



How to Organize Retreats

Alan Webber, originator of Fast Company Magazine, calls retreats 'Advances' which has a much more positive connotation. These meetings are the perfect opportunity to create relationships and connect people. These are not meant to be schoolroom-like lectures where you're spoken at. These are meetings where people can come together, show their strengths and co-create something powerful for the organization and everyone involved.

This is the perfect opportunity to bring independent, powerful thought partners together to inspire, percolate, energize each other and connect.

Here are some points that will help make an 'Advance' a successful, memorable event.

- ✿ Must be off site
- ✿ BlackBerries and other electronic devices turned off. If there are decision makers in the room, then bring in a "runner" who can field calls and, if necessary come and get the person needed to make a decision to articulate it back to head office.
- ✿ Start off with work. Get them going and make the conversation dynamic and powerful and definitely interactive.
- ✿ Create a booklet of attendees with a picture and blurb about that person including who they are, a bit of background and what they hope to accomplish in the meeting.
- ✿ Before the event, ask them to think of a few tidbits of information about themselves that most people wouldn't know that they can share or something each of them can teach the group. Go around the room asking people to, in 60 seconds or less, share the tidbits. Do this a few times. It will deepen the connection. If it's a huge group, have mini-groups do the sharing before start of day, segment and after each break.
- ✿ Use round tables with no more than 8 people per table to have smaller conversations which they'll later share with the whole group. Everyone speaks. Everyone listens when others speak.
- ✿ Use the ADDIE approach. Pose a question or share a problem. Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate potential solutions and action plans. If it's to create strong, cohesive teams, create a potential problem that might or might not have anything to do with the organization so there are no owners of the problem. Let them feel the power of co-creating solutions where everyone 'plays'

no matter what they're level or position. Everyone has something relevant to share and a level of experience and expertise that others might not have. This is the opportunity for them to shine.

- ✿ Act out a situation. Have them sing, act, share.
- ✿ Whoever moderates has to be strong enough to cut people off if they dominate the conversation or drag on too long. Moderators should also be mindful of the tempo of the conversation, where it might veer off and be comfortable enough to go off track if it's powerful. They need to be able to call on people who are mostly silent and ask for their voice in a 'safe' way and get everyone engaged.
- ✿ Serve interesting food. Serve food that won't put the group to sleep i.e. low in carbs, high in protein and vegetables.
- ✿ Have lots of water at each table and drinks available.
- ✿ Always have nametags available. Ask the participants to customize them.
- ✿ Have placecards at each meal and rotate them so people can sit with new people each time and get to know them. If there are team leaders, make sure they rotate as well and get to know other team members.
- ✿ Do something fun after dinner. This is not the time to do more work.
- ✿ Create a virtual network where people can continue the conversation, share contact information and resources after the event is over.
- ✿ Take pictures and ask permission before sharing them.
- ✿ Get feedback after the event is over so you know, in the attendees opinions, how successful it was.
- ✿ Do periodic check-ins to see where everyone is at with regards to moving forward on action items, work and team dynamics and any other intentions that were set for the meeting in the first place.
- ✿ Learn from the 'Advance' you held before so the subsequent ones are even better and people are eager to attend. Remember, attitude is contagious so set the stage for something positively dynamic.