

# Cooperation, collaboration good for the soul

If you ever need to remind yourself of the fundamental lessons in life, read a children's book. They're full of them, every story providing an opportunity to navigate life more successfully. One of my little boy's favorites claims, and feel free to sing along, that "the more we are together, the happier we'll be."

The whole thing is seconds long, but the message is powerful. Interaction. Friendship. Collaboration. Community. They're good for the soul.

With the pace of life at ludicrous speed and the increasing commonality of people working independently, we're becoming a bit more isolated from one another. A little ironic, yes, with the overwhelming flurry of virtual communication channels at our fingertips. But true connectedness is often best achieved in person, and sometimes we have

to make a point of physically congregating and sharing with others to get by. Or better yet, to get inspired.

Because let's face it, anything grown in a bubble could benefit from some fresh air.

Let's say you're an independent contractor, an entrepreneur, a one-person show. Or you work for a larger company, but regularly telework. Or you frequently travel for business. Where can you go when home feels unproductive, the local coffee shop gets too distracting, or the library gets too quiet, to mix with other humans while remaining productive?

This is where the new "co-working" concept comes in. Co-working tosses out the notion that working independently means doing so in isolation. It is, at its core, shared working space. What it provides appears to be much more than that. When people occupy a productive

space together, whether or not they know each other or work in related businesses, networking and collaboration naturally begin to happen. Creative energy emanates. Knowledge and expertise are shared. Friends are made. A community forms.

"We help non-traditional businesses and workers thrive by offering an open, shared workspace that promotes growth and collaboration through an innovative subculture," says Shenoa Lawrence, co-founder of Richland nonprofit Room to Think, the first co-working space in the Tri-Cities. "Our members become part of a group that is highly motivated in supporting each other's efforts, and we've seen how powerful that can be."

In addition to providing a needed change of scenery for some, Lawrence acknowledges that co-working spaces also represent an inexpensive full-time option for small startups and "solopreneurs," which don't

always have the resources to set up a fully functional office environment at first. Just as the needs of its members vary, so do the membership options offered by co-working spaces such as Room to Think, which has 22 members and counting. Individuals or businesses pay for how often they want to use the space, from one day to unlimited days per month.

"We also offer educational and social events to encourage interaction and learning between members and non-members," said Lawrence. One example she cites is a Pitch Lunch, during which members practice pitching a product or service and receive critiques from the group. "Self-improvement coupled with group assistance is a huge benefit to all involved."

Management practices in co-working environments resemble cooperatives focused on community

rather than profit. At Room to Think, for example, planning and management are carried out through an elected board.

Through their guidance, individual members are encouraged to take on projects and contribute in some way.

"Our sponsors are essential to our success," adds Lawrence. "Not just in terms of financial donations, but also the time, knowledge, and mentorship they offer our board and members. They help bring it all full circle."

Curious? Go to [www.rm2think.com](http://www.rm2think.com) or [www.coworking.com](http://www.coworking.com) to learn more.

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