EXPERT INSIGHTS

Earning the Commute: Designing Workplaces with a Hospitality Mindset

By **Rene van Camp** *July 7, 2025*

Share



Food has always brought people together, but today's most engaging offices are taking that idea far beyond the standard cafeteria. Chef-led cooking classes, teaching kitchens and shared meals rooted in employees' own cultural traditions create meaningful connections across teams and titles, sparking the spontaneous conversations that build real community. Source: Judd Demaline, provided by Guckenheimer.

- Advertisement -

When was the last time an employee thanked you for asking them to come in?

It may sound idealistic — even impossible. But it's not. As hybrid work becomes the norm, forward-thinking companies are flipping the script. They're no longer focused on how to get people back. Instead they're asking something far more compelling: "How do we turn the workplace into a destination worth the trip?"

The answer lies in an unexpected place: **hospitality**. The experience of a great hotel — one that makes people feel seen, supported and comfortable — can carry over to the workplace. When companies treat employees like guests, the office feels less like a requirement and more like a reward. People return not because they have to, but because they want to be part of what's happening there.

That kind of pull doesn't happen by accident. The magic is in how you do it.

Popular Articles

Design Days 2024 Recap



Nature Inside: What the Best Workplaces Already Know



- Advertisement -

Latest Articles

Work Doesn't Just Happen in the Office – and the Office Has to Be Ok With That



The Workplace Supply Chain: The Hidden Business Behind Every Office



Engagement Does Not Drive Revenue – So What Does?



The Science Behind Thermostat Wars



Why Open Offices Fail — and What Actually Works



- Advertisement -

Your Office Is Obsolete Before You Movie In — Here's How to Fix It



The Smart Office Revolution: What Buildings Know



Chair of the Month

Start with the Guest Journey

From the moment someone walks through the door, every detail and interaction shapes how they feel. In a well-run hotel, that experience is intentional, carefully orchestrated to make them feel welcome, supported and at ease.

In today's digital world, people crave purpose, connection and spaces that feel meaningful. Bringing that same level of care to the workplace means thinking like a host: anticipating employee needs, easing the experience and creating moments that resonate.

That starts with the basics. Employees need to know where to go, how to get settled and who to ask when something doesn't work. Seamless operation, clear signage and responsive support teams all create emotional touchpoints that shape how people feel about being there.



Employees juggle long commutes, packed schedules and endless to-do lists. Some companies get creative with offerings like take-home meal kits, fresh pet food, laundry services. These thoughtful gestures say, "We see you and value you as a whole person." Source: Judd Demaline, provided by Guckenheimer.

Even small shifts in mindset can lead to big change. Think about how Disney reimagined its park custodial staff as guest service ambassadors— suddenly everyone was part of the magic. The same thing happens in offices when support teams are empowered to look beyond their job descriptions. When a facilities lead becomes someone who helps, not just fixes, the whole culture starts to transform.





Rene van Camp

Rene van Camp is ISS' Chief Hospitality Officer for North America and Principal for Guckenheimer, its culinary business. He has 15+ years of experience in the luxury and lifestyle hotel industry and spent the last 10 years leveraging that experience in leading service excellence and innovation strategy in aviation and now most recently at ISS.

Food Builds Culture

Food has always brought people together. But today's most engaging offices are taking that idea far beyond the standard cafeteria.

Think chef-led cooking classes, teaching kitchens and shared meals rooted in employees' own cultural traditions. These kinds of experiences create meaningful connections across teams and titles, sparking the spontaneous conversations that build real community.

Hospitality also means listening. At Guckenheimer (ISS North America's culinary services division) cafes on client sites, people can talk directly chefs, who absorb and use that feedback as inspiration in future dishes. Personal stories become shared experiences. It's cultural engagement with a real human touch.

The setup varies everywhere. Sometimes employees share meals with leadership; other times curated menus support focus and privacy. What matters is the intention behind it. When food is thoughtfully done, it nourishes more than just the body.

The benefits often ripple out in unexpected ways. A well-designed culinary program supports wellness goals, eases daily decisions and can reinforce values like sustainability and diversity. When food becomes a strategic part of your culture, it becomes a powerful way to bring people together.

