



The Dos and Don'ts of RETREATS

WHEN SHOULD YOU PLAN AN OFF-SITE RETREAT?

by Mary Abbajay

The offsite retreat. Some people love them. Some people hate them. And it's easy to see why. If done well, retreats can be a powerful way to help organizations bring about positive change. If done poorly, retreats can be a waste of time and can actually make things worse. Holding an effective retreat is hard work,

but organizations can get a leg up if they follow some basic rules.

MORE THAN JUST A MEETING

A retreat is an offsite gathering of a group of similarly engaged people – co-workers, team members, managers, board members – with the purpose of digging deeply into issues. The gathering is often held offsite so

that the group can focus and not be distracted by the goings on in an office or by their day-to-day life. Retreats are an opportunity to bring people together to have conversations that they don't normally have.

WHEN RETREATS CAN HELP

There are lots of reasons organizations hold retreats. **Please see RETREAT page 8**

2014 Retreat Planning Guide

10 Easy Steps for Retreat Planning

by Maddie Quick

It is interesting how daunting the word "retreat" can seem with the goal of most retreats is having time away and a space to relax. Many people shy away from planning a retreat for their group due to the seemingly daunting task of setting up all of the details and planning out the activities. Listed below are 10 easy steps to planning out a fun, meaningful and relaxing retreat:

1. Set your audience. Knowing who the retreat is geared to is key. Are you planning a women's retreat? Or is it a youth winter weekend? Setting your audience first helps you plan out the rest of the retreat details like travel, programs and date.

2. Pick a date. It's important to know your "black-out" dates and potential opportunities early on. Popular events and holidays (such as football games or Valentine's Day) may prohibit many guests from attending.

3. Book your retreat. Once you have your date and audience set, it is time to book your retreat or event. It is best to



plan about six months in advance to ensure you get the first pick of dates for your retreat or event. When booking, be sure to ask any questions you may have about your retreat center and if possible, schedule a time to tour the facilities before the retreat or event date.

4. Set your budget. Now for the details, this is the time to create and finalize your budget for the event. Consider allocating funds for activities, speaker, travel, insurance, etc. You may even want to set up an optional payment plan for students.

5. Set your travel. Traveling in groups saves gas and reduces the chance of guests getting lost while also allowing

for group bonding and community building starting even before you reach your destination!

6. Create your programming. Your program can be as involved or simple as you choose. Some retreats have a goal of rest, relaxation and time away. Some events bring in bands, speakers and have planned programming. Your audience and your goals will direct your program and help dictate the schedule.

7. Choose your activities. Activities can draw guests in to sign up for your event and should be carefully considered as you plan. It is also important to ask of any age or physical limitations for activities offered. Some activities may have an additional cost or may only be offered at a special time of year.

8. Promote your event. In order for your guests to plan for the retreat, it is best to let them know about the dates and cost requirements as soon as possible. Flyers, announcements and word of mouth are great ways to get your event promoted at group meetings and services.

9. Finalize details. As your event approaches, it is important to keep track of sign-ups and keep them within the contracted minimum/maximum. If you anticipate your numbers being higher than anticipated, contact your retreat coordinator to inquire if there is any additional bed space available.

10. Evaluate and plan for next year. After the event, be sure to give your group an evaluation to aid in planning future events.

To ensure you get the best dates for your next retreat, talk with your Retreat Coordinator before departing.

Maddie Quick is a Guest Services Specialist at Sky Ranch

RETREAT

continued from page 1

Sometimes they are held to solve a problem, sometimes to explore a new strategy, sometimes to evaluate, sometimes to train; it depends on the objective and the company's need. Leaders should seriously consider using a retreat when they want the support, input and creativity of their organizational members or partners. A well-designed and well-facilitated retreat can be very effective in:

