



COWORKING

Master Guide to Building a Thriving Community

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Featured Industry Experts



Lori Spiess

CEO of OffiCenters

Lori Spiess CEO of OffiCenters has provided workspace solutions in the Twin Cities since 1981. She is an innovator, leader and motivator who helps businesses do their best work. Her company won Most Innovative Workspace 2014 and she made the 2015 Minnesota Business Magazine's (Real) Power 50 List. Spiess, a recent cancer survivor, has a new motto: Life is short. Work someplace awesome!



Lori Hamilton

Workspace Solutions Specialist

Lori is an experienced Organizational Management Consultant with a demonstrated history of success in the areas of: Workspace Industry, Virtual Business Operations, Organizational Development and Human Capital Management. She leverages her 30 plus years of diverse professional experience, with a progressive approach to business management and development to drive success and growth for her clients.



Annette Reizburg

Workspace Solutions Specialist

Annette Reizburg is a Partner in Get Spaced, LLC, a consulting group that is PASSION-ATE about workspace and how space, technology and collaborative client communities impact the way people work, achieve their goals and grow their businesses. For the past several years she along with her partner Lori Hamilton have been immersed in the changing and evolving 3rd place world, consulting with business centers, co working spaces and hybrid alternative workspace models, guiding them through the opportunities, challenges and excitement of creating a vibrant shared space, building client communities and producing profitability. She is "hands on" part of a successful management team at Town Center Suites and is the Past President of Global Workspace Association.



The Purpose of Community

With the expansion of coworking spaces, the word community has come up as if it were some form of secret sauce to guaranteeing an audience, strong member retention, and lead generation with the absolute best possible conversion rate.

Some operators, considered the most knowledgeable in community building, believe in putting the community before all else. According to an AllWork article, *8 Ways to Build Community Before Launching a Coworking Space*, “If you don’t have a community of engaged people, your space will likely struggle. The smartest coworking space operators and developers start building their community before they even have a space.”

The goal of a community in a coworking space is to build an inspired workforce, one where connections happen organically-independent of the efforts of you and your staff. Within a strong community, collaboration on projects is commonplace. The work and efforts of those within the space extend beyond their own business, there is mutual support for the success of all members as well as the space, and the opportunities amongst each other to expand their businesses.

It’s a type of shared space that breathes a different air. One that values friendships over recognition, comradery over sales, quality over quantity, and an enjoyable atmosphere. Community within coworking doesn’t have any other end goal other than becoming a place of belonging for the people within a space. As explained by Lori Spiess, Owner and CEO of OffiCenters, “Organic coworking wasn’t created, it came together. From proximity and the way people came in and out. People came to work because they liked their team members and they liked to do business. They did these things to enhance their business life.”

It’s often believed that the strongest communities within coworking are the ones that serve a common need or purpose within that region.



For the best results, it’s ideal to have a community that’s tied to a purpose, one that people want to work toward, together. As Spiess says, “Community has existed before the branding.”



The Importance of a Genuine Commitment to Community as a Core Value

Annette Reizburg believes that the first step toward building a community is to establish it as a core value within the workspace. *“It has to be a core value, and not a marketing strategy.”*

One of the biggest successes in coworking has focused on the elimination of isolation in the workplace. Isolation has been shown to negatively impact productivity, morale, and most of all, the health of employees.

Lori Spiess sees isolation as something that *“hurts passion, productivity, motivation, and the quality of work.”* She explains:

“What happens when you’re in prison? The best punishment is isolation. Isolation is a punishment.”

Spiess believes that the best practice for building community is to give your space the feeling of “Cheers.” The openness of coworking creates an advantageous climate for this to occur. Within a coworking space, members are more compelled to collaborate.

To further this trend, Spiess occasionally invites work-from-home entrepreneurs to come work in the space, meet other members who have similar needs and practices, and see what changes come about.

This practice has had surprising success in recruiting home-based workers to work in various capacities within a coworking center, ranging anywhere from hotdesking to having a private office.

To best explain this phenomenon, Reizburg believes that *“it’s not about a marketing tactic. You’re selling more of the commitment. Your role is to build social and business connections. People come to coworking because they want to build their business. Second they want to have a social connection.”*



Having a Vested Interest in Your Members

“Being a part of the community, feel like the staff is part of what they’re doing.” says Spiess, “In the old days we were looked at as clerical, now we’re a part of what we create.”



