

Summertime Retreats

By Jay D. Rohman

Summertime is here, chasing away the winter blues and the cold weather. Daydreaming of tanning by the pool or barbecuing in the backyard often override the present duties and less enjoyable aspects of work. Statistics show that 4 out of 5 employees daydream excessively during the summer months. What?! You say! Daydreaming on company time. I need to put a stop to that!

There is a way that your company can take advantage of this costly habit and turn it into a productive advantage. Many organizations are finding that doing a summer retreat that combines recreation with education often pays long term dividends. It bonds employees as well as providing a positive outlet for built up frustration and stress. Providing some learning opportunities to benefit your employee and company is icing on the cake. This is also an excellent idea for board retreats.

Smaller retreats for individual departments or specific groups of people often work best. Of course it all depends on the size of your company. If you want your employee to feel special and really benefit from interaction with fellow co-workers, then it is best to keep the numbers around 50 attendees. In larger groups individuals tend to become a number and can get lost in the crowd. The goal here is to provide an arena for interaction between your employees in the company on a level that is manageable and is not so intimidating. People who get to know each other and like each other tend to be more productive. If your organization is rather large, mingling different departments together for a retreat provides an opportunity for people who don't usually work together to get to know each other.

The most common place to hold your retreat is in a hotel. Depending on your budget, this can either be local or out of town. But being away from the office is essential. The hotel should have several characteristics in order to provide the maximum benefit for your employees. A swimming pool is a must. Outside would be even better. Remember that the whole point is to get the individual outside of the walls of office confinement and into the fresh air where they can clear their mind. An outdoor area for grilling is also ideal. There is nothing like the alluring aroma of food being prepared over charcoal to help relieve stress and worry that is a part of daily life. This provides an excellent opportunity for co-workers to socialize around an enjoyable atmosphere.

Another idea is to use the facilities of a golf course. You can use a local hotel for an overnight stay if you wish and use the golf course for recreation. There are several golf courses in the area that have full conference facilities. One company retreat brought in 140 of their people to golf, fed them breakfast and lunch, had a business meeting and auction, then an awards ceremony and dinner in the evening. Local golf courses have a full slate of options for you to take advantage of.

The locations of most golf courses are also very enticing. They tend to be away from the web of activity and distractions that you wish to keep your people from. Even if you don't play golf, just being in the middle of a large area surrounded by well manicured turf and a quiet environment goes a long way to give you some serenity. Some sites have indoor and outdoor fireplaces. Imagine gathering a group of employees around the fireplace at night after a few rounds of golf and talking about what you can envision the company

being in the next several years. The setting is perfect for placing the vision within the minds of those who can help make it happen.

Many companies hold the retreat on a Saturday, beginning in the morning and concluding in the early evening. This way there is no added expense of having rooms for an overnight stay. A couple of suites may be reserved for changing clothes for swimming or for the kids to take a nap. Skillful negotiation when reserving your meeting rooms can make these inexpensive perks. Other companies do a Friday night Saturday morning and afternoon venue. It all depends upon what you want to accomplish during this time. Don't forget that there should be more rest and relaxation time than work stuff. This is a time for refreshing.

Saying that, I want to point out that some sort of training or personal development opportunity should exist. This may be the place that you would like to introduce a new product or service that is going to come out. More detailed information in regards to product knowledge or service specifics can be forthcoming. A customized workshop to help them do a better job is a very popular activity. Areas of interest can include such things as Becoming Customer Focused, How to Give and Receive Feedback With Skill, or Preventing Workplace Procrastination. Personal development offerings are also very important that can help lead to a happier lifestyle which in turn means more productivity at work. Workshops like Mastering the Art of Time Management, Learning to Control Stress, or Reaching Success Through Self-Mastery provide the employee with the skills needed to help take control of their lives.

Another great way to emphasize to your employees that you care is to make it a family affair. You can conduct whatever business you have in the morning and early afternoon, then bring in their family members for the rest of the day. Spouses and kids are more accepting of the need to work overtime if they are familiar with the other company employees and their families. Plus they understand the extra perks they receive by having their spouse and parent being committed to getting the job done. No business is conducted during this family time. It's all recreation from this time on.

If there are going to be a number of children, hiring someone to supervise them would be a wise move. This allows the parents to be free from wondering where the kids are and always having to go find them. Scheduling structured activities for the children will help keep things under control and safe. There is nothing more distracting than having kids horse playing through a hotel, forcing the facility management to step in and start restricting their movement. Take the initiative and insure that this does not happen. Activities for the kids can include but are not limited to swimming, games, or a movie on the hotel grounds. This keeps them preoccupied and out of trouble.

An additional nice touch would be door prizes or a drawing. A lot of companies like to give away items with company logo. But you are not restricted to this practice. Check with your vendors to see if they would like to contribute items or services to be given away at the retreat. Another great source are businesses that may be located near your office. This would be a great way for them to become known by your employees and have a chance to pick up new customers. It becomes a win-win situation for both parties by giving them an inexpensive marketing opportunity and providing you with free door prizes. To top it off, you could have a grand prize drawing for a family to spend the night at the hotel. They can use it for either that weekend or some other night. Allowing flexibility grants them the ability to really enjoy what your company has done for them.

So as the summer continues to advance, make plans to make it a profitable and memorable time. Your most important asset is your employee. Consider them to be your in-house customer. Take care of them and they will take care of you.

Jay Rohman, the 'Ambassador of Encouragement, is a professional speaker, trainer, and freelance writer. For further information, go to his website at www.encouraging101.org.