

► **DirecTalk** MUSINGS FROM THE 10TH FLOOR

David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH

## The Office

Television has not played a major role in my family's daily routine since the late 1990s when our Sony gave up the ghost and returned to the purgatory of deceased electrical devices. We chose not to replace it and have lived our lives sans TV for over 20 years. This choice has been a blessing and a curse. Among the curses is that I am often out of touch when our staff and business colleagues are ensconced in deeply animated conversations around the *Game of Thrones*, *Tiger King*, and during my lifetime, *The Office*.

I found myself visiting a relative many years ago and with some free time, decided to discover what all the fuss was about and started to watch an episode of *The Office* on DVD. I felt something was wrong—the characters were talking to the camera. It was surreal. I expressed to my family that I must have been provided an incorrect copy of the sitcom because clearly something was awry as television characters do not talk to the guy operating the camera. Of course, I was mistaken, the world had changed. Joke on me.

Our association office lease is up for renewal in July 2021 and the joke was almost on me, yet again. Let me explain. Tradition in the office leasing universe is for organizations like the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) to retain a real estate broker who negotiates the lease for new office space. The broker is paid a finder's fee by the building's owner, so in this case, we (NEHA) do not pay for the service. Likewise, when the building is identified, the lessee (NEHA) works with an architect to design the space and in most cases, the building management pays for most or all that service.

*We will remain  
true to our  
homing instincts.*

My e-mail inbox is inundated by brokers who desire to represent us: it is annoying. Given that we have about a year to move or remodel, selecting a broker is not a trivial decision. In January we retained a broker, chose an architect, and created a staff committee to work on the office issue. We factored in telework and my sensibilities of a casually elegant office. We threaded in long-time member Bob Powitz to determine if we could embed some of his historical environmental health artifacts into our new conceptual office design. The relocation train was chugging down the tracks. We surveyed staff to secure their preferences for where in the Denver metroplex they found desirable and what attributes, physical characteristics, and amenities would enhance their work life. As I jetted off for Wellington in early March to speak at the New Zealand environmental health conference, the general sense was that we needed more office space than we currently provide to accommodate expressed staff needs. Then, COVID-19 happened.

Since March 16, 2020, we have been in a 100% telework environment. Our Washington, DC, area staff work entirely at home, as most of our Denver area employees do now. A handful of our staff visit the office inter-

mittently to take care of essential tasks such as fulfilling book orders, printing, signing checks, and other odds and ends. In other words, perhaps we did not actually need more space after all. Our leadership team connects each Monday morning and as a routine, we discuss how telework is sorting out for each of our operational units. The consensus is that employees prefer the 100% telework environment and that supervisors seem pleased with staff productivity.

This consensus brings me back to the office. We currently spend around \$24,000/month on rent. It was a lease I inherited. I gasp at the number, as I have for the last 5 years, and have made efforts to terminate the contract. This train of thought leads us to several existential questions. How much space do we really need to create and deliver value to NEHA members? How many days of telework are the magic number that give rise to team effectiveness? How do we onboard new employees in an effective manner to ensure they know who NEHA members are and what they desire of us? How about our corporate culture? For those of you who read my columns, you recognize that they are typically chocked full of questions for which I have no clear answers. This one is no different and the struggle is very real.

We have recently hired a new human resource manager who started in June. Early in her experience with us, I alerted her that we needed an office that reflected 2032, not 2022, and that she would be running point on that effort. I believe we can optimize our effectiveness with half the

*continued on page 61*

## DirecTalk

continued from page 62

space we currently lease. I sense with some exceptions, like human resources, our *Journal* archive, accounting, and possibly membership functions, we can entertain a more decentralized and dispersed employee model. We have largely proven it can work in the Washington, DC, area; however, that team does benefit from routine face-to-face interactions that occurred under normal circumstances through our arrangement with the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health.

Most of our portfolio of organizational income is anchored in grants and contracts with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Food and Drug Administration. These grants and contracts have been a blessing during the pandemic as our funding has not been greatly affected. We successfully negotiated with the hotel in New York City to return our 2020 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition deposit. The federal Paycheck Protection Program was helpful and essential to us in bridging a gap in income cre-



Purple martins. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.

ated by the cancellation of the 2020 AEC. Not one employee has been laid off or furloughed.

Our capacity building work has been redirected from a largely face-to-face environment to virtual, just in time trainings. And while we were slow off the mark, we are beginning to get traction in delivering digital training and education. In short, we seem to be adjusting to the new normal. I believe we should mold and shape our future, not be victims of circumstance, a pandemic, or anything else. Our new offices should reflect a nimble, cost sensitive, and member-centered ethos.

Each spring, like clockwork, purple martins return to our yard from their several month vacation in Brazil. These gregarious, chirping insectivores devour biting horse flies, hornets, and dragonflies by the truckload. They fledge their young along the perimeter of our property before embarking on a migration to South America around the beginning of August. They possess an amazing internal compass that guides them to the exact location where their birdhouse was the prior year. Over the last 3 years I have replaced each of the existing, dilapidated birdhouses with new ones and the martins do not seem to care, their homing instincts are world class. Whatever we decide with our office space and though the journey will likely be fraught with twists and turns, please know we will remain true to our homing instincts and remain committed to identifying and serving your needs. 🐦

Dave

ddyjack@neha.org  
Twitter: @DTDyjack



legionella assessment and  
**LAMPS**<sup>®</sup>  
management plan support

### Reduce the Risk of Legionella and Other Pathogens in Building Water Systems

#### Water Management Program Software

LAMPS makes it easy to create an ASHRAE 188 water management plan (WMP) for various building types AND successfully maintain the WMP. In one easy cloud-based application, you can:

- Organize and store WMP documentation
- Easily edit and update the WMP
- Monitor disinfectants and temperatures
- Report compliance
- Track results for *Legionella*, 26 other pathogens, and HPC
- Respond to test results effectively and confidently, with step-by-step guidance
- Find root problems and best solutions with smart data analytics
- Receive notifications of overdue control measures
- Train personnel
- Audit remotely

"LAMPS is an incredibly valuable resource." – Heather Wilson, Senior Operations Analyst, CBRE Healthcare

"The LAMPS software was a godsend for us." – Jonathan Lewis, Klickitat Valley Health

"...cost competitive, comprehensive" – Russel Nassof, Esq., Attorney, Exec VP, RiskNomics

See a demo at [hinfo.com](http://hinfo.com)