What Spiess says is that in the past, the staff of a workspace cared initially about clerical matters such as providing supplies, coffee, etc. Nowadays the staff of a coworking space cares more about incubating the success of members, helping to bridge new paths to success. Coworking spaces today have a greater vested interest in the success of their members

Lori Hamilton explains, *“You are more than a space provider, you are a partner.”* To be a successful partner to your members, it's important to understand their business needs and why they have joined your community.

Members like to go and find like-minded people who can prove to be a strategic component to their success. They also like to find people who can educate them, perhaps taking a mentorship role to help guide them toward greater success.

“Learn about the needs of your members and your space will sell itself.” - Lori Spiess

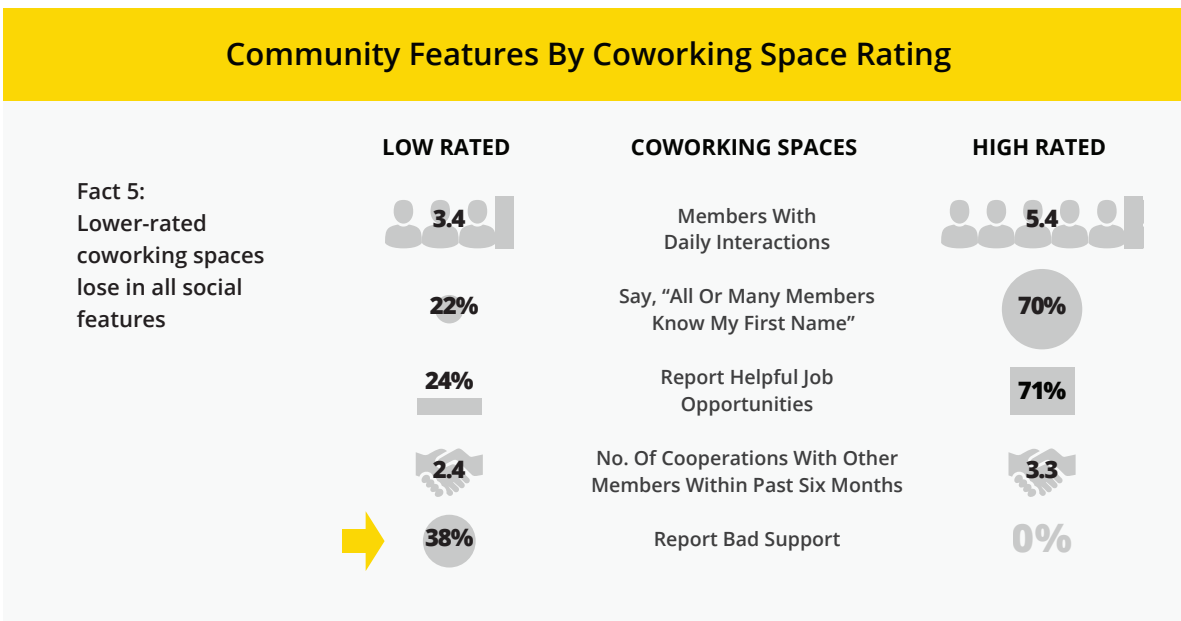
Support is equally as great a contributor to community. It can work in several ways.

The first is by organically building a network of freelancers and vendors who can provide the needed services required to grow. Another method of success includes finding investments or opportunities to merge into other businesses and form another entity. As Spiess explains, *“Now communities put together companies. Coming together to form new entities. These are the things that are magic.”* Another final component for collaboration is the social component. While underestimated in the eyes of operators, it can have a significant effect on the productivity on long term morale of a member.

According to a recent study presented at GCUC Canada 2017 by Deskmag titled, 15 Fact About Coworking Space Members, having “a social and enjoyable atmosphere” is still the #1 reason for why coworking spaces are chosen with 59% of the vote.



The survey also notes the powerful correlation between higher-rated coworking spaces and the rate of social interaction.





Benefits of Community in Coworking

An article by Forbes.com titled Coworking: More Than Just Space, It's A Community of Support wrote that *"A coworking community can offer relationships with peers who share similar goals, challenges, rewards and values, and who are ready to provide counsel or celebrate a big win."*

One of the biggest benefits to having a community is that it offers a built-in network. This network can prove advantageous in making members more resourceful toward finding ways to meet their needs and grow. Lori Spiess explains that for her, *"our first goal in our community is that we look within our directory to buy from one another."*

By creating a built-in network that breathes and moves on its own, Spiess found the following results from one of her internal surveys, *"One of the centers had 80% participation in events. 89% of members felt less isolated. 89% felt more productive."* It's also important to note that it's common within OffiCenters for her spaces to have as many as 5 different generations of workers within the community, from baby-boomers to millennials.

