



GROWING SHOES & TEAM BECAUSE INTERNATIONAL



OVERVIEW

[Because International](#), the company of the “shoe-that-grows,” needed a new, corporate office and turned to J S D A, Inc. to help them create a dynamic space that would empower their team and enable them to continue growing and manufacture children’s shoes.

The solution?

J S D A, Inc. was able to partner with Because International given their B Corp structure and established a corporate HQ that served blended work teams, doubled as a warehouse and an office space, and complete with “Shoe-Bus” on a “shoe-string” budget.

THE CHALLENGE: CREATING A NEW HQ FOR A GROWING SHOE BUSINESS

Solving problems half-a-world away is a daunting task for anyone. But for Kenton Lee, a pastor-turned-shoe innovator, the geographic challenge was just one piece of a complex puzzle.

Lee had always felt called to serve and when that call told him to go to Africa, he listened. But when he arrived, practical challenges loomed just as large as spiritual obstacles. One of the biggest? Shoes.

Living without adequate footwear presents sanitary challenges and is an especially acute



problem for children, whose feet are always growing. Lee developed a solution: a “shoe that could grow” that addressed the dual problem of a lack of adequate footwear and the economic burden that purchasing new shoes presented year after year for families already living on a shoe-string budget.

Lee and J S D A Inc.’s founder, Janice Stevenor Dale, connected during one of Lee’s pitches. The economic benefits for families and the impact of children staying longer in school, spoke directly to J S D A Inc.’s B Corp values and the wheels started turning.

Team J S D A and Lee began talking about Lee’s spatial challenges and developed an economically friendly solution that allowed them to create a new office space and stay safe while they launched during COVID-19.

While Lee had always felt strongly about maintaining manufacturing in Kenya, their temporary, rented office space near Boise was getting too crowded for the growing small business. The next step? Establish a corporate headquarters.

It was clear that this was going to be an extraordinary undertaking, given the times, the location challenges and the focus on building a technology bridge from North America to Africa.

From the start, we knew that the focus would have to be sharing the story of associate voices, defining and creating a company culture, and adding value to a space that would allow their team to come together. And do all this while utilizing as few resources as possible.

THE SOLUTION: ONE NEW, RENOVATED OFFICE THAT EMBRACES LOCALLY SOURCED MATERIALS

Because International asked J S D A to launch the project, starting with their educational webinar on the Resiliency and Office Reopening webinar developed by J S D A Inc, guided by CDC and ASHRAE standards. Implemented in the beginning of the year, these policies remain effective today.

Next step was looking at potential new locations that would align with the iterative strategic plan to become Because International’s corporate HQ and replace their rented space. One in particular stood out: a multi-tenant building that also housed a church.

This single-story building had an unused loading dock, perfect for parking their “Shoe-Bus,” an innovative marketing tactic that doubled as a mobile shoe display. The office space was previously a dance studio and had an open layout that would lend itself well to the team’s unique culture and office dynamics.

Once Lee and the Because International team agreed on this new space, J S D A, Inc. completed a customized strategic planning process and confirmed the needed square footage. The bay depth provided a pseudo warehouse space, which could be reserved for the long-term storage of shoes. The entire storage space would also be split between their for-profit and non-profit endeavors, but sharing a shipping center, further maximizing efficiency.



While the design proved perfect for their setup, the space did require some code updates. One such upgrade was adhering to plumbing guidelines that dictated access to more bathrooms. Another update was replacing the fire-rated door, and its hardware conditions, that accessed the corridor. A corridor modification was also necessary. Primarily, the upgrades required new electrical drops so each new workstation had electrical access. The electrical work extended to adding new lighting, smoke detectors, CO2 detectors, and motion sensors that met energy codes. ADA handicapped codes were also addressed.

While much of this sounds like standard improvement, there was one looming challenge: doing it on a thin shoe-string budget. Creativity and reusing materials were musts.

The layout of an office is a crucial ingredient in building a strong organizational culture. It contributes to “influence employee job satisfaction” as well as employee attitudes and how they experience the company’s culture. (Zerella, von Treuer, and Albrecht)

First, we looked at the plywood dance floor. Instead of sending it to landfill, we repurposed the wood into simple, geometric panels and work surfaces. This allowed us to provide semi-private work areas for in-office staff, without adding material costs.

