

Lighten Up! Increase Productivity through Effective Lighting

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Ever wonder why you feel “blue” on cloudy or overcast days, during the winter months in colder climates, or get groggy and tired in the evening or other low light settings? It’s your body telling you that your circadian rhythm (your 24-hour internal clock) is being affected. Brain researchers and those who study the impact of light on the brain have known for years that to increase stimulation to the brain and help someone reach their maximum efficiency, natural light is needed. If you cannot have natural light, then artificial light that most closely mimics the sun is best.

According to research done in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Energy and numerous organizations, no electric light system has been produced that can mirror the variation in light spectrum which occurs during different points in a day or in different seasons, however, there are ways to compensate for these inadequacies.

In a workplace, training or educational setting it is imperative that rooms and workspaces be designed with light in mind since electromagnetic radiation impacts not only the human visual system, but also the human circadian system. While there is no guarantee that daylight will always maximize performance, research shows that it can significantly improve it in many situations. The key in using daylight or any artificial light is to do so in a manner that enhances rather than detracts from vision. For example, bright, glaring light can cause a negative reaction on the eyes and brain and thereby reduce productivity and performance. Similarly using light in a way that casts shadows or distorts color renderings can also cause a breakdown in effectiveness. The key is to balance lighting with task in a working or learning environment.

As alluded to in the opening paragraph of this article, lighting can actually affect a person’s mood. There is no one solution to the “right” lighting for creating a positive mood; however, windows are strongly favored for producing the most effective lighting situations. This allows a full spectrum of light and color interpretation, as long as there is no glare or shadow created. It is also important to remember that an individual’s preference must be considered when designing an effective environment. For example, some people prefer more daylight than others. When they get it, their mood improves. When they do not, their mood can be negatively impacted and the result is a decrease in productivity.

Some researchers have found that adding natural-type lighting to retail environments can increase sales. Lowered absenteeism and reduced tardiness have been attributed to the addition of natural lighting in schools. In general, the impact of natural lighting has been positive and is certainly worth consideration if you are involved in designing or selecting a work or learning environment in the future. For additional information on this topic, visit the Lighting Research Center at <http://www.lrc.rpi.edu/index.asp> or see my book *The Creative Training Idea Book: Inspired Tips & Techniques for Engaging and Effective Learning*

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