- Helping change a strategic direction
 - Dealing with sources of conflict and confusion.
 - Generating creative solutions for entrenched problems.
 - Getting people on the same page and pulling in the same direction.
 - Improving working relationships and increase trust.
 - Creating a common framework and point of reference.
 - Fostering a collective vision
 - Generating honest and enlightening conversations.
 - Helping people feel heard in issues that are important to them.
- That said, here are seven excellent reasons for holding an offsite retreat:
1. Explore serious organizational concerns or obstacles. Retreats can be a great avenue to explore causes and potential solutions for thorny organizational issues.
 2. Retreats are a great opportunity to tap into the collective wisdom and creativity of a group.
 3. Tackle tough decisions. No matter how strong the leader, tough decisions will require the support of members. Involving members in the decision-making can result in large-scale support.
 4. Create a collective vision of success for the organization, department, team or group. Day-to-day organizational life doesn't hold much time for big-picture thinking between members and groups. Often, tensions arise as priorities have different goals and priorities. Retreats are a great way to align different parts of an organization with a common vision.
 5. Explore and foster change. Whether you need a change in culture or a change in processes, retreats are an effective way to explore and promote new ways of doing things. This can be especially important for leaders who are considering change. Getting input and involvement early in the process will greatly increase the odds of success.
 6. To improve organizational relationships and align members' behaviors, attitudes and perceptions. Organizations are complex social structures. Sometimes relationships, behaviors and attitudes go awry. A well-designed retreat can go a long way to explore and improve relationships, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions.
 7. Evaluate or correct your course. Sometimes the most effective thing an organization can do is to simply take a

break and a 1000-foot view of how things are working. We call this the temperature check. What's working well? What could be improved? Providing people with an opportunity to play a role in deciding what needs to change (or not) is



an excellent way to build support and commitment for organizational goals and priorities.

WHEN RETREATS WON'T HELP

There are, of course, lots of bad reasons for holding a retreat. Even though well intentioned, your reason may not be sound. Here are seven bad reasons for holding a retreat:

1. Tradition. Many people think that annual retreats are a good idea just because they've always done one. They think just the act of bringing people together is a good idea. But having a retreat without a serious purpose is a bad idea. A retreat is not a party or a picnic. People don't generally appreciate having their time wasted. Pointless retreats will breed cynicism faster than you can imagine.
2. Making an individual problem a group problem. Oftentimes leaders have a few non-team players and they decide a retreat is the best way to deal with these issues. Resist that urge. While an offsite can be a great way to surface and negotiate differences, the issues raised in a retreat should be germane and actionable to everyone in the room, not just a select few.
3. Talking at participants instead of with them. Retreats are not a one-way conversation. Retreats are not the appropriate venue for lengthy presentations or agenda pushing. While it is important to keep people well informed, day-long presentations do not constitute a retreat. People associate retreats with participation and change.
4. Retreat as reward. Many organizational leaders want to use a retreats as a way to reward hard work. This is a mistake. People rarely see retreats as rewards. Because they are likely to have even more work as the result of a day (or two) out of the office. If you want to reward employees give them a bonus or a day off.
5. Improving morale. A retreat in and of itself is not going to improve morale. While using a retreat to explore morale issues, do not confuse the diagnosis with the treatment. In fact, holding a retreat

Please see RETREAT page 10

Local and regional facilities provide wide variety of options for every retreat need

FOREST PARK IS A HIDDEN LOCAL GEM

Forest Park is located on 40 acres of old growth forest on the edge of Topeka, at 3158 SE 10th St., and is a mere 5 minutes from downtown. Yet wildlife such as deer, foxes and various small animals are a common sight, as well as geese and a variety of other birds and butterflies.



Despite the secluded and peaceful setting, the location is just off I70 and very fast and easy to get to. This rustic setting is also very inexpensive and is available year-round.

Other features are hiking trails, a cross-shaped tabernacle and a large dining hall with commercial kitchen for use by groups that want to provide their own meals.

WHAT IS SKY RANCH CAVE SPRINGS?

Sky Ranch Cave Springs is located in the breathtaking surroundings of Northeastern Oklahoma, in the four-state area. This 1,480 acre, non-denominational facility holds all the adventure of camping, as well as all the comforts of home. Sky Ranch understands that purposeful and intentional planning is vital to providing an experience that is peaceful, meaningful and beneficial to all guests. With years of retreat experience

to draw from, the staff at Sky Ranch Cave Springs recognizes that a successful retreat begins the moment a group leader contacts one of our staff members. With unparalleled attention to every detail, the heart of Sky Ranch is to provide excellent service, outstanding facilities, and unique opportunities for group members and leaders to connect, grow, and benefit from their time together.

