

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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0:01:24 Jacob: Okay well welcome everyone to another episode of The Future of Work show, and today is a very special guest, it is the co-CEO of Gensler. Diane Hoskins. Diane, thank you for joining me.

0:01:39 Diane: Jacob, thank you so much for the opportunity to come back on your show. It was really great to be here a couple of years ago, and so much has changed in the workplace that it's great to continue this conversation.

0:01:53 Jacob: Yes, yes, likewise. Very, very excited to be speaking with you again, and I know you guys have been doing a lot of really, really exciting work over the years. And you were one of the 140 CEOs that I interviewed for my upcoming book, The Future Leader. So appreciate you sharing a lot of your valuable insights there. And we'll talk a little bit about some leadership stuff, today. Mostly looking at workspaces and the future of workspaces, but to get started, why don't you give everybody some background information about you, because you have a pretty interesting background. And also for people who may not be familiar with Gensler, what do you guys do?

0:02:33 Diane: Well, Gensler, let me start with Gensler and then talk a little bit about my role. Gensler is a design company, really a network, a community of over 6,000 amazing architects and designers, coming together to work in 50 different offices. But our clients actually are in over 100 countries. And we bring insight-driven and research-driven design solutions to some of the most challenging and most amazing opportunities out there, all around the world. Working with leading companies in the tech industry and governments, and law firms, and organizations all over the world and also projects like airports, and sports stadiums and hospitality and even health and wellness. And really bringing a full 360 understanding of really the transformation of live, work, and play.

0:03:40 Diane: And our deep research is helping us to bring insight into the design solutions that we offer with a goal of, at the center, really at the center of all of our work is the human experience. And really making sure that at the end of the day, it's how are we enhancing people in all of the variety of experiences that they have in the places that we create. So my role in this incredible organization is to work with my partner, Andy Cohen, as co-CEO's, to really help to support and create vision around where do we wanna go in the future, and how do we enable and equip our incredible people to be able to take on those next challenges.

0:04:30 Diane: And what we're seeing is a tremendous need to focus on cities. As you know, and as so many of the listeners know, that more people live in cities today than any other types of places on the planet. So what happens in cities really matters. And so again, we are really focusing on critical issues around what's happening in cities. Everything from mobility, all of the Ubers and

scooters and everything else that are on the city streets, and what that means in terms of place-making and how we get around cities, and the drop-offs and the logistics. And again, how do we return our city streets to people?

0:05:17 Diane: To other critical issues in cities, like climate change. And I know that it's not the focus of this call, but I'd love to talk to you more about that topic as well. And the commitments that we are making to transform our practice, so that by 2030 every single one of our projects is net-zero. And then even issues around homelessness and housing, which is such a tremendous issue as we look at every city. And...

0:05:48 Jacob: Especially the Bay Area, where I am, it's crazy.

0:05:50 Diane: Yeah, exactly. And it's really in every single city, and we've challenged every single one of our offices to get involved on a grassroots level, as well as the work we're doing with our clients, to find solutions and to be part of a positive future for people, as it relates to housing and homelessness. So we're really looking at that entire canvas of the city. Yes, all the workplaces and sports facilities and new buildings but also that fabric that has to do with those key areas that are really gonna make or break the success and the liveability of cities all around the world.

0:06:00 Jacob: And what are some of the... And this is just for people to get some more background on Gensler, what are some of the structures or buildings that people would be familiar with, that you guys are responsible for?

0:06:47 Diane: Well, it's a pretty long list, because we are...

0:06:49 Jacob: I know...

0:06:52 Diane: We're the largest architecture and design firm in the world, and so we are involved in shaping cities and places, again, across the major cities in the US, as well as globally. A project that we're very known for is the second tallest building in the world, which is Shanghai Tower. Which is the tallest building in Asia. Tremendous tower that is... Excuse me, 130 storeys. And more than anything it's, again, designed around the experience of people and also a very, very strong story about sustainability and resilience as well.

0:07:41 Diane: We just finished and opened the renovation of the Ford Foundation Building, in New York, which is a building that was built in the '60s, and '70s, an architectural icon, but it had really gone into obsolescence around many of its systems, but also, coming back to workplace, from a workplace standpoint, was not a modern workplace. So how do you take this incredible icon of a building and transform it, and still keep true to its initial great ideas, in terms of this amazing atrium space, and turning it in into a place which stands for its mission, which is inclusion and human rights.

0:08:29 Diane: And the PNC Tower, which is probably the greenest building in the United States, again, a wonderful project for PNC Bank in Pittsburgh. A great example of innovative thinking around how do you create a tall building that has operable windows? I mean it sounds like impossible, but we were able to achieve that.

