

TWELVE STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL RETREAT

By Diane Brown

1. **GET BUY-IN.** Find a good date and then have a real commitment from each person that they will indeed attend.
2. **GIVE YOURSELF SOME PLANNING TIME.** Three weeks is minimum; six is better. Create an opportunity to get input from everyone--brainstorm at a meeting, send out a survey, call the committee chairs.
3. **SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY.** Appoint a chair to **coordinate** the planning of the retreat, not to **do** it all. Ask others to help with **specific** tasks by a **specific** date.
4. **CHOOSE A SKILLED FACILITATOR.** This lets all members concentrate and truly participate. Find one that matches your group's style.
5. **FIND A COMFY SPACE.** If at all possible, get away from the office!
6. **DEVELOP CLEAR EXPECTATIONS.** What product do we want to have in hand at the end? Do we set Goals and Objectives? Have a conflict resolved? Learn a new skill? Recharge our batteries?
7. **BUILD IN SOCIAL TIME.** All work and no play makes for low attendance. Try teambuilding exercises, creativity games, a walk around the grounds, or just a long lunch break.
8. **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** Prepare reports, bring handouts, arrange for audio-visual equipment, gather all the information and tools you'll need for clear decision-making.
9. **STICK TO YOUR AGENDA** (or consciously choose to change it.) Find a facilitator with enough humor and strength to keep things moving on down the track.
10. **GET SPECIFIC.** How will you carry your ideas into reality? Work out an action plan for each planned goal and objective: **Who** will be responsible? **When** will it get done? **What** will it cost?
11. **DO A REALITY CHECK.** Add it all up near the end--is this a realistic workload for your group to accomplish this year? Design for success--not stress.
12. **CONGRATULATE YOURSELVES!** Take a few minutes at the end of the day to appreciate the retreat planners and all participants for their creativity, contributions, and time.

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