

WASHINGTON WORKPLACE

COMMERCIAL FURNISHINGS

Washington Workplace is a Culture Built on Trust, Teamwork and Independence

There are no official managers, no goals, no quotas, and no forecasts. Titles are practically nonexistent. Teams at Washington Workplace operate with near-total autonomy, an unusual approach that somehow works brilliantly. Based in Arlington, Va, the dealership has built a culture around trust, accountability and independence that has made it one of the largest independent office furniture dealers in the country.

The company expects to reach \$50 million in sales in 2025. It employs 15 designers, but no design manager. There are 14 project managers, but no project manager “manager.” The title “sales manager” doesn’t exist. In a world of hierarchy and oversight, Washington Workplace runs on collaboration, freedom and mutual respect.

See what its customers and the brands it represents have to say. Both groups are more like fans than clients.

“Washington Workplace is very special,” said Betsy Frantz, president and CEO of PathForward, a nonprof-

it focused on homelessness and a longtime customer. “They are intentional and sincere in their desire to know and understand their customers’ backgrounds, motivations and needs. They are authentic and not focused only on closing the deal. The team really cares for each client, and you honestly can’t get that level of service from most companies anymore. They will go above and beyond to make sure you are comfortable and pleased with your choices — and that they really work for your space.”

That sense of authenticity extends to Washington Workplace’s manufacturer partners. Over many years, the company has teamed with AIS on countless projects across industries, sizes, and locations. “The leadership of the dealership is very much engaged at every level of the organization,” said Nick Haritos, president of AIS. “They have created large teams within the firm and everyone supports each other. They are keen students of the industry and closely monitor trends affecting the workplace. They understand the concept of ‘trusted advisor’ and definitely walk the talk.”

For 34 years, Washington Workplace has grown on a foundation of family-friendly culture and personal accountability, reflection of founder and president John Murphy, who started the dealership in 1991. “I’ve always had this belief that we should be prepared to aggressively make the most out of every opportunity that comes our way, and we still have that belief to this day,” he said.

The company’s philosophy is simple: Turn business relationships into genuine friendships, stay ready for opportunity, and serve others without expecting anything in return. It’s servant leader-

Washington Workplace By the Numbers

Founded in 1991; 34 Years in Business
42 Employees
6 Sales Teams
14 Project Managers
15 Designers
4 Accounting
3 in Corporate Operations

ship in action and it's led to an enviable level of success.

That culture has also made Washington Workplace a place where its staff stay. Bernadette Michael, vice president of operations, joined more than 11 years ago from a completely different industry. "Imagine if a giant family put a company together. That's how it feels to work at Washington Workplace," she said. "It is the most unique structure I've ever seen in a company. It is not corporate; everyone is part of the team."

The independence that defines the culture extends to the way the company presents itself. Its website is packed with images of installations meant to inspire, but you won't find a single furniture brand listed. Washington Workplace represents hundreds of manufacturers. Products are specified based on what works best for the client, the budget, and the project timeline, not because of a contract or a quota.

"Our lane is really companies who want a partner who can help them create a beautiful space and bring value by giving them options," said Sarah Gabriel, partner and project team leader. "I think we all do see ourselves more as consultants."

That team-based structure is at the heart of how Washington Workplace operates. Each sales team leader has a team of designers, project managers and sales coordinators who manage their projects from start to finish. "The team approach creates great efficiency," said Gabriel.

"We realized that if you had a really strong lead at the top that knew how to manage people, maybe we'd be better off to run a little bit more like an A&D firm with studios," added partner Christine Miller-Langemak.

For people like Charlie Atwell and Ray Holden, who joined from another dealership, the model just makes sense. "I guess it's because we're all entrepreneurial at heart and we're independent," said Atwell. "It's easy to tell if folks aren't performing. It's all self-disciplined. We're doing what we need to do to make it happen."

Industry veteran Tom Talone, former president of Paoli and Cherryman, summed it up best: "The Washington Workplace difference is its true professionalism, respect for all stakeholders, and willingness to take time with its partners."

The company's culture of empowerment is more than talk. During the pandemic, Washington Workplace

Washington Workplace By the Numbers

More than 5,000 Clients

Close to 40,000 of projects since 1991

WW does business in all 50 states

\$50 million - 2025 Projected Sales

\$1 billion in furniture sold since 1991

didn't lay off or furlough a single worker, even as business slowed to less than half its usual pace. Not a single hour was lost. That loyalty goes both ways, and it shows in the company's astonishing employee tenure, often measured in decades rather than years.

The company focuses on the traditional Washington economy - associations, finance, legal, IT, government contractors, lobbying organizations, embassy work, restaurants, healthcare and education. Washington Workplace does not sell federal, state, local, municipal business. Instead, it focuses on commercial corporate work.

Though it is based in Washington, D.C., Washington Workplace is effectively a national office furniture firm. It works on projects everywhere, not just inside the Beltway. Only 60% of Washington Workplace's business comes from the "DMV" - The District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Project business comes from everywhere, not just the Capital area. The company usually works in all 50 states, every single year.

Where They've been and Where They're Going

Murphy relied on his upbringing to push the business forward. Being the oldest in a family of 11 helped him develop a skill set that directly translated into the way he would run the firm - no nonsense, no waste; using the skills of those who surround him, shoring up weaknesses, nurturing and growing teams.

The people who work for Washington Workplace are part of this family-friendly culture. As part of a work family, employees are accountable for what they do. The wins are celebrated and the rare losses are studied so they won't happen again.

While some entrepreneurs outline the struggles they've had building their businesses, Murphy shrugs the difficulties off, thankful for the luck he has had. "I've always been blessed with a lot of good luck and a lot of great, caring people."