

Following the golden rule paves the way to sales gold

I have occasion to visit a beach town in South Jersey that has a reputation for being elitist.

What it really is, however, is an island full of silly men. And frivolous women.

A true testament to the fortunes of accidental birth. Tanned, prep-school postured, Grey Goose VX swilling, Beemer-encrusted, puerile-smiling, empty Izod-garbed twits romping through the glory of daddy's and mumsy's largesse, or the recipients of much-manufactured luck in the oft-rigged gambling industry known as Wall Street.



Rich Plinke

A whole island of them.

OK, that's an exaggeration, but not by much. At least not regarding the property owners, the new property owners of the too-much-is-never-enough orthodoxy, building monuments to their collective need for voracious vacuous validation, playing in shifting sand on eroding dunes of misguided aspirations.

Very sad.

Because as they chase their demons of not-keeping-up-with-the-Joneses, they are wiping out an entire seaside tradition, our tradition, the heritage of summertime pilgrimages by the hoi polloi as they that go



THE GOLD STANDARD

- Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- Always be honest and sell with integrity.
- Help people.

PHOTO/ROSSSTUDIO

down to the sea in minivans.

We would pack up the old family transporter, à la Clark Griswold, and head to a rented seashore cottage to spend a week or two living on seafood, cheesesteaks, frozen custard and fudge – especially fudge.

Playing miniature golf and pinochle; romping on the beach all day until the last speck of light melted into the ocean's choppy horizon, getting painfully sunburned and being rough and tumbled by the thunderous waves, dragged out to sea by an unforgiving undertow, stung by unseen jellyfish and attacked by seagulls in hot pursuit of our PB&Js.

Good times.

But that's all changing as the Main Liners descend like seven-year locusts, only these pests never leave. They eat their way through the old cottages, leveling

them to the not so terra firma, and in the shadow of thousands of cherished memories, build hollow monstrosities, soulless castles with the feng shui of mau-soleums.

TAKING FLIGHT

So, on a recent trip, when the

garish opulence was getting the better of me, I jumped on my trusty bicycle for a pilgrimage of sublimation.

I navigated the rickety old causeways and the new concrete spans of delusion and ventured out onto the mainland where they drive pickup trucks and eat Hamburger Helper.

Welcome home.

LOST – AND THEN FOUND

As I peddled into Middle America, I serendipitously came across a paved trail, a trail that beckoned me to new adventures of losing my way.

Accordingly, after only a few miles and exploring offshoots and pathways, I ended up at that old familiar place: thoroughly lost.

I hadn't a clue where I was when I found myself in the middle of a large

sports complex.

But not just any sports complex, this was the most remarkable, spacious collection of fields of dreams I had ever seen.

SIMPLE AND SPLENDID

I was blown away by the simple magnificence of the place.

The landscape was full of manicured baseball diamonds of various sizes to accommodate all levels of the grand old game, all with outfield fences complete with local advertisements, aluminum bleachers, covered dugouts, electric scoreboards, snack bars and paved parking lots.

The playing surfaces were beautiful: green, green grass that must have been watered daily and perfectly cut-out base paths, raked and pristine.

There was not one single piece of litter, not even an old cigarette butt.

MONUMENT TO ALTRUISM

I marveled at the time and energy it must have taken the parents, volunteers and municipal workers who put this place together and who maintained it in such a noble manner. All for the enjoyment of kids.

What a marvelous testament to hard work and altruistic industry, juxtaposed to my fellow island denizens, who couldn't build their palaces big enough to ever scratch that itch.

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Scaled, focused small-business retreats pay big dividends

There is nothing quite like a successful company retreat to align a business mission and improve employee morale.

Coming together as a team is good for coalescing an organization around its goals and also good for the bottom line. Among other things, a retreat can foster better cooperation between departments which can, in turn, lead to greater productivity and higher profits.



Cynthia Joyce

Taking an entire firm off-site for a retreat may not be realistic for many small businesses. But by designating a half-day to two full days (or anything in between) to focus internally, small firms can reap some of the same team-building benefits that Fortune 500 companies enjoy on more elaborate retreats.

The focus of an annual company retreat can change from year to year. One purpose of a retreat might be to ask employees for introspection about their own attributes and areas for growth – and to

consider how to best collaborate with co-workers. Another purpose might be to roll out a new initiative or company brand.

In all cases, the overarching goal of team building should be supported.

The key to an effective company retreat is planning, planning and more planning. Of course, phones must be covered and meals must be thought out. Clients and customers cannot be forgotten while the retreat takes place.

THIRD-PARTY ORGANIZER

Working with a third-party facilitator can significantly enhance the outcome of a retreat and allow leadership to focus on participation, not logistics.

The consultant can be one who already works with your business or someone new who knows your industry and/or business practices. The facilitator can help company leadership plan a retreat theme, choose guest speakers, consider a location (if off-site) and develop an agenda.

In addition to carefully constructed team-building exercises that address company operations, retreats should include at least one fun activity that has nothing to do with the business.



PHOTO/PRESSMASTER

A retreat should include at least one fun activity that has nothing to do with the business, such as a painting class or cooking class.

When employees take a cooking class together, collaborate to get out of an "escape room" or create masterpieces in a painting class, they build rapport and bond as a group.

FOLLOW-UP IS CRUCIAL

Some of the most important "to do's" for a retreat occur after the event.

The content of business-related discussions should be captured in notes or minutes that can be transcribed and posted. Surveying attendees for feedback also is advisable.

Leadership should review the notes and survey recommendations and update the organization's goals accordingly.

Finally, leadership can develop a plan

for adopting the recommendations, where practical, and follow up to ensure they are communicated.

GREAT THINGS CAN HAPPEN

When a retreat becomes part of a business' annual life cycle – where leadership and staff anticipate and follow through after the event – great things can happen.

A small business can make an annual retreat part of its culture to develop and implement company strategy and to focus leadership and engage employees.

A retreat can create a more collaborative and efficient work environment, which can lead to higher profits, more commitment from staff and even greater employee retention.

All in all, it's a great return on the investment in planning, meals, activities and time away from daily production.

Cynthia Joyce is chief operating officer of JoycePayne Partners of Bethlehem and Richmond, Va., overseeing financial, budgeting, human resources and office operations. She can be reached at cjoyce@joycepaynepartners.com.

Michael Joyce, founder and president of JoycePayne Partners, is responsible for overall investment strategy, management of investment portfolios and financial counseling services. He can be reached at mjoyce@joycepaynepartners.com.