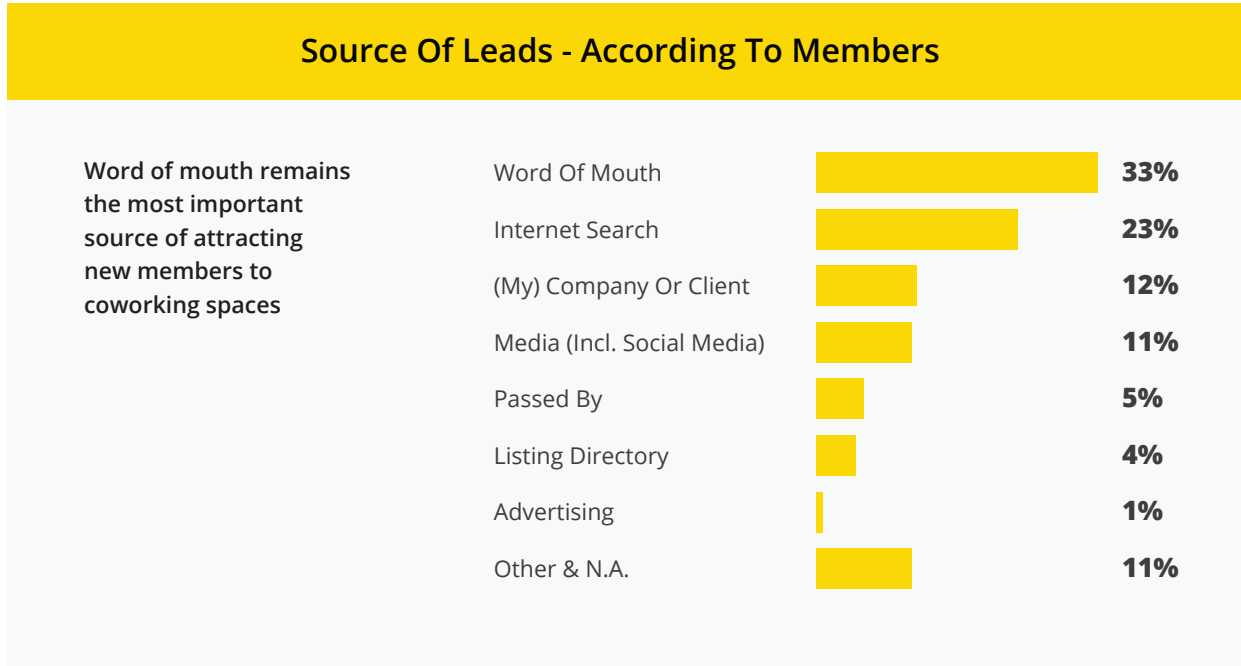
Another benefit to community is that with members helping other members, it tends to lead to members helping other small businesses within the area. *"People like locally-owned, locally-operated. People put their faith into these things."* Spiess explains.

"Over 50% of our leads are coming from our community in the last year. Those leads close at the highest ratio, it's not because of money, it's because happy members are sharing their experience with others."

Members having a foothold into local markets automatically puts the eyes of local markets to your space. Best of all, this form of lead generation leads to fuller spaces from members who stay longer because they already are a part of the community before they become members.



The Deskmag survey from GCUC Canada mentions that Word of Mouth is still the most important source for attracting new members to your coworking space.

