

# The Ultimate Guide for Retreat Planners:

## Managing A Retreat



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### INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING A RETREAT

Participating in a well planned and executed retreat can be a valuable, memorable and even life-changing experience. Conversely, being responsible for large retreat execution can be demanding, stressful and intimidating for event leadership. It doesn't have to be. If you're planning a retreat and have responsibility for its success, this guide is for you. We've gathered the insight, tips and tools needed to put on the perfect retreat without feeling overwhelmed. Applying what you learn here will help ensure that you enjoy the retreat as much as your participants!

Managing A Retreat is a guide that takes readers from the time that their retreat is completely planned, to checking in and kicking off the retreat, through managing the entire retreat, and even how to appropriately follow up after the retreat.

If you enjoy this guide, check out our Ultimate Guide for Retreat Planners: Planning A Retreat.



## Chapter 1: Before the Retreat

In order to be prepared to manage a retreat, you should have completed each stage of planning a retreat. Planning includes: creating a full retreat plan and getting it approved, selecting a venue and theme, coordinating the retreat reservations and events/activities, promoting the retreat, managing registration and all other paperwork and communication, and responsibility for all materials, activities, games, etc. (which should already be prepared and ready to go).



### LAST MINUTE PREPARATIONS

Although you likely double checked everything while you were planning, it isn't a bad idea to go back the last few days before a retreat to ensure that all responsibilities have been taken care of by not only you but the participants, and venue.

Be certain that the:

- Room or lodging space is confirmed, payed for & will be ready at arrival
- Participants are informed on what to bring & what they'll be doing
- Catering, entertainment, equipment deliveries, etc. are confirmed
- All paperwork & payments completed, submitted and accepted
- Transportation coordinated and confirmed
- Materials for activities, events, games, education, etc. are packed & ready

# RETREAT CHECK-IN

Check-in seems simple, but it can easily become a hassle. Since check-in occurs first, this means that it has the power to influence participant's attitudes coming in to the retreat. An unorganized check in could make participants feel flustered or anxious, so we've included some tips to help solidify a smooth and easy check-in.

### Tips for Making Sure Your Retreat Starts Smoothly:

#### TIP #1

Encourage participants to **fill out necessary paperwork ahead of time**, so that on the day of the retreat there isn't a ton of time wasted checking in.

#### TIP #2

Have an option in place where **participants can sign-up ahead of time or online**. This way you can walk in knowing who is coming rather than waiting to get a final headcount and names.

#### TIP #3

**Show up earlier than the participants** so that you can be prepared for their arrival. This way, when the first person shows up, you are ready to start signing them in without wait time.

#### TIP #4

Help **organize where participants go when they show up**. Have stations or someone helping participants so there isn't time wasted standing around wondering what to do or where to go next. Already have team or room placements finalized so that time isn't spent working it out in front of participants.

#### TIP #5

**Hand out schedules and information** and allow for check-in time on the schedule. This way, participants receiving the schedule at or before check in will know how quickly the plans move through check-in to the retreat kick-off. Handing out supplemental information will help alleviate extra questions and concerns.

# INFORM PARTICIPANTS

At the beginning of the retreat participants will be getting the largest amount of information they will likely receive the entire retreat. As the person managing the retreat, it is your responsibility to make sure that all participants are informed, prepared, and have the information necessary to ensure smooth sailing and even the safety of participants.

### Examples of Supplemental Information:

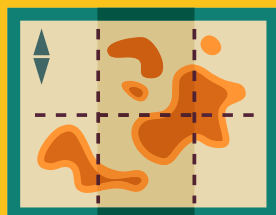
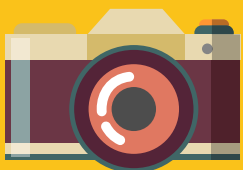
- A Schedule of Events (including check in, down-time, meals, etc.)
- A Site Location Map, Parking Maps, Driving Directions to Location
- Food Options, Times, Menu's, Special Food Requirements
- Participant Materials: Name Tag, Copy of Paperwork & Releases
- Educational Materials: Handouts, Worksheets, Game Materials
- Activity Information: What They'll Need, Attire, What to Expect, Etc.





## Chapter 2: During the Retreat

Once you've made it through check-in, you are finally ready to kick-off your retreat. This is where the true managing comes in. Everything up to this point has been planning, preparing, double-checking, and getting people rounded up for the big event. Congratulations its finally "Go Time"!





# KICK-OFF THE RETREAT

There are several ways that you can start off your retreat. Consider the goals for the retreat and the amount of time participants will have to reach this goal. If you've got only a few hours of time to reach your goal, it may be best to start off with a big bang.

If you have a weekend long retreat planned, you may consider allowing the participants to slowly settle in and get comfortable. Each retreat will require a slightly different kick-off based on the participants, retreat goals and planned activities. From ice breaker activities to creative ventures, we've compiled a list of creative ways to kick off a retreat.

## Ways to Kick Off a Retreat:

### **SOCIAL HOUR**

Start your retreat with a group discussion in which each person is provided with the opportunity to give information about themselves. Go around the room, one-by-one, allowing each participant to say something for a few minutes. This way, everyone will learn something interesting about their fellow retreat participants.

