

3 reasons to chuck coworking and get a real office

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The benefits of coworking are well-known: you can have a funky, well-equipped office without the hassle of a long-term, expensive lease. When the Wifi goes down, somebody else has to fix it. But overstaying your welcome at a coworking space -- like overstaying your time at the parents' pad -- comes at a real cost.

I speak from experience. For five years, my company , a residential leasing and marketing platform, shared office space with a rotating cast of startups. Elements of this experience were great. With the passage of time, though, the cons started to outweigh the pros and having our own space definitely looked like a more attractive option. Everyone's experience will be somewhat different, but here are three things I learned upon leaving the coworking world last February.

1. It's cheaper to get your own space.

Coworking is convenient. But it doesn't necessarily come cheap. If you've just got a few employees, it can definitely make sense from a financial standpoint. You're not paying for a whole office and all the associated expenses. Instead, you're just renting a few desks, often month-by-month.

But when Nestio pushed past a dozen employees, renting desks began to become prohibitively expensive. Then the business really started taking off last year, and we were suddenly looking at ramping up to four times our existing headcount. We realized we'd be saving money (quite a bit, actually) by getting our own space.

Exactly when you reach that tipping point where leasing your own office becomes cheaper than sharing space will vary depending on the local real

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estate market and the demands of your business. Then there's all the additional expenses to consider, from utilities to that must-have coffee machine and maybe even a foosball table. Doing some quick back-of-the-napkin math should give you an idea of when it's time to ditch the coworking space and get your own digs, from a financial standpoint.

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2. You can't put a dollar value on peace and quiet.

Yes, it's mostly about the money-- and the fact that once you hit 40, 50 or 60 employees, sharing space becomes a lot less practical. But there are also the obvious environmental -- including noise and a lack of privacy. While we had great neighbors (including a good friend of mine), we were all affected by each other's business cycle -- and inevitably, when we were loud, they needed quiet and vice versa.

We also didn't have enough private space for groups to collaborate in, and it started to impact our workflow. While I'm a big believer in the open-office model, I also think you need access to dedicated quiet space where people can brainstorm, think, meet or make important phone calls. When we went about designing our own space, we kept the open concept but built in lots of meeting spaces and telephone rooms. Now, when people need a bit of quiet time, they can find it.

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3. In a coworking space, your culture takes a hit.

This point sounds touchy-feely -- it's not. Simply put, it's hard for employees to feel proud -- to feel a real sense of ownership and investment -- in a coworking space. Worse, we never leased one space for more than a year, so we never really felt settled. It's like subletting an apartment and sleeping in somebody else's bed, sitting on somebody else's sofa or looking at somebody else's art. Something feels a bit off.

When we struck out on our own, it was finally a chance to build something that reflected who we were as a company and, yes, to put our own art on the wall. Not to mention, your culture can't really blossom when it's constantly surrounded by other companies and their unique vibe and values.

Psychologically, it was crucial that we get our own space -- as a testament to how far we had come but, more importantly, as a testament to how far we could go.

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In the end, picking and designing a new office is as much art as science... and comes with its own set of headaches. For starters, you have to visualize where you want to go -- a process that takes both imagination and meticulous planning. (We figure will ultimately fit 70 employees comfortably, which is sufficient for the foreseeable future.) But there's no doubt that "upgrading our space" last winter was the best move we could have made -- not just to meet our pressing needs, but also to inspire the kind of energy and passion to allow us to continue growing.