0:08:55 Diane: Again, amazing projects like the soccer stadium, the new soccer stadium in Los Angeles, which is an incredible story about a community coming together and identifying that it

wanted to have Major League Soccer in its city and really building a stadium that reflected the spirit of the fans. And I could go on and on and on about the incredible projects.

0:09:20 Jacob: Yeah. Do it.

0:09:22 Diane: Yes. [chuckle] And we can talk about a few also, as we get into a discussion about workplace, because I think there's some good examples to mention in terms of some of the future trends.

0:09:34 Jacob: Yeah, what about at Gensler? What is it like to work at Gensler? Maybe you can talk about how you have thought about space internally for your employees, and just the overall kind of vibe and what it's like to be an employee at the company.

0:09:50 Diane: Well, we're so proud of our people. And we are thrilled to see incredible feedback from our folks on sites like Glassdoor and other places where people express their views in a very transparent way, about what it's like to work for our firm. We also do other surveys and ways of being able to make sure we're hearing the voice, but more than anything, it's the day-to-day talking to people and understanding what do people need to be successful, to be creative.

0:10:26 Diane: And so, again, we are very proud of our culture. We use the phrase, "We're a one firm firm" which sounds a little redundant, but it's about being one firm, even though we're in 50 different locations, but it's one firm. And we try to work in a very fluid way, that it doesn't matter where you sit, you can be working on projects with people across the planet on projects for some other place across the world. And so it's... We find that that's really attractive and exciting for our folks to have the opportunity to work with people, bringing different expertise, different points of view, and tremendous diversity and collaboration on the work that they're doing.

0:11:13 Diane: So, again, it's a very vibrant organization, and where it's about people first. And so bringing the kind of benefits, we just introduced parental leave, and again we continue to up the bar in terms of the kinds of benefits that people have as well as our compensation, as well as our workplace, which we're very, very proud of. Being a creative enterprise means harnessing creativity and taking down the barriers that sometimes can get in the way of the kind of creative collaboration as well as the individual focus work that needs to happen to create the kinds of work that we're involved with every day.

0:12:01 Diane: So we work hard at ensuring that the design that we create for ourselves, and there's some amazing new offices that are just coming online this year, our new London office is just amazing. It was a retrofit of a building, but we totally took it apart and did some amazing things, pulling out the glass-front edge with wood beams, which again is a really important sustainability message. But creating an incredible, really, workshop of creative energy in that space all the way to our LA office, which has an... Again, it's a great story of transforming an old bank building, into an amazing, again, collaborative work environment. To our Houston office, which just opened, our new Raleigh office, which is just an extraordinary workplace.

0:12:54 Diane: And I could go on and on around the firm, of again, really and totally reflective of its local environment. And we're proud to be embedded in our local cities because that's... If we're gonna work on projects in a city we... It's about being part of that community. So it's not about cookie-cutter. It's really reflective of that, but also being part of an organization with a very strong culture and commitment to design.

0:13:29 Jacob: What are some of the big trends that you are paying attention to now, as far as workspaces or just work in general?

0:13:38 Diane: You know, there's so much going on, and I think the word "transformation" is a great word when we start talking about workplace. I read The Economist every week religiously, and I'm always fascinated how many articles actually are focused on what's going on in the workplace. Which again... And we see it in so much of the media.

0:14:02 Diane: But there was a great quote in the Economist, from, I guess it was a couple of months ago, and I wrote it down, but it was, "What happens in buildings matters far beyond their walls. The corporate office is an agent of global growth. Across 40 developed countries, over 200 million people work at a desk." And it just speaks to the power of what happens in office spaces and what's going on in workplaces really defines how effective and productive organizations, companies, and even countries can be.

0:14:41 Jacob: I like that quote.

0:14:41 Diane: The design of those workplaces is critical. Exactly. Yeah I mean, isn't that just powerful?

0:14:47 Jacob: Yeah, no it is. I think a lot of people always think of a workspace as just kind of like this place where you show up to work. That's traditionally how we've always viewed a workspace. It's kind of like where you go from 9:00 to 5:00, but it seems like now the concept of a workspace is becoming much more than that. So can you talk a little bit about this kind of new role that workplaces play? Because it seems like it's not just this place of work anymore.

0:15:21 Diane: Yeah, that's such a great statement. And it talks about the role of work in our lives, and the integration of work and life and what that means, but maybe I'll just come at it from the workplace side of it, for a moment. But today the workplace is not a single place, but more of an array of places and technologies that connect people, because it's about people, it's about the individual, and how does the workplace support the individual. It's about teams, and the power of collaboration into teams in our businesses and organizations today is just off the charts.