Sky Ranch has the capacity to host groups of various sizes, from small family reunions to larger corporate or church retreats. A couple of different lodging options provide modern, comfortable sleeping accommodations for up to 400 guests. A variety of meeting spaces provides seating and gathering opportunities, complete with stages, a full AV inventory, and indoor/outdoor options. A brand-new outdoor amphitheater provides a beautiful backdrop for an intimate time of worship for youth or church retreat groups or a fun twist on movie night!



While lodging and meeting spaces are crucial to retreat success, Sky Ranch knows that feeding group members well is equally important to an enjoyable event! A flexible menu plan and a fully stocked salad bar are just a few of the

perks offered by the dining facility.

Open year round, Sky Ranch Cave Springs offers an excellent variety of activities – from energetic and challenging to more low impact options – providing entertainment, fun, and relaxation for all types of groups. Horses, paintball, swimming, volleyball, basketball, disc golf, skeet shooting and a 2,300-foot tandem zipline are just some of the incredible activities included in a Sky Ranch retreat.

The foundation of all Sky Ranch camps is to bring kids, parents and groups together and closer to God. Sky Ranch Cave Springs is committed to providing an environment where relationships are nurtured and strengthened – a place where guests and leaders can spend time investing in the group, rather than worrying with the details of the retreat. With the facilities, recreational options and amenities available, Sky Ranch Cave Springs is the perfect location for youth, ladies', men's, and family groups.

Contact one of the friendly retreat coordinators today to find out more about how they can best serve your group, family or church with a life transforming retreat!

YMCA: MORE THAN A SONG!

Hear the acronym "YMCA" and two images probably come to mind. Aside from the song at your last wedding reception, you might be thinking of your local gym, with swimming lessons, personal trainers, and child care. But did you know that your local YMCA offers a superb retreat facility as well? YMCAs Camp Hammond, located at

6320 SE Stubbs Road, is a hidden gem that is not well known.

With 175 acres, a 15-acre stocked lake, four cabins (each sleeping up to 12), a dining lodge with a full kitchen and seating for up to 100, plus various recreational activities such as paddleboats, swimming, fishing, canoeing, hiking and camping, there are endless opportunities for unique and fully customized experiences.

It's a perfect setting for family events, including weddings, reunions and birthdays, as well as an affordable get-away for a more casual corporate function. But the beautiful grounds and outstanding opportunities for outdoor fun are only part of the gem hiding in this rural wonder. It's the Y's mission that really sets this facility apart from all other resorts: To put Christian principles into

practice through programs that build healthy spirits, minds and bodies for all. "In many cases, our retreats and camps are the only vacation a family may ever enjoy, or the only time a child with particular challenges will ever meet another child just like them. It's a blessing to be a part of an organization that touches so many lives facing difficult and diverse circumstances," a staff member said.

For more information, call 785-354-8591.

RELAX AND FEEL THE SPIRIT

Lake Doniphan Conference & Retreat Center is situated on 300 wooded, rolling acres surrounding scenic Lake Doniphan, just outside of Excelsior Springs, MO. Primarily hosting retreats

Please see FACILITIES page 10

RETREAT

FACILITIES

can actually worsen morale if action isn't taken from ideas or concerns raised in the retreat.

6. The covert agenda. This means not putting the real choice on the table. People view retreats as an opportunity to provide real input on real change. Leaders will sometimes use a retreat as a way to "get buy-in" on an issue in which they have already decided. But it is dangerous to involve participants in a retreat on an issue that is already decided. Do not use a retreat to push a covert agenda or give people a false sense of participation.

7. No intention (or ability) to follow through or act on participants' suggestions. When you ask people for their input, you raise expectations that it will be implemented. Do not disappoint them.

SUCCESSFUL RETREAT PLANNING

Now that you know why (and why not) to hold a retreat and what you can expect to get out of it, you have to take the time to design and execute one. A good retreat can improve communication, energize and motivate, improve engagement and or improve skill sets. A bad retreat can make matters worse. Good retreats require weeks, if not months, of solid planning in order to be effective.

