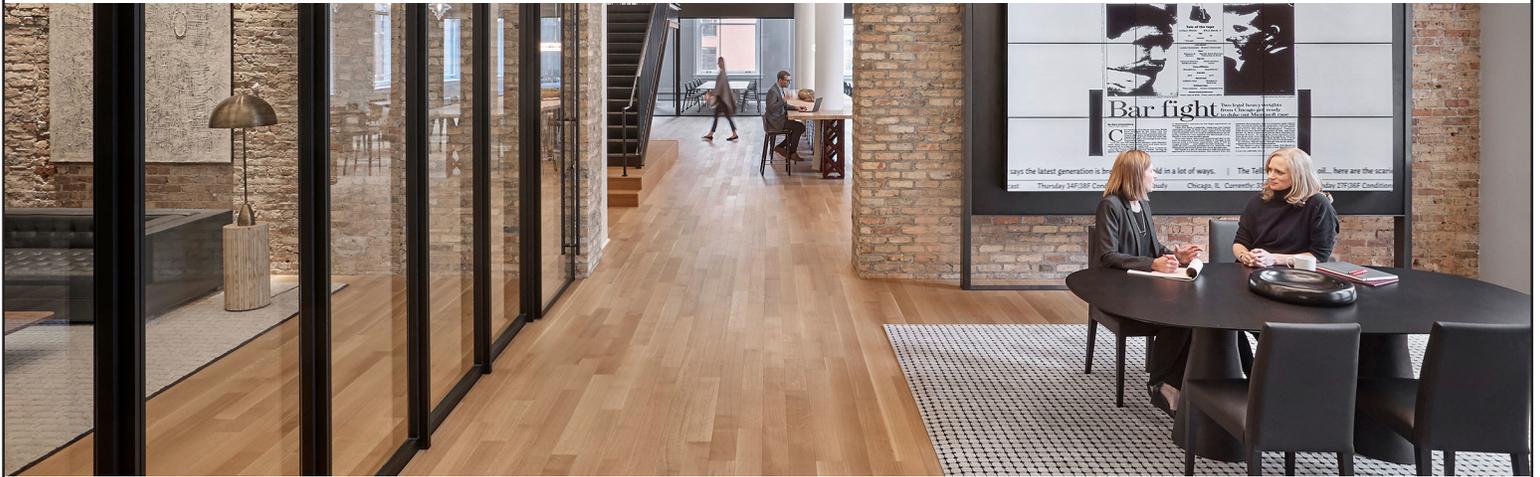


## OUT OF A FISHBOWL



Michelle Conlin  
*Forbes*  
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A chief executive's digs say a lot about his management style. Some chief executives are aloof and isolated in offices that would do credit to a Hapsburg monarch. Others take a cue from Henry V in Shakespeare's drama and show themselves to the troops.

Then there's the story about the late C.R. Smith, chairman of American Airlines. He and his entourage were on a visit to a terminal. Suddenly Smith disappeared. His people finally found him in a hangar, shooting craps with the mechanics. In those days American was the undisputed first among its peers in business.

"Just get out of your fish bowl, it's a terrible way to live, it's too lonely," advises John Tu, cofounder of Kingston Technology, the hugely successful memory board maker. Tu, who sits in a cubicle to be close to his employees, has lots of company these days.

### **Sidney N. (Skip) Herman**

Managing partner, Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott LLP, Chicago

We used to work in a typical high-rise office, an 80-story building with 8-foot ceilings, private offices and conference rooms. When we set off to launch our own law firm in late 1993, we wanted to start from a fresh sheet of paper.

We knew that we worked best when we were on a trial-when we got into a big room with all the key players, and had whiteboards and laptops.

Then I saw this space, and I thought, "It's big enough for a basketball court. Why not?" We already had a saying, "Forwards play forwards, guards play guards." Why not build a basketball court so that our space would manifest the idea of a team?

We call the basketball court the Forum, like the one in ancient Rome where people would come to exchange ideas. We have 10-foot whiteboards, movable tables and chairs and network connectors built into the floor. We can sweep it all away at any minute to pick up a game of basketball.

Two of the name partners here, Fred Bartlit and Phil Beck, have their offices courtside, with huge double doors that stay open. Bartlit or Beck will walk out, pick up a ball and start shooting in the middle of some meeting. We get so much more done than if you have offices with secretaries out front as guard dogs. You're not protected here by E-mail or phones or memos.

Clients travel here all the way from New York and Los Angeles. They eye that basketball all day and finally someone rolls the ball that's been sitting in the corner. They smile. They take a shot. Pretty soon we're scrambling to protect the laptops and overhead projectors! Next time they come, they come without the tie.

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