0:16:07 Diane: And then it's about the community, the organization itself. How we define ourselves, what is our culture, what's unique about us, what is our mission, and how do we all again align around that and see ourselves as a single community. And that's really reflected in the design of the workplace and how we're thinking about the workplace. And again, this transformation that we're seeing. And the fact that what an individual needs needs to be, again, part of an optimized within the workplace. And these are the desks and benches and maybe offices or shared offices. And then the team needs collaborative space, small conference rooms, large conference rooms open meeting areas, those types of spaces.

0:16:56 Diane: And then the overall organization, and you're seeing this in many of the newer workspaces, are the larger gathering areas. Those interconnecting stairs, these lounges, community spaces, a lot around F&B. But again, the places where the serendipitous connectivity across people in an organization, not just the work groups and teams that are coming together for a specific purpose and goal but the bringing together across the organization, which, you know, again, study after study has shown that that's where innovation comes from, but it's also where community

comes from, that people know each other, that people start to share that common space, but also that common set of values.

0:17:47 Diane: And again, what holds you to that organization is that community and that mission and goals. So we're seeing really the way that we're designing space is really around all three of those, which again gets back to your question of the role that workplace plays. So you could say, "Wow I can get my work done sitting at home". But the fact of the matter is that's only one part of the equation. Our studies are showing us that maybe 40% of what an individual does is that individual work by yourself.

0:18:25 Diane: The rest of that time is in connection with other people, and it's that team space and also that sense of being part of a community, the kind of learning that goes on, the alignment with mission, the moving forward together is what that kind of organizational and shared space is about as well. So again, people will be in the workspace and they may not have a task they're doing with someone else but they wanna be there because they are a part of a group and they don't want to lose their understanding of where the overall organization is going and what role they play in that.

0:19:06 Jacob: It's actually interesting, because that always raises the question of virtual workspaces. I know a lot of organizations now are implementing flexible workplace practices, they have virtual teams. Would you say, from what you're seeing inside of Gensler and from your clients, is that a trend that is growing? Are companies pushing back on it, is it bad to have a virtual workforce?

0:19:32 Diane: You know, it's like so many things, when we are in that transformation there's always this kind of prediction of an ultimate end. That never happens, right? [chuckle] So being part of the design community, doing workplaces, what, 10, 15 years ago, there was kind of this prediction that everyone was gonna work from home, that ultimately...

0:20:00 Jacob: I remember that.

0:20:00 Diane: Right? That was what was gonna be the manifest destiny. And it didn't happen. In fact, the opposite happened. As we look at the phenomenon of co-working... I like to say, "Not only did people not wanna work from home, now they pay to go to work," because you're paying for that license to go and sit in a workspace in an office building, among other people. And that energy that people get from that, and of course the relationships that get built, and the kind of idea sharing that is all possible is what people recognize is so critical in a workspace.

0:20:42 Diane: And so that part of the equation is something I think we've only come to understand more over the last six or seven years, as we've seen the rise of co-working, but more than anything, where even when people have the choice to be able to work from home, people are choosing to come into the office. Again, because there's the level of mobility, that people have, there is a need often to travel or to work in different places, so there is a level of mobility that requires people to be able to work in multiple places, but when, again, when given the choice to only work from home, we're finding that 70% of people would prefer to actually come into a workspace to do their work.

0:21:32 Jacob: That's really interesting, so it sounds like... Well I suppose this also assumes that it's a workspace where people actually want to show up because if it's just kind of like dreary cubicles, gray walls, it's kind of hard to get motivated to go to a place. And I used to work in a place like that years ago. I suppose it's kind of hard to get that motivation for that.

0:21:54 Diane: Yeah, I would agree with that. I think in some of our surveys we've found significant numbers of people who are in work places where there was a very little understanding of what are those ideal kinds of spaces that do support and optimize all of the kinds of things people need to do their best work.

0:22:16 Jacob: Yeah.

0:22:17 Diane: So, lots of times people are coming out of those spaces when we are designing new space for them. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to require more square footage but it's all about how it's designed. As we have found in our surveys, again, kinda getting back to what people are doing every day, it's that individual space, and that ability to focus, and that also means not having the collaborative space right next to a place where people are trying to focus. But also... Right? And then also having the places that people can go to for those small meetings or large meetings, or that enclosed space where that private phone call needs to happen, you have to design and build those spaces into that array of different kinds of places that are available to people in the workspace.

0:23:13 Diane: So I think we're starting to see more and more people understanding you just can't have rows of workspaces and that's it. You have to have that balance of collaborative space also. And we would also add, and this is something I wanted to talk to you about, which is that really there's a third typology that's starting to emerge.

