

Executive committee retreats

Author: Gaby Belz, organisation consultant, supervisor, www.belz-gmbh.ch

Executive committee retreats are an investment into ensuring that committee members continue to enjoy their work, into continuously improving the quality of committee work over the long term and thus into finding new committee members. In short: An absolute must!

A retreat can help participants to:

- Get some distance from everyday activities;
- Reflect on things;
- Celebrate as well as find ways to improve;
- Interact with others without the pressure of everyday life;
- Learn from common experiences;
- Sharpen visions for the future;
- Reenergise in preparation for next steps;
- Get to know one another better.

Effects

- Retreats allow participants to reflect on daily business from more of a distance.
- Holding one retreat per year will carve out some time to pay some care and attention to those who work for the organisation free of charge. It will help stop them from burning out and becoming fatigued. It will also promote personal contact among the committee members and thus a sense of "us". And it will provide a space for resolving any latent conflicts.
- It will also send a signal to employees that the committee is taking its tasks seriously and also subjecting itself to regular quality control.

Framework

Aspect	Minimum	Optimal	Effect
Time range	1 entire day plus informal part	2 days	Deliberate departure from the usual meeting schedule, providing a bit of distance from everyday life and the chance to recuperate in a calm atmosphere.
Place	Outside of the usual meeting rooms	Away (conference hall, hut/cabin, holiday home)	Important for getting some distance.
Opportunity for personal interaction and getting to know each other (better)	Social part outside of working hours (drinks, evening meal, cultural event)	Due to an overnight stay away. The event may include a cultural programme or personalised structure.	Joint experiences strengthen the feeling of "us" and thus trust in the group's resilience.
Minimal equipment	Enough space with tables and a flip chart wall and pens Places to eat or take breaks nearby.	Enough space with tables and a flip chart wall and pens Places to eat or take breaks nearby.	Good working conditions give people the feeling of being taken seriously. Difficult topics can be addressed in a pleasant atmosphere. Visualisation means are helpful.

Run by	A competent member of the executive committee.	If there are difficult topics to address, external moderation can be very useful.	Good management helps participants to concentrate on the content, doesn't exclude anyone and creates a space for addressing more challenging topics.
Utilising the results	Retreats are suitable in particular for setting objectives for the next period. No everyday business but a list of open issues for executive committee meetings.	Retreats are suitable in particular for setting objectives for the next period. No everyday business but a list of open issues for executive committee meetings.	Retreats tend to look more behind the scenes than at the superficial happenings.
Planning	<p>Earlier decision-making on site (reservation!) and internal or external moderation (budget, look for an expert).</p> <p>Programme proposal is presented, adjusted and signed off on during the last meeting before the retreat. The other option is preparing for the retreat in consultation with an external expert as a coach.</p>	<p>Earlier decision-making on site (reservation!) and internal or external moderation (budget, look for an expert).</p> <p>Programme proposal is presented, adjusted and signed off on during the last meeting before the retreat. The other option is preparing for the retreat in consultation with an external expert as a coach.</p>	Careful planning will ensure that the retreat provides some respite from the everyday and a calm environment.

Objectives of the retreat

- By holding thorough discussions on the committee's duties as a management body over the past year, the achievement of objectives set and the quality of collaboration, a common view will be established, highlighting where there are differences and forming a basis for structuring future collaboration.
- The analysis of work to date is an opportunity to celebrate achievements and reflect on anything still outstanding. Respectful criticism and self-criticism provide an opportunity for participants to learn, thus increasing the quality of work and collaboration and strengthening trust in the group's resilience.

Possible schedule and elements

Getting started					
Title	Aims	Tasks	Methodology	Material	Approx. time required
Check-in	The group members arrive at the retreat mindfully.	Participants answer the question "What do I need to do to make sure I leave the retreat satisfied?"	Individual work / answers collected / answers sorted	Pinboard cards Wall or pinboard, stickers or nails	Individual work: 10 mins Collecting and sorting answers: up to 30 mins
Work agreement	Setting the rules for the day.	Wishes are discussed.	Votes are collected or written down on a flip chart. Arrangements are made The answers collected will remain visible for the duration of the retreat	Pinboard cards Flip chart or stickers and nails	20 mins
Getting to know one another	If there are members of the committee who have recently joined, it may make sense to hold a short introduction round to create more familiarity and a feeling of "us".	Members go around and say something (subjectively) important about themselves:	Round of talks	Nothing	2 mins per person

Looking back at the year and objectives					
Title	Aims	Tasks	Methodology	Material	Approx. time required
Possible preparations	Putting the time available to optimal use, with participants having prepared their contributions in advance.	Everyone has already read the annual objectives from the previous year and the committee minutes or other relevant documents before the retreat.			
Structured assessment and new objectives	Gaining an idea of the quality of committee work performed over the last year, identifying the reasons for this and drawing conclusions for the future	Assessing individual tasks and objectives pertaining to committee work over the past year. Setting new objectives for the future.	Reflection sheet	Reflection sheets for everyone More extensive sheets for compiling all information together Colourful glue dots	Reflection sheet including time to fill it out, collate the responses and hold discussions, approx, 2 hours Discussing individual topics: depends on the number of topics. Objectives including planning: approx. 1 hour.

Self-reflection					
Title	Aims	Tasks	Methodology	Material	Approx. time required
Collaboration	Continuously improving collaboration	Half-days with the request that participants note down their thoughts on the quality of collaboration: Are we listening to each other? Are we staying on topic? Is everyone benefiting? Are there any underlying conflicts or taboos?	Individual work: 10 mins Discussions: as long as everyone wants. If bigger issues are uncovered in the process, these will be included in the agenda.	Nothing	Individual work and discussion: 30 mins, otherwise included in the agenda.
Conclusion					
Evaluation	Bringing the retreat to a clear and considered end, gathering the participants' views.	Feedback on the objectives Feedback on the moderation	Individual work: 5 mins Round of talks	Nothing	Per person: 4 mins
And in between all of this...	Keeping the body moving, planning in breaks.	Frequently getting up, moving around, and getting some air.	Small movement - sequences:		2 mins