
Heart Work Is Hard Work

I'm reminded of this phrase periodically on Sunday mornings in church. It is the simple-to-hear, but hard-to-live idea that as

humans, to improve things about ourselves in a meaningful way always requires fundamental change deep in our core. Otherwise, shortcutting the process results in unsustainable outward changes, isolation due to disingenuous and inconsistent efforts, and long-term ineffectiveness as we start to lose sight of who we really are. In our conversations with office groups, the easy part is quickly getting leadership teams to agreement around buzz words and broad concepts like flex, hybrid, future of work, proptech, etc. However, when we start delving into the organizational “heart” work required to achieve those things, we get distant stares and cold email trails. And while I am a vision casting, team building, strategy setting leader, who loves pontificating and pushing towards what's next, the reality is a lot of nitty gritty detailed work must be incorporated soon or the office sector risks quickly devolving into that well-meaning person described above who never addresses themselves from the inside out and flounders.

ReWork Realville: I used to joke frequently to the steady flow of inbound analysts and investment teams who visited our portfolio and who I also affectionately call “managers from a spreadsheet”, that I lived in the lightly populated town of realville. It was here where mere numbers on a spreadsheet had to become reality through team management, goal setting, tough meetings and decisions, and unforeseen but inevitable disruptive events like hurricanes. Office has developed this bad habit lately of hoping for a bolt-on solution – a new Chief Innovation Officer, a new flex operator, or technology – that will plug holes, appease various stakeholders, or bridge the current



market in route to getting back to “normal”. The quick, ready-made solutions simply don’t and won’t deliver in a sustainable way and, worse yet, they are confusing if not demoralizing to teams. With one large institutional owner, we described a 2-4 year process filled with multiple milestones needed to help them construct a more robust business as well as a more advantageous investment approach. They were a little surprised and disappointed that we could not magically address it in months, but like we tried to convey, as super impatient as we are, the truth is you can’t address in months, structurally what has taken 20-30 years to end up in the present condition. Like I have said before, I’m a big fan of fake it until you can make it, but you better fake it as quick as possible in route to making it.



Industry Support Revamped: In a recent conversation with one of the more forward leaning thought leaders out there, I was challenged in a way I did not expect. He articulated a strong case that we currently do not have a good office industry network prepared to support and build this new office “realville”. He went on to describe that the few flex communities out there are oriented towards non-core flex operators, helping them navigate the treacherous ownership/operator waters so that they have the best chance of survival. On the flip side, almost all the tried-and-true management support groups are still very much oriented at political advocacy, manager designations, and support and training of a dated management model. He took this a step further and asked if I was ready to be part of an effort to construct something necessary and new to address and meet the market. Like most heart work necessary in my own life, my initial reaction was “ugh... this sounds hard” followed by “... he’s right... it sounds essential”.



Dollars for Touchdowns: One of the defining moments in American Underdog, the movie documenting NFL quarterback Kurt Warner’s life, occurs as he’s trying to get his arms around arena football and how to succeed in that very fast-paced game. After he threw his first touchdown, he was surprised to learn



he would be paid for each touchdown thrown, of which he promptly went on to throw a bunch. I'm not here to break down all the merits and shortcomings of that approach, but merely to point out that if office wants to leverage flex, data, technology, and hospitality cohesively, it will absolutely have to rethink how it attracts, retains, and incentivizes the team to throw the most touchdowns in this new office world. We sign flex deals and never interact with that key partner again unless they miss a rent payment, we buy proptech without selling it internally, and we mine for endless data without knowing what we will do with that information when we get it. Want to integrate it and align it with an occupier-centric approach? Time for some heart work to rethink how to reconstruct and bring optimal performance out of your teams!

One big reason I'm sometimes reluctant to start and push through heart work to get to a better version of me is that it must be done amid all the normal pressures and stresses of life. But when I press and go all in and prioritize and reevaluate what I'm doing, I'm able to create space and eliminate previously unrecognized, wasted efforts. The same dynamics and objections for office owners will eventually fall off as those who are most committed realize in this evolution that the things they don't think about and work on today become the most important, if not only, things they focus on tomorrow. And the truth is, this isn't about a onetime fix but rather a mind shift that embraces a way to incorporate ongoing heart work with an eye towards continual and necessary improvements and, ultimately, superior economic performance and value. Afterall, no one should be under the impression that we are anywhere near the end of where work is headed.



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