

# delve

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**Celebrating  
Women in the  
Industry**

**Trailblazers  
Of Design  
Spotlight**

**Women in the  
Public Sector**

# INDEED

A Chair Designed for the Comfort of  
Socially Responsible Humans

*With Dauphin HumanDesign Group*



# WHY CHOOSING THE RIGHT COMPANY

Is As Important  
As Choosing The  
Right Furniture



*By Mindi Faris and Jenifer Halverson, Pacific Office Interiors*

Are you feeling stuck and inflexible with limited options? Do you dread going to work each day because it's going to be just like the day before? Does the message you are sending to the world just not seem authentic to you? Did it ever?

Of course, selecting the wrong office furniture can lead to all of these feelings for the people who go to work in cookie-cutter spaces filled with "big-box" dark brown particle-board office furniture with high, gray cubicle walls and even gray floors.

But these feelings can also come from selecting the wrong company at which to work ...especially for women. No one wants to be locked into a monotony-filled job that stifles creativity, advancement and fulfillment.

Although there is still far more progress to be made, women have more opportunities than ever in the workplace, and the Interior Design and Contract Furniture industry happens to be one shining example where a high percentage of influential team members are women. Women in C-Level positions are a smaller percentage of leadership teams, but we're making progress there, too.

Like it or not, however, men and women are different, and by and large, we women have a different set of priorities and needs than men do -- some of which take us away from the office -- which makes it all the more difficult for a woman to navigate a career in an industry designed and dominated by men...and all the more important for women to choose their company wisely.

## Two Women's Stories

That's why we decided to write this article.

Mindi Faris: Soon after graduating from San Diego State University's Interior Design program, I interviewed with the owner of Pacific Office Interiors to see if I could pursue my interests in Interior Design. When you're interviewing with someone whose first name is "Free", you get a little bit of a clue about this person's open mindedness. I was fresh in the business -- any business -- and didn't have a lot of priorities at the time except to find a place to learn and grow and build a career for myself.



## **CELEBRATING WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY**

It worked out well for me: During the last 17 years, I have risen to become the Vice President of Client Engagement, got married, and am raising two beautiful children.

Jenifer Halverson: I am currently the Design Director at Pacific Office Interiors, and I had a very similar path to Mindi's. Single and fresh out of the Interior Design program at California State University Northridge, I interviewed with company president Free Taylor and quickly learned that POI had a perspective on fostering individual employee growth as innovative as their perspectives on office design. There have always been strong women in leadership roles at POI, and they, along with Free, made it clear that the company would not only accommodate but encourage our career growth and aspirations. Sixteen years later, I am also married and a mother of two wonderful boys, and firmly at the helm of my own career.

Together, we are two critical parts of the POI leadership team, and both of us have worked hard to not only design beautiful spaces for our clients, but to design careers and lifestyles for ourselves that are filled with creativity, advancement, and fulfillment.

That's why we'd like to offer our perspective and some important pieces of advice for women who are choosing a career in Interior Design, or are choosing to change course or companies during their careers.

### **Be Clear About Who You Are**

Our clients often say that they understand their own company after working with us better than they ever did before working with us. That's because in order for us to do our job right, we need to fully understand who our client is, their mission, their values, and their personality. If we don't know these things going in, there's no way the solutions we select (this color, that desk, this lamp...any of it) are going to work. So we spend a lot of time at the start of every project asking our clients a long list of questions, many of which our clients might not have considered before.

Similarly when you are choosing where to work, you need to know who YOU are, what you want now, what your goals are tomorrow, and the support you'll need to get there. That may mean asking yourself some questions you hadn't considered before. If the current leadership team isn't on board with your goals, you can't be who you are, and you won't be satisfied.

### **Be Clear About What You Want To Say To The World**

Your office (or hotel, restaurant, lobby, medical office, corporate office, government office, school campus...pretty much any interior or exterior space) says something about you to everyone who walks through your doors. Without seeing your company name, hearing a word, or talking to anyone, your office speaks volumes to every visitor and employee.

So, what does your space say? Does it say that you are forward-looking, creative, idealistic and successful? Or does it say that you're trapped by convention, living in the past, and not welcoming to new ideas and better ways to do things?

Similarly, every woman working in a company strives to express her individuality, her perspective, her talent and her vision...not only for her clients but for herself. A woman's message can express itself through career advancement, meaningful work, family life, good compensation, or all of the above.

### **Prioritize Comfort**

Effective ergonomic design makes staff more productive, increases efficiency, reduces down-time and even helps to reduce legal and medical costs. And these days, ergonomics aren't just about a supportive chair.

Ergonomics includes the abundance of alternative environments and ways of working -- height-adjustable desks, privacy pods, relaxation rooms, cafe-style workspaces, sound masking/absorbing elements, outdoor spaces and indoor pergolas that bring the outside in -- all with the goal of not only making the body healthier with support, activity and variety, but making the mind healthier, too.

The equivalent in your career might be the difference between doing the same thing every day versus having the freedom to change not only your work environment, but your work responsibilities over time. Will the company you are considering support you in your career growth? Will they encourage you to get up and try something different for a while, with cross-training, continued design education and even continued business and marketing education? If your goal is to move up or around within the company, you'll want access to all of these.

## Prioritize Adaptability

One of the big focuses across the industry is building an adaptable space. Office areas with movable walls and reconfigurable furniture allow a company to grow with its space instead of growing out of it.

If a modern office can be reconfigurable, why can't your job? When we each began to work at POI, we were in very junior roles and neither were married with children.

So what was the company response when the babies came?

Easily enough, it was accessible [from the car] workstations outfitted for baby gear, allowing us to tend to our new families without sacrificing our careers. And, when it was necessary to work from home to help with sick children or to volunteer at school, Free and POI again responded with a big Yes. So long as the work was done, the company grew and the clients were happy (and they were VERY happy), WFH was A-OK.

## Design Your Own Hybrid Life

Before COVID turned the whole world upside down, it made the world stop dead in its tracks. At that point, working from home wasn't actually a choice, it was required, and so POI rolled with the times and set up all the required office equip-

ment at home for all the design and administrative staff, allowing us and many others to be at home with children while the children were also learning/working from home.

Now that world is finally learning to live with COVID, this post-COVID business environment is going to be drastically different than it was before. We're finding that employees worldwide don't want to go back to their 5-day a week, 9 to 5 jobs with an hour-long commute each day. Companies are exploring the hybrid office policy, accompanied by flexible office furnishings and dependable technology, allowing the combination of at-work time with work-from-home time. In other words, employees can have it all.

## Having It All With The Right Company

And "having it all" is the ultimate goal, isn't it? Designing a "hybrid life" means being able to pursue your family life as vigorously as pursuing your career. Put in more conventional terms, it's about having a Work-Life balance that is fulfilling in every way.

And it all starts with knowing that choosing your company is maybe the most important decision of all. Know yourself, who you are and where you want to be in the next 5 or 15 years. And if you don't know where you want to be, that's OK, too. The important thing is putting yourself into the right environment no matter what you choose.