### **ICE BREAKER ACTIVITY**

Jot down a list of icebreaker questions that will likely be relative/true for at least one participant (ex. "Who has two siblings?"). Put a signature line beneath each question. Make copies of the list and pass one out to each participant. Make sure there is at least one question for each participant. Let your group circulate and ask these questions until they pinpoint someone who the question is true for. Have them sign their name underneath the question and the first person with a completely signed off list "wins."

### **GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER ACTIVITY**

Have each participant write down one lie and two "truths". Challenge the rest of the group to identify which statement is true and which is false. Let each person expand on their "truth" once it is revealed.

### Ways to Kick Off a Retreat (Continued):

#### **TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITY**

Pass out pen and paper to each of the participants. Split up into smaller groups. Allow two or three group members to think up an image for the other participant(s) to draw. Those who have a mental picture of the image, are allowed to describe it without stating what it is. Those with pen and paper attempt to draw the image based on its verbal description.

#### **EDUCATIONAL TIME**

Kick off your retreat with a PowerPoint presentation that outlines the objectives of this shared experience. It will set the stage for all activities to follow. As a result,, the group will feel as though they have some direction as well as something to strive for throughout the remainder of the retreat experience.

#### **PHYSICAL COMPETITION**

Everyone loves a good old fashioned tug-of-war. Bring a long and thick rope to your retreat. Divide your participants into two teams with equal numbers of people and engage in a tug-of-war. It will lighten the mood, foster teamwork and bring out the inner-child in each participant.

#### **CREATIVE ARTS ACTIVITY**

Get your group's creative juices flowing by writing a collaborative story. Begin with a blank sheet of paper and a pen. Ask for a volunteer to write the first sentence of the story. Then, have him pass the pen and paper to his right so the next person can add his own unique sentence or two to the story. Keep on passing the pen and paper until your team has composed a brief story. Read the story aloud.

#### **BOARD & SKILL GAMES**

Though video games have surpassed board games in most homes, board games still serve as an excellent opportunity to bond with one another. Engage in a game of Monopoly, Clue or Jenga. If your group is especially large you can divide it up into smaller groups with multiple board games.

#### **MIND GAMES**

Have ten optical illusions printed out. Provide a note card for each illusion to the participants (10 note cards per participant). Hold up the optical illusion and allow participants to look at it for one minute and write what they see. After each illusion have team members hold up their notecard. This will allow the participants to see who sees things in a similar or different way.

# DURING THE RETREAT

If you are planning a retreat, part of your responsibility is to manage the event so that the planned outcomes are effective and goals are reached. Don't shy away from getting deeply engaged, as the event itself should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, even for the planner.

### **KEY IN ON BEHIND THE SCENES WORK**

The participants will certainly appreciate your public announcements and direction, but they will be even more grateful for the behind the scenes work you do that makes the retreat a seamless experience for all. So, go ahead...sweat the small stuff!

### **KEEPING TO THE SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

It is important to plan each retreat activity in advance. Create a detailed schedule and stick to it once things get going. Don't let activities extend far beyond their scheduled end time unless you feel it is beneficial to the group.

Be sure to incorporate some "transition" time in between retreat activities just in case the group needs some extra time, a breather or the opportunity to socialize in an unstructured environment.

### **TRANSITIONING AND DOWN TIME**

Segueing from one event to another can be a challenge. Let your group know how much time has been reserved for each activity. This way, they will have a general timeline in mind when participating in the day's events.

Transitions and down time can get crazy, so maintain full control during these portions of the agenda or risk slipping into chaos! If you find your group's attention waning, be ready to step in and spice things up by leading a group meeting and/or asking if the team would like to transition to the next scheduled activity.

### Team Retreat Theme Example:

#### **COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT**

Letting your retreat progress from one scheduled event to another without regular communication can be a mistake. Take some time to regroup in between activities to reflect on the activity's value, lessons learned and so on.

Encourage everyone to speak up, share their thoughts and listen to the perspectives of other participants. This consistent communication fosters cooperation as well as objectivity.

#### **HELPFUL STAFF & RESOURCES**

Recruiting a team of volunteers to assist with the planning and management of your retreat will prove quite helpful. They'll help with activity transitions, answering questions, distributing materials and communicating safety information.

#### **MANAGING PARTICIPANT CONCERNS & QUESTIONS**

Each participant's questions and concerns should be addressed in a timely manner during the retreat. Furthermore, participants should probably know exactly who to ask when they have specific questions.

#### **REACHING GOALS**

Establishing goals is one of the most important factors when planning a retreat. When managing a retreat, reaching these goals is key. Write down what you'd like the retreat to do in terms of lessons learned, memories made and anything else your group should benefit from... then be relentless until it happens!

Don't forget to **provide participants with a recap** of the retreat in the hours, days and/or weeks that follow. Reinforcing the benefits of this shared experience will raise awareness as to just how important the retreat was for each participant and the entire group.



