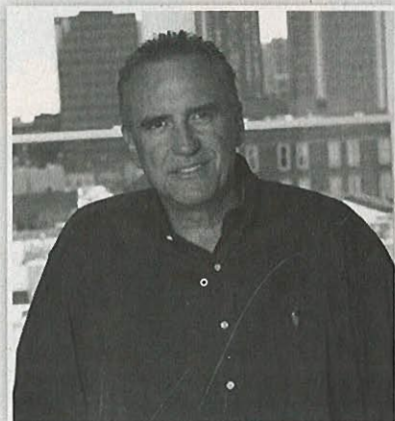


Removing Certain Elements Can Add Value to Your Fitness Facility



HERVEY R. LAVOIE
HLAVOIE@OLCDESIGNS.COM

When fitness facility remodeling and renovations occur, most health club operators typically look to add attractions, build new space, upgrade existing space or re-purpose wasted space. But you also can find value in removing certain building components that no longer serve a useful purpose.

Unnecessary walls are a prime target for removal. One can see walls without purpose in both old and new clubs. Sometimes, these walls are remnants of the past, such as those where racquetball courts have been converted to new uses. Sometimes, they are misguided attempts to define functional areas, provide privacy or comply with misunderstood code requirements. In a club environment where success often depends on member interaction, staff efficiency, internal cross-marketing of programs and a high-quality spatial experience, walls can create barriers, both physical and visual, and should only be maintained where clear and compelling purpose, such as acoustic or visual privacy, is served.

Here are other examples where strategic removal can deliver value:

Locker room entries. Is it market expectations, visual privacy, sound

isolation or having a place to hang the sign that compels some operators to insist on locker room doors? None of these rationales are compelling enough to offset the negatives of putting a swinging door in a high-volume, two-way circulation path. Locker room doors are a collision hazard, a health risk and an inconvenience. Your members will appreciate their removal in favor of a generously dimensioned, sight-line protected, hands-free opening.

Fitness room walls. Does your club layout resemble a junior high school? Are there corridors, walls, doors and a row of classrooms, each one for free weights, cardio, stretching and so on? In the modern, flexible, open fitness floor, little benefit can be gained by defining fitness activity areas with walls and doors. By tearing down these walls, you can enjoy openness and energy uplift.

Floors. Many older multi-story clubs were designed as an unbroken stack of floors with little or no physical or visual openness between levels, creating isolation between the activities that occur on adjacent floors. This isolation can contribute to lack of energy, way-finding confusion, spatial dullness and a general lack of internal "wow factor." The cure for such excessive vertical isolation is simple: remove a section of the floor and create a light well that provides openness between floors. This move trades space quantity in favor of space quality. The payback will come in increased member interaction and awareness of club programs. The opening of the floor plane can be coordinated with additional ceiling and roof openings that can enrich the interior space with natural daylight.

Exterior walls. Fitness clubs that are conversions from former racquetball and tennis clubs are notoriously lacking in daylight and exterior views. Transformational results are possible in such facilities when large solid sections of the windowless expanses of exterior court walls are removed and replaced with glass. The addition of glass will improve the member experience and add a competitive differentiation.

Columns. The good work done by columns in holding up your building is often unappreciated when these same columns get in the way of clear member circulation or open group studios. Although removing a column usually is not simple or low cost, it is never impossible. Until the costs and benefits are fully understood, a troublesome column should never be viewed as an immutable reality.

Outdated artwork. That exciting, cutting-edge gymnasium wall graphic may have been the talk of the town when it was first created 20 years ago, but today, it is just a reminder to your members that the wall needs painting. Built-in artwork can get old and lose its ability to inspire your members and impress your guests. Consider removing and replacing it with an architectural feature that can deliver on the timeless, ever-changing benefits of daylight and views.

In the quest for the latest, the newest and the trendiest in facility enhancements that attract members, remember that rule of math that two negatives equal a positive. Sometimes, dramatic enrichments can come from simple subtraction. ●

BIO

Hervey Lavoie is president of Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative, an architecture, aquatic design and interior design firm. With 35 years of design experience, Lavoie has completed club design assignments in 42 states and six countries.