0:23:36 Diane: So if we think about this idea of the individual space, and then the collaborative space as being the small, medium, large types of collaborative conferencing whether with walls or not, there's really a third typology that we're seeing emerging and we're calling it the "flex space". And probably the best example of that is, we've all been in Starbucks, where they have that kind of high top table that's long and has the stools around it.

0:24:11 Diane: And the reason these kinds of spaces are starting to, we're starting to design them into our workplaces, because they can serve as a place where someone sits and works by themselves, as in focus work. Or they could be a place where a team of five people cluster and actually have a meeting. So it can serve as meeting space or it can serve as an individual workspace.

0:24:40 Diane: And again, with the mobility that most... We're starting to see emerge, where people are doing unassigned seating. So when you have more people there than you have seats for, it's a great place for that surge moment. Or again, you don't have enough conference spaces, because again, there's more people than had been initially thought, or on that day there's more people in because it's the day that everyone comes in the office, you can use that for meeting space.

0:25:14 Diane: So you have now, we're starting to build in this kind of flexible zone throughout a workspace, to really be able to offer the kind of flexibility of either focus work or collaborative space. And we're really starting to identify this as sort of, I guess I'd call it a third typology, but also an essential ingredient to make a mobility strategy work for companies.

0:25:48 Jacob: I know a lot of people who are both watching this live and gonna be listening to the podcast when it goes up. One of the big questions that a lot of people always ask is open spaces versus closed spaces. And I sort of have my way that I talk to people about that, but obviously you're the leader in this space, so how do you respond to people that say, "Well, Diane we're

thinking about having an open space or a closed space." What do you tell them?

0:26:14 Diane: Well, I basically will say, "Look... " I'll go back to our research for a moment. This was something that we actually spent a good deal of effort in studying in our 2019 workplace survey. And what we found is that people are not looking for either extreme. That no one...

0:26:35 Jacob: Okay. I'm glad you said that. That's the direction I was gonna go into.

0:26:36 Diane: Okay, great, so we're totally aligned. That there's work environments... Actually, my husband just started in a new job, and it's that old school thing of everyone's in a private office with these long corridors, and he's like, "I can't wait till we move." Because everybody is siloed. There's... You just feel the loss of energy, because no one can see each other and you're going down these long hallways. Nobody wants that again.

0:27:08 Diane: But the other extreme is not right either, these kind of call-center looking layouts where it's just rows and rows of people, and it's too noisy, and there aren't enough areas where people can go to a variety of other kinds of settings. No one wants that as well. So again, it's this mix. And what that mix is is really gonna be very much about the organization and the culture, the needs, what business they're in, a law firm versus a tech company. And so we do research to help us inform and guide a conversation with our clients to help them understand what's gonna be the right mix for them.

0:27:51 Jacob: So it sounds like it's creating a diversity of workspaces instead of just picking one or the other. Because we do so many activities during the day, whether we're learning or relaxing, or learning something, or we need that kind of private focus time. It sounds like the best approach is to think of different spaces, not just one or the other.

0:28:14 Diane: Exactly, that is exactly it. And I think it's why the workplace today, frankly, I think it's a much more exciting and interesting place than it's ever been. And to your point earlier, it makes you wanna be in that workplace because it does have that variety.

0:28:33 Jacob: Yep, absolutely. Now, earlier you mentioned climate change in workspace, and this is actually one of the people who's watching live right now asked this question, which I think relates very well to what you mentioned earlier and his question is, "What do you think the greatest challenge is in fighting climate change with real estate?" I mean, how do those two even come together for people that maybe are not able to make that connection?

0:28:58 Diane: Yeah, it's a really big issue. We look back to the '60s and '70s and there was a real understanding of how the car was contributing to pollution, and the catalytic converter was invented and it became required and, again, we really understood that and now we're moving to electric vehicles. And again, I think people get the fact that cars contribute a lot of the CO₂ in the air. Well, buildings actually contribute as much as the cars. [chuckle] And it's time for us to really address the issue of the contribution of our buildings to the level of CO₂, which is driving all of what we're talking about around climate change.

0:29:45 Diane: So there's a variety of industries and sectors that need to really focus on this issue if we're going to really move the dial. And as the largest architecture and design firm out there, we feel a tremendous commitment to being a leader in this area. And as I mentioned, we are focused and laser focused on this. So again, it's about the operations of our buildings, and this is not just

new buildings, but existing buildings. Really working on creating design solutions that ultimately reduce the amount of energy that that building uses to be able to... Again, heating and cooling.