Following the suggestions in this Retreat Planning Guide can help you find success, whatever your organization and whatever the size.

Mary Abbajay is a partner in the Careerston Group, a professional consulting company that specializes in leveraging generational diversity to support organizational success. She can be reached at mary@careerstongroup.com

for Christian church groups, it also welcomes corporate entities looking for more affordable off-site business conferences or retreats.

"I've had guests exclaim over the amount of work they can accomplish in



planning sessions away from normal office distractions," says Brenda O'Dell, Lake Doniphan's recently retired Business and Reservations Manager. "They also appreciate the peaceful setting for its calming effect and the chance to stop and breathe deeply, letting go of the normal stress factors in their lives. There is something healing and restoring about the woods and the lake that infiltrates even the busiest of people, if given a chance. Too many of us forget this, unless we deliberately schedule time apart such as a personal or group retreat."

Other groups visiting Lake Doniphan include people of other faiths. "We have had Jewish, Buddhist, Sufi and Kria Yoga groups," states O'Dell. "Our mission is to provide a place of refuge and reconciliation for people from all walks of life and all faith traditions. We want to enable all our guests to find renewal and inner peace of mind and spirit, as they deepen personal relationships with their Creator and others in their lives. We don't limit this opportunity to just some, but welcome all who are seeking." She confirms that no proselytizing between groups is allowed, however.

O'Dell explains that a group can

reserve the entire conference center if they wish, but because of the layout of the Lake Doniphan grounds, groups do not need to interact, other than to smile if they walk past each other. There are three lodges so groups can be housed in separate buildings. "It is wonderful to see the respect with which groups treat each other, regardless of their distinctly different beliefs. They have always been respectful and honored each other's times for worship, or prayer walks around the lake, or even for a special canoe race." "I think it is because for so many of our guests Lake Doniphan has become sacred ground."

MORE THAN JUST FOR CHURCH CAMPS

The Tall Oaks Conference Center is a year round camp/retreat center owned by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Greater Kansas City located on 340 acres of mostly riparian forest 30 miles west of downtown Kansas City. Over 300 groups use Tall Oaks each year ranging from mostly youth groups in the summer to adult usage during the majority of the rest of the year. We host sixteen Disciples camps during the summer. Other groups who make Tall Oaks home for a short period are:

Seven special needs camps during the summer include: MDA (Muscular Dystrophy), ADA (Diabetes), 2 autism/Asperger camps, sickle cell anemia youth, foster kids and kids with grief issues.

Craft Groups: Many adult groups for getting, scrapbooking, photography,



and creative painting workshops have found a home at Tall Oaks.

Educational Groups: Many public school and college groups use Tall Oaks. Tall Oaks boasts two of the best educational and recreational programs in the area. One is the OAKS Program. It is an experiential program challenge course which uses three different levels of activities to teach teamwork, bonding, problem solving and leadership.

The first level is ground games which are activities that groups do out on a lawn or meeting room space. The second level has over 20 low ropes course elements that are done on low apparatus and do not take special safety equipment. Then the high ropes course has 8 elements that are up in the trees and use harness, belaying ropes, helmets and concludes with a zip line ride.

The Tall Oaks Equestrian program is an educational experience with horses. These activities range from pony rides for the youngest riders, to arena training events of several levels, to trail rides on our beautiful woodland trails.

Tall Oaks has many outdoor areas for communing with nature and God and it is considered "Holy Ground" for many who come here whether using the site for a religious retreat or other type of event.

Tall Oaks has an excellent food service that can meet the needs of about any type of group request as well as special

menu needs. Holiday banquets are our specialty in November through March.

SCENIC VALLEY INN

"Scenic Valley Inn, in Manhattan Kansas, is the perfect retreat site for everyone," says Diana Nickel. "We have hosted church retreats, ladies and men's retreats, family reunions, girlfriends' retreats, etc. We have several private retreat out places for quiet times and group spaces for larger meetings."

Each suite at Scenic Valley has a king



bed, private in-suite breakfast and comes with a 3-course breakfast each morning of your stay. Lunch and dinner for all day retreats can be catered in to the Event Center/Bar.

