

Style

## What's Your Office Style?

Nicola Ruiz, 02.22.08, 12:01 AM ET

Take a look around your desk. What do you see? A chipped mug with the congealed remnants of yesterday's latte, a mountain of unopened mail, a pen holder so overstuffed that it can't accommodate the pens you use? If so, enjoy your stay--because you are probably going to occupy cubicle hell for the long term.

But if your desk is only conspicuous because of its absence of clutter, exuding an [organized](#), professional ambiance, don't get too attached. The next promotion could very well be yours.

It's not your fault. You've probably been wrapped up in a demanding project, up against deadlines and haven't had time to organize, or maybe you just got back from vacation and haven't had a chance to create mayhem. Regardless, your current cube decor and office style speaks volumes about your personality--and your colleagues and bosses are taking note.

### [In Pictures: What's Your Office Style?](#)

"It sounds cliché," says Sam Gosling, a personality researcher at the University of Texas, Austin, and author of the upcoming book *Snoop*, which examines the behavioral footprints people leave behind, "but the more research I've done, the more I've come to believe that what's going on outside the mind reflects what's going on inside the mind."

For instance, if you find yourself surrounded by knick-knacks and [symbols of personal relationships](#) with friends, family and pets, you're more likely to be in a woman's office. Men's offices, on the other hand, tend to display items pertaining to sports and personal achievements.

Since we spend more waking hours at work than we do at home, it's natural to want to decorate our office or cube spaces, creating a home away from home.

Go ahead; personalizing your space is a win-win that's good for you and your company. Meredith Wells, a researcher from the University of Eastern Kentucky who has examined people's relationships with their work spaces, says people who decorate their offices often have higher levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being, leading to higher levels of employee morale and lower turnover.

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## Location, Location, Location

Where you place your adornments can reveal even more clues. Anything displayed on the outside of your work area is not necessarily about conveying honest or inspirational messages, says Gosling, but rather about sending a specific message to co-workers.

Don't be fooled, for instance, by those cutesy [family photos](#). When called on to analyze the office of ABC's *Good Morning America* presenter Mike Barz, Gosling found a slew of photos of Barz's smiling wife and kids lined up neatly on the windowsill facing anyone who entered. While Barz had to turn around to view the pictures, the display gave outsiders a glimpse into his values.

On a bulletin board in his line of vision, however, were a dozen small photos of his kids--hung for his benefit. These, according to Gosling, are "a social snack that tides [Barz] over until he can reconnect with his loved ones in person."

Other revealing personality signs include [plants](#), [Post-It Notes](#), [clocks](#), calendars and [candy bowls](#), which can represent everything from strong roots to a welcome mat.

Ellen Hendrickx, a partner at the Manhattan-based architectural and design firm [Milkie Hendrickx](#), says she's had clients who use office design and décor to set a tone.

"Recently a CEO told me he wanted a very traditional-style office, even though the rest of the offices were contemporary," Hendrickx says. "He was older and was very used to the hierarchy configuration. Traditional furniture such as a large intimidating desk and imposing chairs sent a clear message that he'd reached the upper level of his firm."

That's in contrast, she says, to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has forgone the plush corner office to sit in a cubicle surrounded by his employees.

But while it is well documented that in interviews, employers make up their minds based upon their first impressions, we tend to forget about the truism when it comes to our offices.

"People draw opinions about who we are and how we operate based on what our space looks like, sounds like and even smells like," says Jen Zobel Bieber, a New York-based life coach.

So, no matter how much or little work you have on your plate, maybe it's time to start paying attention to what's on your desk. Just remember that you probably won't be able to completely control the memo being sent.

"Every time we hang a poster on a wall, toss a cup of coffee in the trash or download an album from iTunes, we leave cues about who we are," Gosling says. "And although we may attempt to arrange our stuff to outfox others, our true personalities inevitably leak out."