0:30:34 Diane: And that can involve a photovoltaics of various kinds, that can involve, you know, various kinds of technologies like what we used in the PNC Tower, where we have a heat chimney through the center of the building and air coming in from the perimeter of the building, balancing the air temperature and the, again, the fresh air coming in and ultimately reducing the load of the need for energy within... Pulling off the grid. Also, we all need to work with our cities to green the grid. That's gonna be one of the most important and probably one of the most dramatic things that we can do is not to have coal-based electricity sources, and to find those renewable strategies.

0:31:31 Diane: But then one of the larger issues, and just to put it on the table, is going to be, and it is around this concept of embedded energy. And this is the energy that is embedded in the materials that we use when we're creating a building, when we're building, you know, designing or building the building. The concrete, the steel, the carpeting, and the ceilings, the walls, the furniture. All of these things have embedded energy and have their own carbon footprint, and we are looking to begin to start being very selective about the kinds of materials that we are using in our buildings, be it on, again, a base building or an interior workplace.

0:32:20 Diane: And we're gonna be working with vendors in making sure that they understand what we are looking to do in terms of driving down that carbon footprint as it relates to the materials that show up on our projects. And ultimately, there'll be some materials we won't use, simply we will draw the line. And we will hopefully encourage the creation of, in the R&D and the support that is needed, so that materials that do have the kind of net zero profile, that those ultimately are the ones that are out there.

0:33:00 Diane: It's kind of like organic food, until there was a market for it, it wasn't out there. All of a sudden there's a tremendous market, and we're seeing so many manufacturers making what it is that the market is demanding. We wanna be the market demander, driving market demand for net-zero materials on our projects.

0:33:22 Jacob: Which is great, we absolutely need more of that. I think everybody listening to this and watching this would completely agree with you. What about, and kind of shifting gears a little bit, I'm curious about if different generations of workers are impacting the workspace at all? So we see a lot of talk around millennials, Gen Z, do you think this is fueling the conversation at all around how we should think about workspaces, or is that just kind of coincidence?

0:33:51 Diane: I think it definitely impacts the workplace. Certainly the new entrants to the workplace are gonna be more open to the changes, often, and ready to try new things. But we have also found that in terms of effectiveness, that when we survey all generations, that there's no difference in the perception of the effectiveness of a workplace that offers the kind of choice and variety that we've been talking about.

0:34:25 Diane: But when you're working with, again, an older workforce, you're often going through much more change management because of just a sense of, "Wow, this is a big difference". But once people are using a workplace that has the kind of variety and choice, it's liberating, it's awesome, people love it. Where some of our Gen X, or Millennials and our Gen Z, they're ready and excited and are pushing for those kinds of work environments.

0:35:01 Jacob: Which is great. So it's kind of fueling the conversation going forward?

0:35:04 Diane: Yeah.

0:35:05 Jacob: Do you notice any differences around geographic locations, like different countries and different parts of the world and how they view spaces and is there a noticeable/perceived difference?

0:35:19 Diane: Wow, great question, Jacob. Honestly, there is a difference. And we've been doing workplace surveys in different countries. So again, the US, the UK, Germany, Japan, Latin America, the Middle East, and... So I won't go through all of those, but what is interesting and just sort of the big macro side of it, is cultures differ, especially in the reliance on collaboration, the amount of collaboration that is happening on a given day definitely has... There are noticeable differences. Where, let's say, in Latin America much more collaboration, again even... And again the social element is much more part of the workday. Even having lunch together and that sort of thing is common in a lot of the folks that we surveyed.

0:36:31 Diane: Again, the American workforce is much more individual work focused. So you do start to find significant differences and then that definitely plays into the design of the workplace in a very specific way around just those two dimensions, not even speaking about the issues around hierarchy and authority. And usually, again, those differences are very clear as it relates to the cultural frameworks that are already in that society and that plays out in the workplace also.

0:37:10 Jacob: So, what would some of those differences be? So for example, you mentioned the United States, we're very focused on more kind of individual work. So how would office spaces look maybe a little bit different, depending on if you're in the United States, or Europe, or China, or Saudi Arabia? Do you have any examples or things that you've seen?

0:37:29 Diane: Yeah I guess, to not... Maybe we can talk another time about very specific projects, but in cultures, let's say even in Europe, where there is a much less emphasis on hierarchy and authority. Differences in size of spaces is diminished, and again, it is not looked upon well to have executives in large offices, or even in offices.

0:38:11 Diane: Where in, again, in some cultures, you would of course have the leadership in office space that's enclosed, with certain kinds of positioning as it relates to the rest of the staff in the organization. And again, this is something we are very conscious of when we're designing, and not necessarily... We're based in America, but we are not trying to be insensitive to the cultural norms, or the, what is going to maximize the work processes and culture of the organization itself.

