

Law Firm Retreats: They Can Be Small. They Can Be Anywhere.

Steve Matthews | June 2014

Though we covered it in our Tips Tuesday roundup post a few days ago, I'd like to call your attention to an exceptional piece by Garry Wise on his upcoming Law Office Backyard Retreat [<http://tips.slaw.ca/2014/practice/the-law-office-backyard-retreat/>].

What struck me as I was reading was the engrained conceptions many of us have about what a retreat is, and where it must be located. Depending on your own personal experience, you might believe that a firm retreat:

- must always be 'a road trip';
- is only applicable for larger firms;
- requires an expensive keynote speaker; or generally,
- is far too expensive an undertaking for anyone but the most profitable operations.

The thing is, all a retreat really *must* deliver at the end of the day is some advancement on the firm's 'vision & direction', and a 'planning component' on how to get there. And while both pieces can certainly be done within an office setting, most firms have found that taking these meetings outside of that environment helps to inspire creativity.

[I also recognize the positive impacts on 'firm culture', but am ignoring those for the moment.]

Having done a few retreats for my own company, and in a similar format to what Garry Wise is planning, I have to say retreats can be very effective tools in smaller organizations: for inspiring the group to think collectively and creatively, for building lists of your next steps, and for expanding on any *pre-planning you've done* (a key success factor, in my view) prior to assembling the masses.

Smaller firms have successful retreats all the time, and on a budget. Do they match the prestige of larger firms? Occasionally, but "prestige" is hardly a necessity to inspire your group of thinkers. Smaller groups are more effective, in fact. Otherwise why would breakout group sessions at larger firm retreats be such a routine event?

I also liked that Garry is bringing his wife in as a facilitator. Regardless of the role, having a few time slots set aside where outside voices can contribute is almost always a productive addition.

There's a lot that can be accomplished at a smaller retreat. Garry's "backyard" might be as good a location as any.

This article was originally published at Slaw.ca.

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