## Chapter 3: After the Retreat

Once your retreat wraps up, you might be a bit concerned that your participants will lose sight of the lessons learned during the retreat. Though most retreat participants emerge with newfound knowledge, wisdom and possibly even a different outlook, some will inevitably lose sight of the retreat's lessons as time progresses.

Be proactive by following the advice set forth below and you will rest easy knowing your retreat efforts were not in vain!



# REINFORCE MEMORIES/ LEARNING

There are several ways to reinforce the lessons and memories to be taken away from a retreat.

## Ways to Reinforce Lessons:

### **CONDUCT A SURVEY**

Use a post retreat survey, as an opportunity to stimulate the minds of retreat participants. Thought provoking questions should help jog the participants' memories regarding what happened during the retreat, the "moral of the story", what they came away with and why it was such an important event. This also provides valuable insight to the retreat leaders and planners.

### **A WRAP-UP GROUP DISCUSSION**

Invite retreat participants to a post retreat group discussion. Depending on the location of participants, the discussion may occur in person or over a conference/web call. Consider providing a special drawing/prize for people that participate in the discussion!

Let each participant share what was gained from the retreat. Listening to others share what impacted them the most, will inspire participants to reflect and appreciate the experience even more.

# POST RETREAT FOLLOW-UP

After lessons are reinforced, this is when you can start thinking about post-retreat outreach. Here are some best practice ideas for staying on touch.

## Options for Reaching Out:

### EMAILS

Create an email thanking participants, give a quick recap, discuss goals and how they were reached, provide any feedback from the retreat itself, encourage participants to be thinking about their take home materials, etc.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Encourage participants to “like” the retreat profile on social media. Some events create a private group on social media where participants can comment, ask questions, post photos, chat, and hopefully continue relationships after the retreat. Create a post every few weeks to keep the retreat on their minds.

### BLOG POSTS

The use of a blog can be a great way to stay engaged with participants. Create original posts and invite others to guest blog, then share the posts on social media to increase engagement.

### RECAP VIDEO

A recap video is a fantastic way to capture the essence and energy of the retreat for use after the retreat. Be sure to post any videos on the event’s webpage and social media. Use email and blogs to share the video and circulate it among the public, recent and future participants.



# REPURPOSE RETREAT CONTENT

Although it seems like your job is done (and it almost is!) you can take things one step further and repurpose the content you created for the retreat. Here are a few ways to repurpose retreat content:

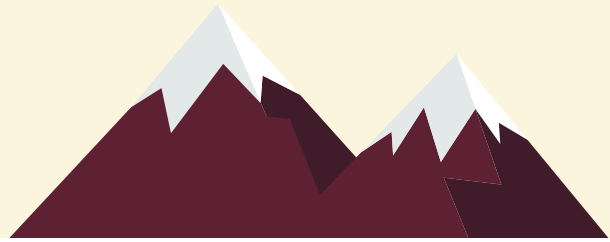
## Repurpose Retreat Content:

### **CREATE TESTIMONIAL VIDEOS**

Use participant testimonials to create a video about the retreat. Release the testimonials all at once to create a big bang, or release them slowly to keep your target audience engaged for longer periods of time.

### **CREATE BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM**

Repurposing retreat content into Bible Study curriculum is an outstanding way to get the most out of the valuable content you created for the retreat.



## SUMMARY

Congratulations! If you've read through this guide you should be prepared to manage your upcoming retreat with confidence. There is a lot of information in this eBook, so just in case you missed anything... we created this handy checklist. Feel free to print it out and use it when you plan your next retreat!

# Managing Guide Checklist

- Last Minute Retreat Prep
  - Lodging/Rooms
  - Activities
  - Food/Entertainment
  - Paperwork
  - Materials (Handouts, Takeaways, Schedules, Maps)
- Set Up Retreat Check-In
- Get all Participants Signed-Up Efficiently
- Hand out Schedules and Pertinent Information
- Kick-Off the Retreat
  - Ice Breaker/Games/Get to Know Each Other
- Key in on the "Behind the Scenes" Work
- Keep to the Event Schedule!
- Plan for Proper Transition Times
- Maintain Constant Communication Throughout
- Ensure Staff is in Their Positions & Informed
- Handle Participant Concerns or Questions Quickly
- Make Sure Goals are Reached During Planned Activity
- Provide A Retreat Recap
- Reinforce the Memories and Key Learnings
- Consider an in-person Group Discussion or Conference Call
- Perform Post-Retreat Reach Out
- Follow-Up Events or Emails
- Repurpose Retreat Content to Maximize Reach and ROI

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Refreshing Mountain is a year-round retreat and adventure center providing family friendly fun and refreshment for over 30 years in Lancaster County, PA. With multiple lodging types, hot buffet meals, numerous meeting rooms and a variety of on-site activities, Refreshing Mountain is the perfect destination for groups retreats of 20-450 persons. They also offer day event options that are great for corporate team building, school field trips and family outings. The retreat center is built on 80 acres of beautiful Pennsylvania woodland and is conveniently located just 25 minutes west of Philadelphia.

To learn more about Refreshing Mountain and their retreats, visit: <https://refreshingmountain.com/retreats/>



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