0:38:13 Jacob: No, it makes sense. A lot of people are always talking about the impact that technology and the workspace have on each other. We've seen organizations experiment things like wearable devices or sensors to kind of monitor traffic. Looking at how people work, where they work. Are you seeing... Or better yet, what role does technology play when thinking about workspace design?

0:39:27 Diane: Oh, we actually are developing a new practice area within our firm that we call Intelligent Places. And that is going to do exactly some of what you're talking about, which is to really bring a new level of data analytics in a spacial-ized way, meaning being able to test how people actually use a space by setting up a mock-up or a "living lab" as we like to call it, to really

understand how people will use or potentially use the space, by using the kinds of sensors or other kinds of wearables.

0:40:12 Diane: And then... Excuse me, using that information to then simulate how the design of the space might actually function. We think this is a really important next wave of design capability that's important for our clients and also to people, for them to be able to have workplaces that truly do optimize their ability to do their best work.

0:40:42 Jacob: So in other words, before you design a space you actually have concrete data about the existing space and the people who work there and how they get their jobs done, and then you take all that data into the new space design?

0:40:56 Diane: Yeah, but a step in between that would be to create a mock-up of the new idea, of the new space concept, and then to use the kind of data sensors and wearables to understand how people use that space and then to take that algorithm and to look at the design of the full new concept, to simulate then what the possibilities might be, to make adjustments, to look at alternatives, and ultimately create a much more, let's say, bespoke solution, that would not even be possible by not having that information.

0:41:37 Jacob: That's pretty cool stuff. I suppose this stuff even wasn't possible years ago before we had all these types of technologies, it was probably much harder to design a space that was more using data and people analytics, because you just didn't have that data, so now you can really create and design these kind of catered spaces, which I think is super fascinating.

0:42:00 Jacob: One of the questions I also get, is around, how do you adapt to workspace trends? For example, let's say you're a large organization and you just completed, you know, a very large new corporate headquarters, you created this new kind of floor plan and then a couple of years in trends change. Something changes, maybe a new leader gets into the workspace design role and he wants to make changes. Like how do you keep up with workspace changes? Because these are like... We're talking about buildings and structures and the walls. It's not easy to change this stuff. So how do you stay relevant?

0:42:41 Diane: Well, I'll address maybe the core question there. I think there's lots of really interesting things that you just said. How does a space stay relevant, right? How does a place... How do we design a place so that it can be adaptable, so that it can change overnight, in terms of the company's going to grow or there's a new strategy or there's a new leader. And I see a dramatic difference today than what we would design maybe 10 or 15 years ago.

0:43:19 Diane: There used to be a lot more specific design around the process, almost this idea of taking apart the process and then overlaying that on the floor plan and designing each department in its own way, and really looking at the actual work activity. And with the rate of change of what people do, and how companies are transforming, to your point, you basically can design something that will be obsolete you in a year, six months, or two years.

0:43:57 Diane: And so the the understanding of what work is and how people work, is less about the process, which is probably a little bit more of a factory mindset, and more about, as we were talking earlier, it's about really supporting individual work, group work, and the organization itself. And ultimately then, there's total flexibility to be able to then support any work process, any new type of offering that that organization is going to bring to the markets, new kinds of people they

may be bringing in, different generations and so on and so on. So again, that is probably the 180 degree difference between the way we think about designing the workplace today versus what it was many years ago.

0:44:54 Jacob: So it is possible to create a space that stays relevant?

0:44:57 Diane: Absolutely, absolutely. And with the, again, this idea that work is about people, it's about optimizing people, and it's people as individuals, it's people as teams, it's people as an overall organization, that when you really understand that core piece, then it's the kinds of workspaces, the flex spaces, the collaborative spaces, and how do you do that in the best way possible.

0:45:14 Jacob: So it sounds like if you view your workspace just as purely designing cool things and having it be beautiful, then the chances of it getting outdated are much higher, but if you look at workspace in terms of something that's more functional, how people work, where they work, then the spaces that you design will be relevant over the longer term, and then you can kind of make tweaks to the aesthetics, if you need to?

0:45:58 Diane: Yeah, I think there's always going to be beauty. You're designing for people. And people, again, the way that you design it, it's going to speak to who you are as a company. So there's probably a deep connection between that organization and what it wants to represent as itself to its people. And whether you wanna call that beauty, whether you wanna call that brand, whether you wanna call that mission, space communicates. And we haven't talked about one of the things that is critical in the workplace today, which is the attraction and retention of talent.

