

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME: *In-House Retreats*

If home is where the heart is... your conference room, reception space or break area could be just the backdrop your company needs to arrest workplace arrhythmia and unclog sluggish performance arteries. Certainly within the last year, office suites have become surprisingly good venues for corporate retreats.

Traditionally, recharging their spirits beyond the confines of the workplace has been a treat for most employees—especially when the boss pays. Regrettably, though, many companies are dropping getaways from their itineraries. Budget tightening is relegating off-site retreats to “unaffordable luxury” status. Stymied by the costs of having such gatherings at hotels and conference centers, executives are abandoning these proven investments altogether. All because they haven’t managed to stretch past convention to see alternative possibilities.

A growing number of organizations of various sizes, however, are finding that budget cuts don’t have to rule out workforce development, professional growth or team relaxation activities. Through inventive, on-premises arrangements, they’re showing that particularly lean coffers don’t have to preclude getting away from office demands and distractions. As unconventional as “retreating at home” might sound, increasingly, businesses are embracing this approach and getting desired results. For the most part, in the spirit of creating true respite from the concerns of everyday operations, these sessions don’t depart very much from the basic structure of standard business getaways. But for many small businesses, an office “takeover” can involve the type of engineering that seldom impacts larger companies. Repurposing space and covering customer needs alone can call for a good bit of ingenuity. Naturally, factors such as personnel size, departmental configurations, and facilities layout affect retreat logistics. That’s why the most successful on-sites generally involve employees in the planning process.

Before setting an agenda and saving a date, get your people involved. Having early buy-in can help minimize snags, especially if your company has never held a retreat. As with just about any staff undertaking, ground-floor participation often fosters a sense of ownership. Employees who invest in laying the foundation of motivational, training, or strategy sessions are apt to value them more. Allowing them to play a role in putting the event together signals appreciation, which, in turn, encourages advocacy. It also ensures that selected activities take your corporate culture into account.

In “Employers Cling to Off-Site Retreats” (*Canadian HR Reporter* - 3//23/09), Sarah Dobson relates how several companies view retreats as indispensable tools. Toronto-based I Love Rewards CEO Razor Suleman says he would never eliminate his group’s retreat. “We get tremendous value...For us, it is the only way to drive clarity and alignment for our company, hold employees accountable and, most importantly, reward and recognize those individuals who drove our company forward.” Another staunch getaway advocate, Allison Bain (VP of HR and planning for Toronto International Film Festival Group), says, “If there’s no budget to go out of town, there will still be some kind of retreat this year.” Because there’s consistent virtual gold in taking time out for motivational, informational, and recreational sessions, these businesses represent thousands that, in recessionary times, are doing whatever it takes to hold on to one of the best means of strengthening team relationships and outcomes.

No matter the company aim, the format or the event locale, typically, these gatherings have a two-fold goal: generating non-stressful co-worker dialogue and heightening organizational productivity. Even if in addition to building staff rapport, your focus is on a tough business dilemma or goal, be sure your folks have some FUN. Both the friendly competition found in games and the creative processes of art can be immensely beneficial. Team play taps many of the skills naturally used at work, such as communication, decision-making, interdependence and compromise. In “Company Retreats Soar Toward Offbeat” (*McClatchy - Tribune Business News* - 11/18/07), *Retreats That Work* author Sheila Campbell says, “It’s interesting to see what roles people play and who becomes dominant.” Some of those roles in the workplace transfer into the (creative retreat activity).”

She says the best exercises will engender teamwork, even when that’s not the primary goal.

Using a light approach in an informal atmosphere is a great way to “magically” transform your workplace into a temporary retreat venue—if you’ve taken care to insulate the process from interruptions and preparation oversights. Bain says, “It’s very difficult to be strategic when you’re sitting in an internal meeting room and your Blackberry’s going and you know people are waiting for you to come out for break.” So, be sure to redirect physical customer traffic away from the retreat area as much as possible, and send office and mobile calls to voicemail or hire an answering service for the day. For a visual retreat, post or position images and items that reflect your event theme, vision or goals. Also, be sure to appropriately stagger employee sessions if simultaneous whole-staff attendance is impractical. Put everyone at ease about participating openly. Present information in short, energetic segments. And don’t forget to collect employee feedback when the session concludes. A well-crafted retreat can prove there *is* no place like home.

MARTA Business Opportunities

The procurement and contract opportunities noted below can be found on the Internet at www.itsmarta.com. Because dates for noted events are subject to change, you should contact MARTA's Contracts & Procurement and Materials Division at (404) 848-5131 for verification.

NAME OF BID/PROPOSAL	CONTRACT NUMBER	BID/PROPOSAL OPENING/DEADLINE DATE (Eastern Standard Time)
Group Health and Wellness Insurance Coverages	RFP P17141	December 2, 2009 at 2:00 PM
Train Control & SCADA Systems Upgrade	RFP P15120	December 14, 2009 at 4:00 PM

Prospective vendors are urged to visit MARTA’s web site for weekly updates.

Announcements

WEDA WORKSHOPS

The Women’s Economic Development Agency (WEDA) offers various workshops to small business owners:

- December 3, 2009, 6-7 pm - WBC/Microloan Orientation - The Metropolitan, 675 Metropolitan Parkway SW, Suite 2026, Atlanta, GA 30310. Workshop - SBA guaranteed Community Express Microloans up to \$50,000.
- PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED FOR ATTENDANCE!

For registration information, contact WEDA at (678) 904-2201 or <http://www.weda-atlanta.org/registration.htm>.

DEKALB SMALL BUSINESS ‘BOOT CAMP 2009’

- December 11, 2009 from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm
- Location: Porter Sanford III Performing Arts & Community Center located at 3181 Rainbow Drive, Decatur, GA 30034

Contact the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce at (404) 378-8000 for more information and registration.

U. S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DISASTER LOANS - GEORGIA #11886 & #11887 (Disaster #GA-00027)

For the Counties of Bartow, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Heard, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, Stephens and Walker; and for Economic Injury Only the contiguous counties of Banks, Barrow, Butts, Clayton, Dade, Dawson, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Franklin, Gordon, Habersham, Hall, Haralson, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Meriwether, Morgan, Pickens, Polk, Spalding, Troup, Walton and Whitfield in the State of Georgia; contiguous counties of Cherokee, Cleburne, and DeKalb:

Filing Deadline for applications for Economic Injury: June 24, 2010

For More Information, contact SBA at 1-800-659-2955 or www.sba.gov.

MARTA Information

All public events (i.e., bid openings and conferences) are held at the MARTA Headquarters Building, 2424 Piedmont Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30324, unless otherwise indicated.

Most solicitations may be downloaded free of charge and are available via the web at www.itsmarta.com. Solicitations with drawings may be ordered for the above noted contracts via telephone by contacting MARTA's Documentation Control Branch at (404) 848-5580 or other sources as indicated.

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