

Building a Reading Place in a Business

Why build a reading place?

- Creating a space for reading helps to facilitate lifelong learning - those who read, continue to learn and remain more nimble in times of crisis and high-pressure;
- Reading and literacy is foundational to opening up new opportunities for individuals to think creatively about solving problems in the world around them;¹
- Reading Places can attract talented workers, because those who have a choice in location placement will often choose organizations that have more or unique offerings for personal growth and development - translating to professional growth;²
- Foster the creative side of your employees by providing them a place to let their imaginations soar and ultimately their contributions to your business grow;¹
- Reading places can serve as an 'idea accelerator' where readers can discuss and explore new ideas;
- A 1% rise in literacy rates would ultimately lead to a 3% rise in GDP, or \$54 billion per year, every year, and a 5% increase in productivity;³
- Employees who read regularly have a larger vocabulary, better communications skills, improved general knowledge, more creativity, and an easier time understanding abstract concepts.^{4,5}

Case Study - Chevron Canada

Chevron Canada is an energy company. They have partnered with Calgary Reads for 10 years, supporting the creation of 10 reading places in Calgary schools. In addition, they recognize the value of reading and reading places in their own corporation. Jacqueline Harris, Social Risk & Investment Advisor, shares their connection to reading places:

"Chevron Canada has a reading culture and our employee networks actively participate in Book Clubs, Reading Buddy Programs, as well as the Calgary Reads annual Book Sale.

In 2019, we opened a next-generation work space within our building that's designed for employees to connect and collaborate. Its purpose is to support a sense of community within Chevron, and it's had a very positive response from employees.

In 2020, we engaged Calgary Reads to explore with us how a Reading Place may be integrated into this new space. This Reading Place would offer employees the choice of finding a comfortable, quiet space to read on their break, or for employee network book clubs members to meet and discuss their latest read."

1. Gaiman, Neil (2013). Reading and Obligations: a Lecture by Neil Gaiman.

2. Welch, Clark, and Louise Anderson. "Place Matters: The Role of Placemaking in Economic Development." Edited by Lynn Knight, Eli Dile, and Cody Haddow. Washington, DC: International Economic Development Council, 2017

3. LIFT Philanthropy Partners. Education: Helping Canadians build comprehensive life skills to reach their full potential. LIFT Philanthropy Partners.

4. Stanovich K. E. (1993). Does reading make you smarter? Literacy and the development of verbal intelligence. *Advances in child development and behavior*, 24, 133-180.

5. Heavenridge, P. (2015, May 21). Why Read? Reason #6: Knowledge is Power but Imagination is More Valuable. Literacyworks.



Key Steps to Building a Reading Place in a Business

1. IDENTIFY WHO THE INTENDED USERS ARE (employees, clients, community groups) and engage in a conversation about their ideas for the space. This feedback can inform the following steps and you can build champions along the way. As you move through these steps, you can check back in with these stakeholders and iterate ideas based on additional feedback.

2. FIND A COMMON SPACE TO DEDICATE TO READING. This space could range from an entire room to a section of an already existing common space like the Chevron example. The trick is finding a space that can have cozy places of retreat, while also allowing spaces for employees to interact and read in a shared space. Once you find candidate spaces, discuss important risk factors like safety and insurance implications to ensure the space is viable from an operational perspective.

3. SCOUT AND BRAINSTORM. The difference between a reading place at home and in a business is the number of considerations that need to be taken into account. After all, coziness in a workplace is different from coziness at home. Consider accessibility, consider easy to clean surfaces, as opposed to soft penetrable ones, consider quality lighting, and visibility. We can help you with this as you weigh all the things that go into a successful reading place.

Spend time talking to your employees and other potential users, learning about their preferences for the space. A space that is co-designed with the readers of the space, is more likely to be used than one created for them.

4. SELECT A VARIETY OF BOOKS, including fiction AND non-fiction. Fiction books help employees take a step away from the project that they're working on, which inspires creativity. Non-fiction books help to build employee capacity and knowledge of both their business's industry, but also of other fields which inspire innovation. We recommend allowing employees to own the books that are provided in the space, as users are more likely to fully utilize and read the books that they own.

5. ENSURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS. A reading place is characterized by 3 main ingredients: Books, Book lighting, and book shelving. There are a series of other building blocks that make up great reading places, including: reading seating, reading nooks, reading artifacts, decorative words and artwork, and themed curiosities to fully submerge a reader in a space. Find the design ingredients that you need, and those that will make the space connect with readers. We can help you to find unique reading place materials.

6. START BUILDING. Now that you have the inspiration and direction from your reader, the books, and a place in mind, it's time to start building your very own reading space! Create curiosities and nooks in a space that is perfect for you and your employees. Don't forget to have fun, and use the space with your employees to show that you value reading and lifelong learning!

ONE LAST THING... Great reading places grow and change, just as employees do. Think about how the space is used differently over time. What's working? What isn't? Does the reader still relate to the atmosphere and artwork in the space? Is the furniture the right scale for the reader?

Think about introducing programming into the space - start a book club, share stories and ideas from what you're reading, and adapt the space as it continues to grow and change.