0:46:40 Jacob: Yes.

0:46:40 Diane: And so your space and what it says to your people, is critical, both in terms of all those functional elements, as well as kinda that understanding of, "What are we about and what is our mission and why are we here and what is our community about? What do we stand for? What do we not stand for?", is all part of how that space communicates to people.

0:47:07 Jacob: I think people oftentimes forget the importance that space plays on attracting and retaining talent. And have you seen this with some of your clients? Changes in terms of how their space attracts and retains talent? For example, going from an old space to a new space. Is there different perceptions from their people all of a sudden?

0:47:28 Diane: Oh, absolutely. But what I wanna say is, I don't think there's a client that we work with that doesn't start with, "It's about attraction and retention of talent." That is the goal, that is what people are focused on today. It's harder and harder with, again, a very, very tight labor market. And the competitiveness for the kind of really talented individuals out there, it's at the city level, cities are competing now for companies and the companies are going to cities because of the talent.

0:48:08 Diane: And then within that city it's again, "Where am I gonna be able to do great work? Where am I gonna be able to have a great career? Where can I contribute and make an impact?" And your space, the space that an organization has really allows them to not only create great places for individuals but for the kind of synergies that say, "You're not gonna even be able to do this great work unless you're here, because you're gonna work with all these amazing people and we have the kind of place..." and of course, policies and all the other things they do, but the place that is really going to, again, show you in your best light, and allow you to do amazing work.

0:48:49 Jacob: Yeah. No, well said. I know one of the things that you wanted to make sure we talked about was workplace density, and sort of what we're seeing there. So maybe we can talk about that for a couple of minutes, and I was actually just reading an article before we jumped on this, that the size or the square footage per employee is actually shrinking, and appears to be continuing to shrink over the years. So how does kind of workplace density trends impact the way that we think about space?

0:49:19 Diane: Yeah, it's one of those things that is kind of in the background happening. And I was asked to speak about this a few weeks ago, and really did some deep dive research regarding the trends, and it's pretty fascinating, and I think really important when we're thinking about not only workplace but also our real estate markets. Probably in the '80s or mid-80s we were seeing densities of let's say 300-350 square feet per person.

0:49:58 Jacob: Wow.

0:50:00 Diane: Again, we had still office space design that was pretty much individual offices, the work stations were very large, and we get to maybe the 2000's and we've really seen a significant dropping of that square foot per person, to where now it's clearly in the, I don't know, 185, 160.

0:50:26 Jacob: Almost half.

0:50:27 Diane: Almost half, exactly. So almost half. Which again, I think is significant when you think about a company, if it was the same company in 1985 they'd need half the space today. So again, that says a lot to the real estate market in terms of demand for space as well. So I think that's really interesting.

0:50:50 Diane: But probably one of the even more important trends is really because of mobility. And I'll call it dynamic occupancy, where we've changed the relationship between the individual work seat and the number of people that are housed in the space. So let's say... And many consulting companies and others really are using dynamic occupancy. So the traditional would be one work seat for one occupant, but now we're seeing the planning being more one work seat for two occupants.

0:51:34 Diane: Because, as I said before, people tend to only need that individual workspace for about 40% of their day. So it's pretty realistic to say you could design in a two people to one seat model from an overall count standpoint. And so if you were to look at the effective occupancy of 180 square feet person, that really drops to 90. So I again, we... Right?

0:52:04 Diane: So this has implications around demand for office space and understanding of, how much space does a company need? Which is often something that is the first question when a client comes in to talk to us, is, "Well, how much space do I need?" So we really do look at a lot of these strategies and in some cases what the decision is is "We'll design to a one-to-one today, and then as we grow and add people we won't add space, we'll just change... We'll allow that ratio to play in."

0:52:43 Diane: So there isn't as much of this kind of panic when the growth happens, which would have been the case in the past, where, "Well, we better leave 10% additional for growth or all a sudden we need some more space." But this idea that you can grow in the space by recognizing that you've got a good amount of slack. And also if you have the flex space that I was talking about

earlier, you're really able to accommodate a lot of growth without having to take additional space. So again, this really changes the understanding of how much space does a company need. And of course it makes it a lot more challenging.

0:53:28 Jacob: Oh yeah. [0:53:29] ____.

0:53:30 Diane: Right? But it also hedges some of the risk of continuing to just take more space, and if there's some kind of downturn, then you're now with empty space. You actually have much more flexibility to be able to house that increase, again within the space, the original space, before you're having to find other ways of accommodating people. So I think we're looking at a much more dynamic workplace strategy for clients and for people. And at the same time, it's a better work environment from the standpoint of the individual being able to do their best work.

