

10 Ways to Spark Creativity at Leadership Retreats



September 27, 2006

By Rosemary Rein

Originally published October 2006, Successful Meetings

So It's time for your "End of Year Business Planning Session!" In three days, you will lock the best minds of your organization into a conference facility, in which you envision them developing an absolutely killer 2007-2008 strategy. Bonus: Your team is back at the office on Monday—basking in the afterglow of renewed drive, vision, and a sense of real teamwork.

Too good to be true? Maybe, unless this year you get a little adventurous to stimulate creative thinking. Here are 10 ideas for sparking fire and creative thought in corporate leadership retreats while staying within your budget.

1. Take Them Outdoors.

Not only does playing in the outdoors produce more creative and playful children—it works especially well with adults. Get your team out of the "bored room" and see the effect a change in physical environment has on mental output.

2. Stimulate All of Their Senses.

Activities such as wine-tasting events, artistic interpretations, and dance break people out of their normal thought processes and open the door for breakthroughs. One exercise I organized for a financial institution had the senior management produce a corporate music video to convey the company's strategy to its rank and file. The video stunned the front-line employees as the normally conservative executive team "got down" to convey the corporate theme for the year.

3. Let Them Have Recess.

Interspersed with brainstorming sessions, throw in physical activity breaks that demand and inspire teamwork and produce the critical fun factor. River rafting, road rallies, scavenger hunts, and survival simulations are just a few of the activities that can accomplish this goal.

4. You're Fired!

Well, not really, but do take a lesson from The Donald—give your team retreat goals and throw in a little bit of competition.

5. Themes Build Teams.

Don't forget to merchandise and brand your retreat as you would a product. From this one retreat your company could achieve that breakthrough, new-product marketing strategy, and team synchronicity critical to your success.

6. Show Them the Castle.

When Walt Disney was building Disneyland, he instructed the construction team to build the castle first so the team could share in the vision of the project, even amidst the muck and chaos of construction. Likewise, be sure to kick off your retreat by sharing your mission and vision.

7. Follow the Hollywood Model for creating anticipation.

Are managers looking forward to this retreat after seeing your exciting trailer or dreading the very thought? Forget

the easily ignored memo; build excitement for the retreat with inspired pre-event publicity.

8. Hire a Facilitator.

Calculate the salary of every staff member going to the retreat in addition to hotel/travel costs. Why jeopardize that investment by trying to handle the facilitation in-house?

9. Add Some Heart-racing Excitement.

We tend to learn the most when outside of our comfort zone and when the senses are stimulated. Provide an experience for your team that will enable them to return home and say, "You won't believe what I did!" Of course you need to keep it safe and free from litigation, which is why I refer you back to point eight—hire a professional.

10. The TISP Factor.

Finally, make each retreat participant and member of your team feel Trusted, Important, Special, and Pleased. I once heard a certain hospitality diva say, "When you're hosting a party, make sure everyone at the party feels like they were the most important guest." Apply that rule to your retreat and you're on your way to building a winning and loyal work team that not only sees the castle, but creates and achieves the dream.

*Rosemary Rein, Ph.D., is the author of *Go Wild: Survival Skills for Business and Life*, and the founder of *Costa Rica Learning Adventures and Retreats Costa Rica*. Dr. Rein hosts *Leadership Safaris in Costa Rica* and locations throughout the United States, Canada, and South America. To contact her, visit www.costaricatraining.com*