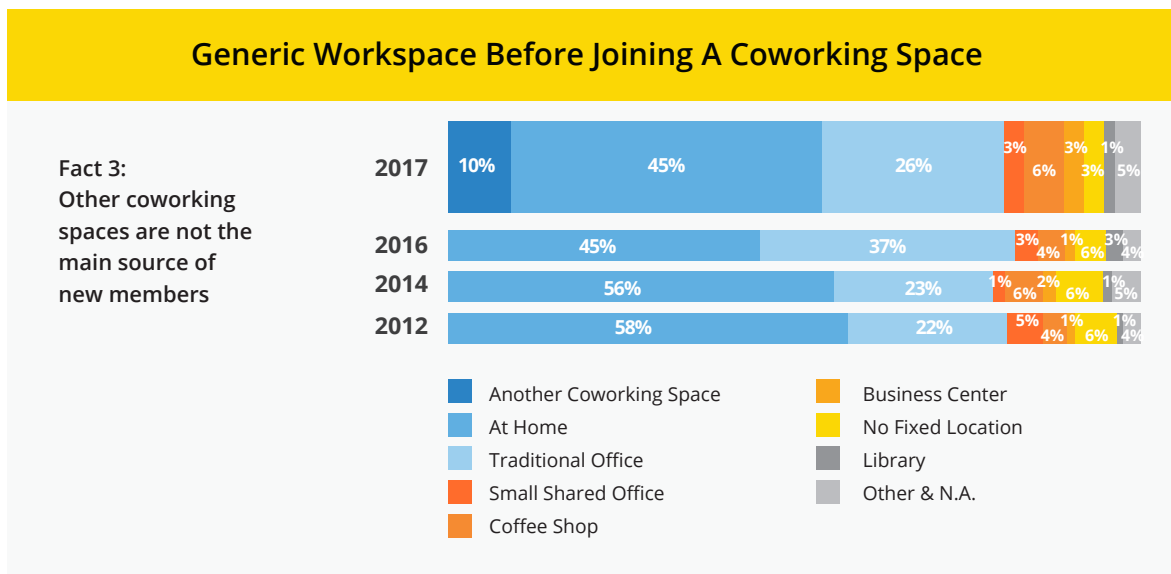




Community's True Competition

On the surface it may seem that having competing coworking spaces can have a drastically negative effect on your efforts to build a community. This is not true. The Deskmag survey from GCUC Canada states that *"other coworking spaces are not the main source of new members."*

The survey showed that only 10% of members join a coworking space from another one. What is notable and interesting, however, is that 45% of new members were "at home" workers.



Most coworking members are coming to a workspace as an alternative to working from home. With this knowledge in mind, it's important that you market space as the perfect solution for overcoming the isolation, distraction, and inadequacies that is associated with working from home.

The best approach is to understand why isolation occurs in the workplace. The main reasons often include member introversion, personality differences, and the feeling among your members of not prioritizing social interaction.

While you can't force your members to speak to others or to make the time to collaborate, there are a few practices that you can put in place to inspire an environment that breeds greater engagement.



Designing for Community

The best practice for designing a shared space falls upon a multi-tiered approach. The first part of this approach is to give your space the look of being collaborative and out-of-the-box. Going back to an Allwork article that we wrote in February 2017, *“How Art Can Help You Create a Unique Workspace Experience.”*

“Your whole raison d’etre is to provide individuals with a place to work, a space they feel proud of, they feel inspired in, and they feel a part of. One way to achieve this is through design...The way your workspace is laid out, designed, and decorated can help you build the type of environment and culture you want for your space. If you want members to feel inspired, creative, and innovative, you need to make sure your workspace in and out of itself reflects these principles. Luckily, as an independent coworking space operator, you have the freedom to give your space its own identity, one catered specifically to your physical location, your local market, and your members.”

Keep in mind that this must be a full commitment to offering this kind of space. As explained by Annette Reizburg, *“People aren’t going to leave the house to work in a closet. You have to commit to coworking space and create an open space with no darkness, great lighting, and interesting features such as booths and monitors, places for people to plug in, and great wi-fi. Give reason for people to leave working from home.”*

Annette Reizburg and Lori Hamilton have a unique method for designing their spaces to inspire collaboration. They believe in furnishing the workspace with transformational components. This includes moveable walls, furniture that can break apart, stags that can be assembled and concealed when not in use, and any other adaptable furniture.

Reizburg explains, *“Not every event can happen in a conference room. Specific event space doesn’t always fit into a budget.”* She advises to consider taking your workspace and using it as a temporary event or collaboration space. It’s important to have freedom to modify your space to conform to the type of event it’s needed for.



Keep in mind that within these spaces you have many types of areas:

- ▶ **Open areas**
- ▶ **Dedicated desk spaces**
- ▶ **Private offices**
- ▶ **Non-dedicated coworking desks**
- ▶ **Phone booths**
- ▶ **Conference rooms**

The best practice for determining the right ratio depends on your understanding of your member demand. It can vary between splitting it into even thirds or having 50% private space. As with many things relating to coworking, there is no “one size fits all.”

There are some practices, however, you should look to avoid when seeking to maximize collaboration within your space:

- 1** Do not “bench” your entire open area with rows of long desks that are solid and connected. This can create obstruction and limit movement
- 2** Make sure your space doesn’t feel cramped. Having too much furniture or people sequestered closely together can create fire safety concerns.
- 3** Consider noise levels that can travel between open spaces and private offices.