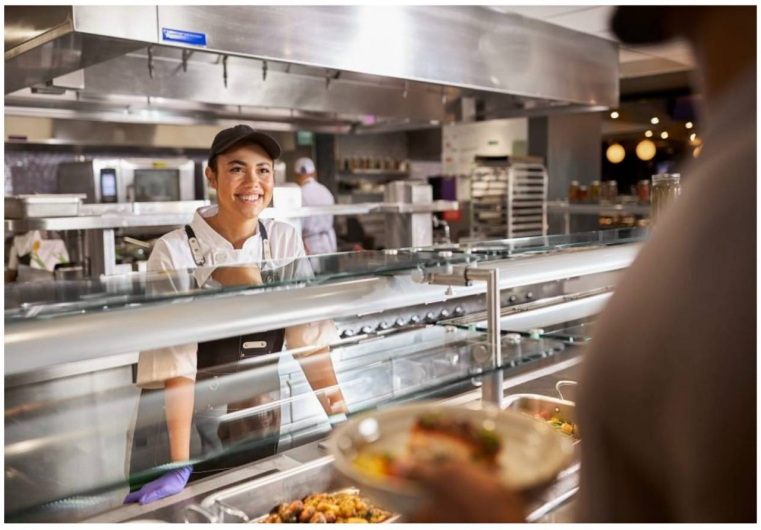
The FOMO Effect: Creating Moments That Matter

No one's eager to commute just to sit at a desk and answer emails. People want what they can't get at home: the energy and experiences of a great workplace.

That's where the FOMO effect comes in. Offices that offer "you had to be there" moments — pop-up lunches, chef demos, surprise speakers — give people reasons to show up. The trick is to lean into that effect, especially on slower days like Mondays or Fridays, and let word-of-mouth work its magic.

When something unexpected or exciting happens, the office becomes a place people don't want to miss. The vibe turns dynamic, unpredictable and magnetic.

- Advertisement-



A well-designed culinary program supports wellness goals, eases daily decisions and can reinforce values like sustainability and diversity. When food becomes a strategic part of your culture, it becomes a powerful way to bring people together. Source: Judd Demaline, provided by Guckenheimer.

Think Beyond the Office

Hospitality doesn't stop at the front desk. The best companies see their people as whole individuals with lives beyond 9-to-5.

Employees juggle long commutes, packed schedules and endless to-do lists. So some companies get creative: take-home meal kits, fresh pet food, laundry services. For some ISS-managed client offices, for example, programming helps newcomers connect with the local culture while building a sense of belonging at work.

These aren't flashy perks. They're thoughtful gestures that say, "We see you and value you as a whole person."

Turning Culture into Strategy

Hospitality might feel soft, but it relies on structure. Good service is consistent and intentional. Every thoughtful detail — a clean meeting room, a warm greeting, a great lunch — sends the same message: this place, this organization values you. That message builds trust, lifts morale and helps people feel confident, cared for and productive.

When this mindset meets operational excellence, the office shifts from a place people must go to one that adds real value to their lives.

This is how culture becomes strategy. It's not just about feeling good — it's about creating environments where people can do their best work, build meaningful connections and take pride in who they are.

That's how you earn the commute. And the best part? When you get it right, you don't have to convince people to come in. They'll start convincing each other.

TAGS *Employee Experience* *employee-centered design* *FOMO* *Guckenheimer* *hospitality-inspired design* *ISS* *office as a destination* *Rene van Camp* *teaching kitchens* *workplace hospitality*

Share

Previous article
Microsoft's New Vocabulary Is Rewriting The Future Of Work

Next article
RESEAT: Second Life Furniture Coming to a Dealer Near You

- Advertisement -

Popular Articles

Design Days 2024 Recap

Nature Inside: What the Best Workplaces Already Know

Your Office Is Obsolete Before You Movie In — Here's How to Fix It

The Smart Office Revolution: What Buildings Know

Chair of the Month



- Advertisement -

Latest Articles

Work Doesn't Just Happen in the Office – and the Office Has to Be Ok With That

The Workplace Supply Chain: The Hidden Business Behind Every Office

Engagement Does Not Drive Revenue – So What Does?

The Science Behind Thermostat Wars

Why Open Offices Fail — and What Actually Works

© COPYRIGHT WORKSPACE DESIGN MAGAZINE, LLC DBA WORK DESIGN MAGAZINE (2010-2026)

Sign Up For Our Newsletter

Subscribe for curated insights, industry voices, and standout workplace projects.

Subscribe Here