Secondly, we sourced case goods that became a reception desk, an island counter in the visitor/lounge area, and additional tech storage near the company printer.

To keep costs low, bamboo poles were swapped in for corner posts and we avoided traditional drywall where there were no acoustical concerns.

We also wanted to make a plan for future team growth, so a few shared, private offices were envisioned for the back of the space, ready to be constructed when future funding is secured. We added reused and new adjustable height desks at the workstations to add flexibility to the team’s work preferences. And we added a hot desk area for interns, all socially distanced.

Because International offered flexibility for some employees to work remotely, particularly women who were torn between their children’s stay-at-home educational needs and their full-time employment. Alternating staff attendance based on their existing desk locations was a strategy applied early and during of the construction of the project.

The new layout also allowed for six foot or more spatial separation and directional orientation away from the nearest workstation neighbor. UV filters were recommended for the existing and new facility HVAC upgrades to keep employees healthy and safe.

Finally, we drew on the company’s African roots for inspiration and utilized indigenous materials that were economically friendly and culturally appropriate. We used reeded enclosures for the palletted shoe storage and echoed the texture across the re-used case goods. For upholstered goods, we embraced colorfully patterned textiles, adding warmth and interest to the space.

Materials play a strong role in how we perceive space and how we connect with each other. By



bringing in natural materials like wood, we enhanced the feeling of interdependence of the team while incorporating traditional Kenyan materials. Zhu, and Meyers-Levy (2009)

The selected color palette matched the team’s cultural aesthetic, full of vibrant colors, that punched up the vitality of the space. One textile backdrop served a double purpose of adding visual interest and adding privacy to the unisex restroom doors.

We also added images to the walls reflecting the children the team serves. Their smiling faces are sure to keep inspiration going strong for many years.

The selection of images, textiles, and materials was done with a strategic focus: create a unique company culture. By creating a space where employees felt at home and their backgrounds incorporated, Because International has taken another step to building a strong corporate culture. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010)

The once-lounge was combined with the reception area, creating an open space that would encourage community events, celebrations, and those indefinable but important “water cooler moments.” We lined this new area with a display that told the history of the Because International shoe. The evolution of the “shoe that grows” is featured along a series of open-area space frames that visually tell the story to any visitors, including potential donors, as they tour the new HQ in a loop.

We ensured the lighting was upgraded, negotiating with state resources to secure LED light fixtures to replace old lights throughout the space. All existing track lighting was upgraded to LED and was relocated to cast light on display areas and the beautiful new mud cloth that defined the reception area.

Last, but not least were conferencing spaces. Key to creating a space that matched Because International’s team culture, we needed both indoor and outdoor meeting spaces. Some were informal and a few needed to be more formal.

Existing private offices were refitted with wall-mounted monitors and plug-and-play hardware to create formal gathering spaces. The end of the extension space was perfect for a large, all-hands-on-deck, informal conference areas, complete with couches and other soft seating options like ottomans and floor pillows.

Outside, a covered outdoor area by the old loading dock made an ideal candidate for a patio. By adding two tables and chairs, this space will function as an accessory meeting and dining space to the “Shoe-bus.” To finish off the area, we added pull-out seating from a truck to create lounge seating and added a small monitor kiosk to share images or presentations easily from cell phones.

THE RESULTS

After completing the conceptual design, J S D A’s work was finished. Because their budget was limited, we opted for a DIY approach that the staff embraced wholeheartedly. The work of



bringing the building up to code and the rest was executed and constructed by the Because International team.

One of the most rewarding parts of the project was the transformation from an ad hoc office space to an organized, fully functional corporate headquarters that reflected the emerging culture of the company. J S D A was pleased to be able to show them the way to utilize space to enhance company culture as well as outlining how to build it properly with code and safety in mind.

J S D A provided all services pro-bono.

Lee has transitioned from a regional pastor to a service-oriented, global entrepreneur. Because International's new corporate headquarters is a true reflection of the hard-working, scrappy team that inhabits the new space, giving them the space and opportunity to continue serving others.

The J S D A team is proud to be a part of another success, this time a couple of continents and an ocean away, to help Because International with their life-changing growth.

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