

10 Steps to Arranging (and Enjoying) Your Own Private Business Retreat

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Believe it or not, I'm more refreshed after a simple weekend at a private business retreat by myself, than I am after a 10-day vacation in Florida. Retreats clear and relax my mind, help me recharge, and focus my attention. The change of pace also allows me to, as Rolf Potts describes perfectly in *Vagabonding*, "rediscover the entire concept of time...at home, you're conditioned to get things done, to favor goals and efficiency over moment-by-moment distinction. On the road, you learn to improvise your days, take a second look at everything you see, and not obsess over your schedule."

Private business retreats help break ruts and reignite passion. When conducting the 360° organizational and leadership survey in preparation for the upcoming Midwest Women Business Owners' Conference, 49.1% of women business owners throughout the Midwest rated passion as one of the top three characteristics required for success in business. So, how do you renew your passion? You step back from the day-to-day distractions of business, and you stoke it.

While facilitated retreats are worth every penny, you can – and should – also hold private retreats on your own. Every client I've ever recommended this to has returned raving about the experience. Below I've shared my top 10 tips for arranging a successful private business retreat:

1. Select the date a month or so in advance, carve it out in your calendar, mark yourself as "out of office", and make it a priority to follow through.

2. Identify the best location for you. Personally, I prefer cities that are walkable and allow me to work in cute coffee shops, people watch, and do a little shopping. While I can work well in a coffee shop or hotel room, some people can't...so try several situations to find one that works best for you. I've "retreated" everywhere from large cities like Chicago to mid-size cities like Kansas City; and from rustic, remote retreat venues to suburban conference-center hotels. There are several locations that already work for me, but since I like to explore, Nashville, Paducah, and Indianapolis are next on the list. These cities are all reasonably priced and within fairly close driving distance of St. Louis.

3. Plan to spend sensibly. Here's a brief breakdown of expenses that a private business retreat usually incurs--which of course will vary by where you stay, what you eat, and how far you travel:

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- a. Two nights' hotel
- b. Gasoline
- c. Meals
- d. Incidentals

4. Don't skimp on accommodations. There's no need to stay at Four Seasons, but dumpy hotels are depressing. I generally spend just under \$200 for a hotel room and leave very satisfied. Much less than that and I'm just not inspired to work or relax in the room.

5. DON'T bring a lot of work with you. Retreats are about exploring business issues that you ordinarily wouldn't...not working from your to-do list. I cross a few pressing items off my list when first getting settled--just the things that are quick, easy, and otherwise distracting. Then I dig into the elements that'll really restore my energy and move my business forward.

6. Prepare. In the weeks leading up to your private business retreat, make note of what you want to accomplish, as described in the point above. I log these focus areas in the notes section of the retreat's calendar appointment.

7. Enjoy the drive. I usually talk on the phone while driving (hands-free, of course), and listen to podcasts or music on Pandora. The drive relaxes my brain and gets me in the groove for the retreat days ahead. Make a call list and use the time to knock out a few important calls.

8. Pack strategically. I almost always bring oversized Post-It easel pads, markers, my laptop, and some business reading. In addition, the following are essentials: water, healthy snacks, comfy clothes, walking shoes, chargers, and headphones. You'll be amazed by how much you

can accomplish with nice (instrumental) music playing in your ears while sitting in a coffee shop or restaurant. Even a bathing suit—I recently missed the opportunity to hang out pool side on a hot, sunny day at a pool overlooking the Kansas City Plaza. It would've been a great way to get out of the box and access the creative problem solving side of my brain.

9. Go with the flow once you arrive. Sometimes it takes several hours to get in "the zone". Don't sweat it. Don't force it. Trust that in due time you'll be in the flow, working on massively productive and important areas of your business... areas that require a fresh perspective, which the travel and new surroundings help provide.

10. Spend at least two nights away. The first day is driving and unwinding, followed by a good night's sleep. The second day should be full of relaxation, focus and "work". As mentioned above, I might not really get in the flow until mid-morning – sometimes even mid-afternoon –but the hours following are going to be tremendously productive. The third day I'm heading back home, after a leisurely morning with breakfast, some exercise, and a little work preparing another call list for the drive ahead.

Taking time out of your hectic day-to-day life to slow down and get out of your element will help you to refocus, reprioritize, and reignite the passion for your business. Give it a try!

To learn more about the author, Erin Joy, and the upcoming Midwest Women Business Owners' Conference, go to www.midwestwboconference.com. Interested in purchasing tickets? Visit www.mwboc.eventbrite.com.