

PLANNING THE SUCCESSFUL RETREAT

Details, details, details. As the rate of change accelerates, the workload just seems to pile higher and higher. That makes it tough to see the forest for the trees. Sometimes, you just have to bring the operation to a screeching halt, retreat, relax and regroup. Create the right environment so your people can see the big picture, consider how it's changing and envision your course into tomorrow. Bring your best minds together under the best conditions and you'll discover new resources, clearer goals and new avenues to your future. Integrate these key concepts, and your next retreat or planning session will deliver fresh options and renewed enthusiasm.

PREPARE THE PLAYERS

Insight, ideas, innovation -- these are the critical elements upon which a good retreat is built. The minds you bring to the table determine the quality of your outcome. If you have good people, they're already in touch with issues you need to address. In planning your next session, prepare your people to explore the issues, now. Encourage them to consider the trends and influences affecting your future. Have them note what currently works and what needs fixing. Have them explore alternative goals and methods. Challenge them to think about the big picture before the getaway happens. Prime them to gather relevant information each day so that when they gather later, the pump will be primed and all you have to do is turn it on.

THE IDEAL SITE

One way in which a successful retreat helps you reach the core issue is by creating a psychological and physical distance from daily work. Take the time to select a site that provides comfort and beauty. The less it looks like the office, the better. Locate a setting where your people can relax and let their minds stretch out -- a place where they feel like they're away from everything. Create a relaxing atmosphere, surrounded by comfort and

beauty and you'll open the doorway of the imagination. When that happens, fresh insights and new solutions become readily available to your group process.

GOOD FOOD

While all of this sounds idyllic, you'll be working hard uncovering critical issues and laying the groundwork for improved performance. Comfort offsets the hard work. Balance great thinking with great food. Don't skimp on the meals or the snacks. The better the food, the better the attitude. If it's just a one day session, consider a potluck where everyone brings their best dish. If you've got the budget, have a local caterer prepare something special that will win raves from your planning team. One way to the mind's best ideas is through the stomach. Feed it well. It will return the favor.

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

For better or worse, every organization has certain politics, a natural balance of power between the players. Successful retreats suspend *business as usual* rules and substitute an open space in which everyone freely reviews current conditions, explores alternatives and imagines improved scenarios. Assure that your sessions are highly participatory, that every voice is heard and that every possibility is considered. When retreats succeed in creating this open space, a measure of it always returns to the workplace. This can increase the flow of information and ideas at work and enhance your team's ability to attain the goals of the organization.

Strategic planning, predicting the future, evaluating your process, and consensus building can be hard work. Two days is often a minimum in which to achieve a meaningful executive plan. See that your sessions allow for free time to let creative minds rest. When rational processes relax, powerful things can happen within the intuition and imagination that yield striking results. Schedule your retreats so that they have a balance of working sessions and empty space

to let your best minds and brightest ideas mix. This combination of active and passive sessions delivers valuable insights and practical solutions.

GET THE RIGHT FACILITATOR

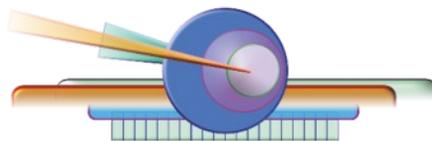
Good facilitators don't come with answers. Instead, they bring potent questions that evoke your best ideas. True facilitators are curious by nature and want to learn as much from you as you do from them. They value diverse opinions, alternate viewpoints, complementary and opposing positions. They thrive on discovering new ideas. Facilitation is about discovery -- discovering how things are, how they could be and what it takes to change them.

The right facilitator brings a powerful process which helps you to deliver the product you seek. He initiates dialog and helps to build relationships in the sessions. He listens without interruption, works persuasively to negotiate the drama of your working sessions, and helps the group weave the details into the big picture. A good facilitator is a good coach, encouraging your best performance and brightest ideas in a practical and realistic manner.

A professional facilitator assumes full responsibility for the developmental journey you will make. He champions the success of your session. He manages time and space to help expand your perspectives and open new horizons for your organization. Find a facilitator without an axe to grind, or one side to support against another -- someone who can maintain objectivity on behalf of the group. Select a facilitator who recognizes the expertise and wisdom within your people and encourages its expression through full and open participation. Make sure it's someone who can read the underlying issues, someone who'll work to release blocks in your planning process. See that he brings you experience, professionalism, integrity and authenticity to echo the same qualities in your team. When the session's finished, your facilitator should provide you with powerful documentation and provide ongoing assistance in implementing the plan you have created.

Prep your people. Construct a creative atmosphere that removes them from their daily experience, feed them well and ally yourself with someone experienced in the creative process. If you're planning a retreat, focus or search group, attention to these issues will return solid products from your upcoming session. Take the time to plan early and carefully and the results will be everything you're looking for.

Farrell North has designed, produced and consulted creative projects for individuals, corporations, non-profit and public sector organizations. Using a powerful, intuitive method, he can help your group explore the critical issues facing your team. Target realistic goals and design the work to achieve them while learning a process that can unleash the creative assets of your organization. Assure the success of your next retreat or strategic planning session by calling 303-419-4937.



Farrell North

Strategic Counsel, Keynote and Facilitation For
Adapting To Critical Change