

Steelcase Helps Design Space to Set New Ford Culture

When Jim Hackett held his first global leadership meeting as Ford’s CEO, he called on Steelcase Events to help design a space to signal change.

When Ford Motor Company named its newest CEO, Jim Hackett, the company’s public announcement described it as “extraordinary times” for the organization in need of “extraordinary leadership.” Extraordinary indeed. Today, Ford describes itself as much more than a company that makes cars and trucks. Through innovation and acquisition, it’s accelerating its mobility strategy to deliver products and services to individuals, fleet owners and global cities. The 114-year-old iconic company founded by Henry Ford — the man who brought automobiles to the masses — is following its roots rich in invention and innovation.

Digital transformation is changing the way businesses operate and, at the same time, consumers are trending toward service-oriented business models. To respond to changing infrastructure and changing habits, Ford is moving quickly to test, develop and launch new ideas and solutions for the market.

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Jim Hackett was appointed the new Ford CEO in May 2017. Described as a “transformational leader,” he was known for bringing design thinking to Steelcase during his nearly 20-year tenure as CEO. To introduce Hackett to the Ford global leadership team, a two-day meeting was planned with several key goals to begin to cultivate a culture of innovation.

FORD GLOBAL LEADERSHIP MEETING GOALS

- **Executive alignment & group discussion**
Orchestrate a shift from traditional meetings where the audience listens to the stage presenter and, instead, encourage the 300 attendees to participate and engage in discussions with peers.
- **Flip the hierarchy**
Provide a premium atmosphere for the audience to let them know they are just as important as the speakers.
- **Signal change**
This couldn’t be like any other meeting. It needed to communicate this was a new kind of exchange.

Hackett's experience at Steelcase meant he knew the physical environment could be a powerful lever to communicate company culture. Words can only go so far. His team reached out to [Steelcase Event Experiences](#) and with a short timeline, the team got to work. They connected with Ford's event and marketing agency, Imagination, a critical partner as designers began envisioning the space for Hackett's first global leadership meeting at Ford.

Steelcase Event Experiences was created for just this kind of situation. This service-oriented team uses Steelcase research and insights to transform event spaces through experience design and a broad portfolio capable of creating a diverse array of experiences. They partner with customers to identify objectives and create custom spaces that inspire and engage.

The Ford global leadership meeting space before Steelcase Event Experiences went to work.

The space the Steelcase team set out to reimagine included all-too-familiar conference room arrangements. The prior leadership meeting space included a sea of homogenous round tables where inevitably, many people, would have their backs to the speaker or have to crane their necks to see. A raised platform and podium suggested whose voice was most important. And, a color palette that lacked inspiration.

EVENT REIMAGINED

In order to accomplish Ford's goals, designers transformed the traditional setting into a vibrant, comfortable and welcoming event space.

"We know people are more satisfied with their work environment if they have choice and control over where they sit. We wanted to give each of those 300 attendees the opportunity to sit in a posture that's comfortable for them and change positions throughout the two days to reenergize and stay connected," said Tom Condon, Steelcase Event Experiences Creative Director.

Stools and tables, task chairs and lounge seating meant everyone in the audience could choose a posture that felt good to them. Risers and an arced seating arrangement gave everyone a good line of sight to the stage. The stage of blue and white connected everyone to the Ford Motor Company brand. And, colorful and plush accessories like pillows and throws signaled a more informal, conversational setting where everyone was encouraged to engage.

NEW TONE

Hackett said, "We were able to give pause to the leadership of Ford Motor Company that our meeting wasn't going to be a traditional leadership meeting because of the space. They applauded when I asked them how it felt."

"I wish we would have filmed people's faces as they came into the space. It definitely set a new tone for the two days," said Clare Braun, Ford CEO Chief of Staff.

The space helped signal to the team in the audience that they were just as important as the speaker. Ford organizers said it helped elevate a new tone where it wasn't about a new leader, giving new orders, it was about engaging the team in a new way.

“The Steelcase team really opened our eyes to how we could create a meeting setting and atmosphere that communicated to our leadership that we are going on an exciting new journey — and that each member of the team was as important as the presenters,” said Mark Truby, vice president, Communications, Ford Motor Company.

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