



Rana Florida
CEO, The Creative Class Group

Your Start-Up Life: Do Team Building Retreats Ever Work?

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Thursdays at the Huffington Post, Rana Florida, CEO of [The Creative Class Group](#), will answer readers' questions about how they can optimize their lives. She will also feature conversations with successful entrepreneurs and thought leaders about how they manage their businesses, relationships, careers, and more. Send your questions about work, life, or relationships to rana@creativeclass.com.

Dear Rana:

My team works very hard, sometimes up to 70 hours a week. Most of them are young and energetic and like to have a lot of fun. I want to reward them with an all-expense-paid team building trip somewhere great. I'm not sure which experience would be best: A dude ranch in Texas? A group hike in California? A biking trip in Portland? Are there any work retreat packages or companies you can recommend that provide both the experience and the take-aways for team building?

Kate
Tampa, Florida



Photo credit: Jim Simmons

Dear Kate:

You sound like everyone's nightmare boss. If your team is working 70 hours a week, the last thing they want is to spend yet another weekend away from their families. A work-related trip might be fun if you're unattached, but the married folks and parents among your employees won't see it the same way. You must be single and have no life. In this case, you're blurring the line between needy behavior and true leadership -- does your team want a "team-building" trip, or do you?

Let me be clear: no one wants to go to a dude ranch with their boss. I couldn't think of anything more tortuous. I've been on bowling outings, road trips through Virginia and team trips to Orlando, and I can tell you that all of them were a waste of time when it came to building team morale. You can't make associates like each other and work better together by forcing them on a trip.

But the question remains: Whether it is setting up an obstacle course or silly trust exercises where you let yourself fall backwards and hope your team will catch you, do team building exercises really work? Of course the companies that specialize in them say that they can. According to [Meeting Facilitators International](#), a successful retreat contains seven key ingredients:

1. The right people
2. The right agenda
3. The right process
4. The right prework
5. Action planning
6. Follow-up
7. A comprehensive meeting report

If you don't choose the right people to be involved, they warn, the whole thing can backfire. The last thing you want to do is invest all that time and money and have it turn into a disaster.

[Adventure Associates](#) is another company that specializes in such retreats, while [Backroads](#) is a great one-stop shop for organizing full service bike trips almost anywhere in the world.

But I've been in the corporate world for a long time, and experience is in this case valuable. Not only do I think that these retreats are useless -- I can vouch for the fact that forcing me to engage in nonsensical games and exercises with coworkers -- not my friends -- in what would have (and should have!) been my free time only made me despise my workplace more.

Creative and knowledge workers value intrinsic rewards, freedom, and flexibility. They won't find any of those on a group retreat. Try asking your team what they'd prefer as a reward and put it up to a vote. We'd all be interested in hearing back from you.