Another best practice for designing your space is by having your community and local artists contribute to the décor and design of the space. By having your members participate and bring in their insights, you can show your space as a location that is all-evolving, and all-inclusive. It’s important to show them what your space believes in and how much it values the input of your members.





Member-Facing Staff and Building a Community Facing Team

Regarding staffing your space, extra consideration must be taken into the member-facing staff and their role in building the community of the space. It's important to allocate a section of this staff toward fostering the relationships of members.

We've noted before the importance of having a Community Manager, or a position that is similar. According to the 2017 Annual Survey by the Global Workspace Association

“The Community Manager is the foundation of the community ethos embedded in most coworking spaces. A good community manager makes your space sticky.”

Annette Reizburg believes that *“it takes a very unique person. Its unlike most positions that you would hire for.”* She believes the person needs to be multi-functional, a great communicator, and must also be *“very, very, outgoing.”*

While it's important to have the right person, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is having just that one person to build community. *“Some centers that only hire one person.”* Says Lori Hamilton, *“Cannot build a community on the back of one person. Events to build community happen around the clock.”*

The best practice is to account for events and the community happening during the day, night, as well as after hours. If you leave this responsibility to one person, that person will burn out and not be able to address the specific needs and wants of the workspace.

The best practice for this is to use some of your members as part of the community building team. By affording them with the opportunity to brand the workspace you naturally integrate the community as one of the core values of your space. As an operator you should encourage your members to organize events and take the initiative to do more for other members. This practice also helps to establish community ambassadors to put a face on your workspace.



Using Technology for Community

Technology for coworking, including a workspace management platform as well as software for coworking, is specifically tailored toward bringing people together. These technologies are made to break obstacles and allow for connection and collaboration. By connecting your members together you can foster collaboration, share each other's work, and create a bridge that records the contributions of all members and keeps everyone on the same page.

Virtual collaboration, such as dialing in remote members into a conference room, can also go a long way with keeping others involved. A CRM is also beneficial for creating a member directory that can index all the members in the workspace by their experience, industry, and skillset. This kind of collaboration will only prove to further enhance the in-person collaboration that goes on later.

To better streamline communication and collaboration between your members, having a member portal as well as an event calendar in place for them to self-service can help to break obstacles and provide autonomy toward building a community that is entirely organic.