0:54:15 Jacob: So somebody else watching live had this question for you, and he said, "In one of Diane's articles, she mentions this. For a more human workplace quality experience-rich is central. Could she tell us a bit more about that?" So what does experience-rich mean when we think about the workspaces?

0:54:39 Diane: We've spent a lot of focus time at Gensler. Again, we have a research platform within our firm really trying to take apart this idea of how does space, how does design, contribute to the human experience? How do we create great experiences through design? And we've really been able to understand the dynamics of experience and understand the part that design and place plays within a framework of experience, and looking at it from the standpoint of the retail experience, or the work experience, or the travel experience.

0:55:25 Diane: They're all slightly different, but in many cases some of the core ideas are actually very similar. And I'd love to deep dive a little bit more, and I'll refer to the data and the research that's actually online on our website, gensler.com, but just in essence, the task or the thing you're trying to do is only one piece of it.

0:55:54 Diane: And so when we're only focusing on that and as it relates to design, we're kind of missing the rest of what creates a great experience. That there's a social element, there's an element that is about discovery and learning. That there's, again, these elements that are about even inspiration, that all come to play. It's kind of a pie chart, and there's different amounts of interplay that each contribute, but it is a rich array of these kinds of inputs that ultimately create a great experience.

0:56:34 Jacob: Makes sense. I know we're just about out of time, so maybe I can ask you one last final question before we wrap up. And that is looking at the future of workspaces. So if you were to look, I don't know, 10 years, or you can pick even further if you want, what would you like or hope to see, or even what do you think we'll see, when we consider the future workspace?

0:57:00 Diane: Well I, you know I... First of all I think it's such an exciting time right now, and I'll say, through my career over the last 10-20 years, to see the unbelievable transformation of workplace. What's fascinating is a lot of this, if you look at some of the real, real early research that was done, it was kind of like all predicted, which is crazy. There was a great article in Harvard Business Review, back in the mid '80s, that was called, Your Office is Where You Are.

0:57:37 Diane: But again, kind of predicted a lot of what we're starting to see today. So I do think

there's early signals often, to to the future. And I believe that there... And I love the fact that we were just talking about experience. I think there's a real openness to understanding that great experiences create great outcomes for people. And so this idea of workplaces that are kinda like factories, that we probably saw in the 1900s, where... The beginnings of the office. That, again, then you come forward to today, 100 years later, and see a workplace that is human, that understands that it's about the human experience that ultimately yields incredible impacts and incredible outcomes, that frankly that that is the trend.

0:58:11 Diane: If you were to look at the 100-year trend, that is the trend that we've been on. And so I would say that more understanding of how humans thrive, more bespoke solutions because we do have the technology now to understand the uniqueness of people, we're introverted, the more extroverted. That's probably a gross exaggeration of extremes, but people are different in how you optimize and create places that people thrive. Again, I think we've got lots of room to continue to grow in that understanding. And, and again, to value those places which you see with co-working, that people assign a value to that, that it is valuable to be in a place where other people are, to be able to do your best work.

0:59:37 Jacob: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Well, I know we're a couple of minutes over. So, Diane, where can people go to learn more about you and Gensler? A couple of people live were talking about the amazing research that you guys do, and how big of fans they are of your research. So anything that you wanna mention for people to check out or to connect with you, please feel free to do so.

1:00:00 Diane: Sure. First of all, it's been so amazing to have the opportunity to have this conversation, Jacob, and you're a great interviewer. And...

1:00:10 Jacob: Oh I appreciate your kind words. [chuckle]

1:00:11 Diane: No, you're great. And I love your focus on workplace and leadership, and you're doing some amazing work. Gensler.com, we've got all of our research is there, and all of the project work we're doing, and really amazing insights from so many people across our firm. And then I'll just do a plug for our Gensler Research Catalog, it'll be our third volume, is coming out in the spring, which is a culmination of all of our research that we've been doing over the last couple of years. We create a research catalog every two years, so this will be the most recent one, most current one, which again is gonna really go deep on shaping the future of cities and the research we've been doing around the areas we've been talking about.

1:01:02 Jacob: Very cool. And then I'm assuming that is something that people will be able to find on the Gensler site?

1:01:06 Diane: Yes, absolutely.

1:01:08 Jacob: Okay. Alright, so we got something to look forward to in the very near future, checking out that report. Well, Diane, again thank you so much for your time and for sharing your insights and ideas, I really appreciate it.

1:01:20 Diane: Thanks, Jacob. It's been great.

1:01:22 Jacob: And thanks everyone for tuning in, and I will see all of you next week.