

**Openings:** Free oxygen was originally a threat to all life on Earth. It was only the development of a new metabolic process, photosynthesis, that allowed some living cells to utilise oxygen in the presence of sunlight and save the living world from extinction. What was once a toxin is now the essence of life.

**Spotlight:** The field of environmental studies looks at the relationship between humans and their environment from a variety of perspectives. While it may sound like something confined to the halls of academia, this field offers many practical insights into how the environment in and around your business directly affects your bottom line.

Humans are, to the greatest extent, sensual being. The information that our senses provide is what we use to formulate our ideas, opinions, and actions. Our relationship with our environment is a prime motivating factor in decisions regarding where we live, work, play, and shop. We are influenced heavily by our sensual attunement with an environment and only frequent places where we feel comfortable.

To be successful, your enterprise's environment must go beyond being comfortable, it must be attractive. The attractiveness of your environment—the degree to which it draws people in—sets the tone for all that happens within the enterprise. Creating a space that both customers and employees want to inhabit leads to interactions that are more enjoyable and transactions that are less stressful. Your enterprise is a meeting place where business is transacted: putting an emphasis on people in the design and maintenance of the space strengthens the business.

Environmental aspects such as room temperature and sound levels are easy to measure, to control, and to determine the optimum settings that attract people. There are other environmental aspects where finding the right balance is more art than science. The importance of room colour, the abundance of sunlight, and the type of floor covering is subjective and varies between individuals. Still, for your enterprise, an ideal balance between all aspects does exist. Attention to the details makes all the difference and your knowledge of your stakeholders is the most important piece of information.

What are the environmental factors that tell your employees and your customers that your enterprise is the right enterprise for them? Does your environment convey a message that is congruent with your other communication mediums? Even if the message is subtle, it does influence people. The wrong environmental message can be just as damaging as selling the wrong product at the wrong price.

Making space for people is a very intimate undertaking. Even in the most public spaces, people know if the designer understood their personal requirements. It is the consideration that the individual matters in the grand scheme that builds intimacy. As much as the design and its implementation, it is the intention to make people the central element in an environment that determines its success. Anything that does not attract people repels them; there is no middle ground.

**Musings:** In the Pacific Northwest, the ocean is, in so many ways, a moderating effect on life. It eliminates most extremes amplifying and emphasising everything near the median. Atmospheric temperature, landscape colour, and even human temperament seem to favour the middle zone of life's spectrum along the ocean's border. While it is possible to extend this analysis to the frequent cloudy days—grey being the midpoint between black and white—it is just as possible to interpret the ocean's influence on the sky as one of the few extremes.

The clouds that form over the Pacific Ocean provide a significant portion of the moisture necessary for life across the continent. As these nimbostratus tankers lumber towards the coast, their bellies barely above the wave tops, they present a vista of unparallel depth. It is not that these clouds are unique to the Pacific Northwest and rather that here, their quality and abundance is notable. Rather than being a flat grey blanket, these clouds present a three dimensional skyscape of subtle nuances in hue and texture.

On your next cloudy day, ignore the absence of blue skies and look deeper to see what wonders are present.

**Facts & Figures:** Wal-Mart, with annual sales exceeding \$245 billion (USD), is the largest U.S. retailer. The estimated \$15 billion (USD) Wal-Mart spent on Chinese-made products last year accounted for nearly one-eighth of all Chinese exports to the United States. If Wal-Mart were a separate nation, it would rank as China's fifth largest export market, ahead of Germany and Britain.

**Links:** Check out an engaging mix of humour, pop-culture, and social commentary at [www.thematrix.com](http://www.thematrix.com). This site's message highlights the interrelatedness of all environments.

**Quote:** Author Annie Dillard offers an interesting observation on our natural environment.

*"Nature seems to exult in abounding radicality, extremism, anarchy. If we were to judge nature by its common sense or likelihood, we would not believe the world existed. In nature, improbabilities are the one stock in trade."*