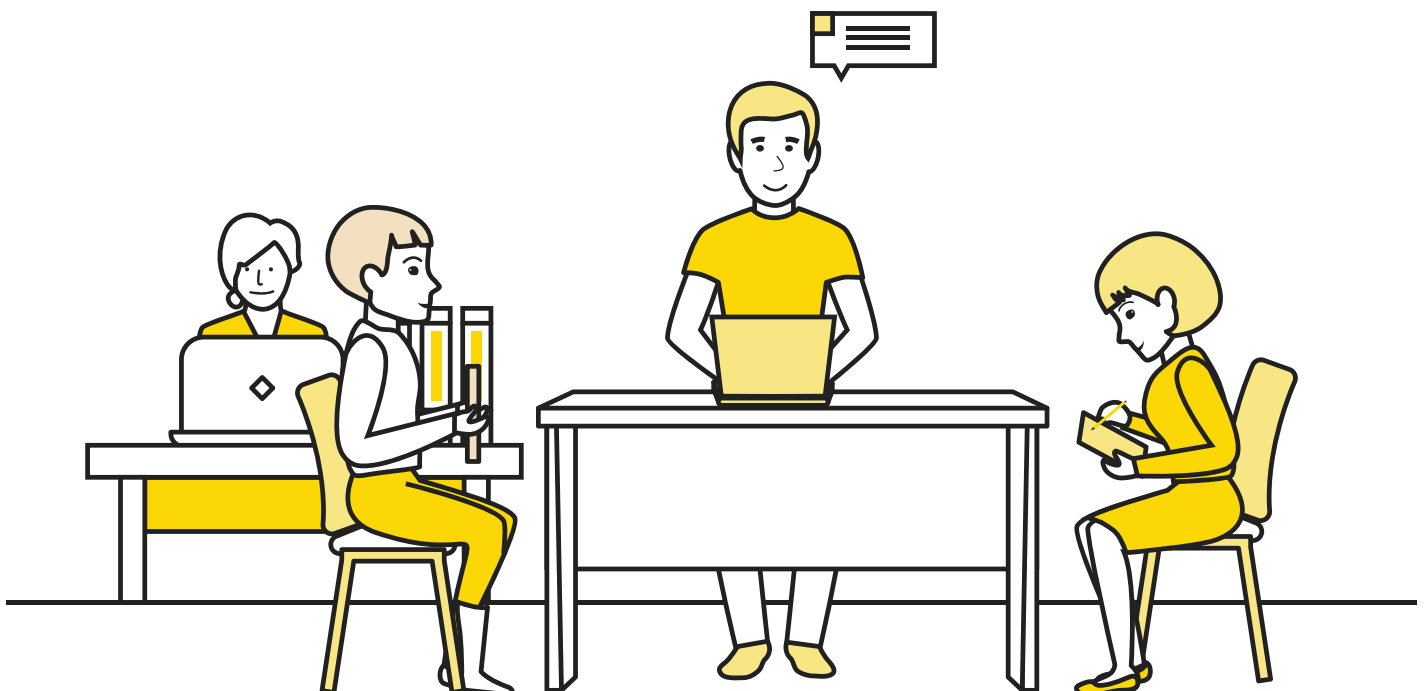


Introducing Your Members and New Faces

It's critical to encourage your members to feel wanted, welcome, and to have a sense of pride within the workspace. By making them feel as though their success is your success, you can give them a place where they want to work. To inspire member engagement, it's important to first build the bridges between new members and everyone in the community.

Reizburg, Hamilton, and Spiess all go into detail to introduce new members and make them comfortable within their new workspace. "Showcasing members" can be a science within itself. Spiess likes to have a newsletter that introduces new members and highlights the achievements of all members within the community. This newsletter has received so much influence that it features paid advertisements which goes back to the community.

The basic principles you should look to is to see if you can inspire your members to look up other members, find ways to positively connect home and work so you can improve the lifestyle of your members, and ultimately create events for the sake of people getting to know each other.





Diverse Communities

It's often said that the best kinds of communities in coworking are often the ones that come together to address a specific need in their location. However, it's important to be diverse and practice inclusivity as much as you can. If you cannot provide for diversity and exclusivity, you can run the risk of shutting out certain groups you know and the groups you don't know. Make sure that your space isn't run by a specific clique and that all parties are included.

The niche group that is in the greatest risk of feeling isolated is the virtual members. According to Lori Spiess, who runs a space with a significant audience of virtuals, "They need community building the most, and they appreciate it. It's important to make sure your virtuals feel included."

It's easy to build a community with those who are present, but with those who aren't within your space it can be a bit complicated.

"Make sure they feel they are communicated with and part of the team." – Annette Reizburg



Annette Reizburg and Lori Hamilton believe in making sure you get your messaging across.

"You can't reach them with mass announcements. Call them individually, hold special meets, and events just for your virtuals."

Virtuals eventually can become full memberships and come to the office to work and have more of a A full membership. This can significantly lead to greater internal sales.



Events and Promotions

It doesn't have to be grand. Lori Spiess emphasizes that the simple act of bringing donuts to a kitchen is an event within itself. *"Anything you do can be an event." Says Spiess, You have to drink your own Kool-Aid."*

Reizburg and Hamilton like to encourage community interaction and daily communication with the members. You'll know them on a more personal level and help with any challenges or celebrate any successes. For instance, as Speiss mentioned, if your space has a significant amount of dog enthusiasts, you should take the initiative to coordinate a special event for the dogs.

Events don't have to be managed entirely by staff or by the community manager, they can be managed entirely by Meetup or through the coworking software. *"We need to curate fun." Says Lori Hamilton. "People need a little break in the action and feel like they can be themselves. Once you have your members starting your own community-driven events. 5k runs, happy hours, group exercises. You've done a good job."*

You can use events to address issues that come up in the workplace. They can be social issues, lifestyle issues, or something to help meet their professional needs such as organizing special clubs and meetings, or creating a network of consulting. The rule of thumb is to promote without being promotional. It's important to be creative and make your space a reflection of the people who want to be there. By doing this you can establish the brand perception of your workspace to be a hub: a place where good things happen and businesses are transformed.



About Yardi Kube

Yardi Kube provides all the tools needed to grow a smart and connected shared workspace.

Designed for overcoming operational complexities, Yardi Kube is a workspace management software and technology platform empowering operators to increase revenue, maximize productivity, and build community.

Yardi Kube provides a complete package for accounting, data management and voice services. Kube empowers operators and members with greater accessibility when it comes to billing, booking spaces, managing opportunities, and communication.



Increase Revenue



Maximize Efficiency



Build Community

Learn more about how a workspace management program
can optimize your coworking and shared space

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