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Give a gift to yourself: Take a retreat

Carla Kimbrough

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, ckimbrough2@unl.edu

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**CARLA
KIMBROUGH-
ROBINSON**

Carla Kimbrough-Robinson has spent nearly 20 years in newsrooms and is a trained life coach with Inspire Higher International, LLC, a Denver-based personal development company. She can be reached at coaching@inspirehigher.net.

Plan Your Retreat

1. Determine what you want to accomplish during a retreat. Decide what will benefit you most and then find that retreat.
2. Establish a budget for your retreat. Be sure to examine all costs.
3. Add at least one extra day on the back end of your retreat. Use that time to catch your breath.
4. Create an action plan that builds on your retreat experience.

Give a gift to yourself: Take a retreat

I visit Starbucks maybe once a month, if that. I usually use a gift card, because shelling out \$3 to \$5 on a cup of specialty coffee isn't my cup of tea. If anything, Starbucks is a meeting place for me. Brainstorming and networking over a café mocha is something I've been known to do.

For some, Starbucks is an experience. For others, it's the only place to get a decent cup of high-powered joe. Because I've seen some journalists lay down hundreds of dollars a month at Starbucks, it might be a near addiction.

What caught my eye recently was the 3 1/2-hour closing of U.S. company-operated Starbucks. At first, I wondered what on earth are all those Starbucks lovers going to do? Then, I wanted to quench my thirst for knowledge — what was Starbucks up to now?

Posted on the Web site were two memos — Transformation Agenda Communications — from returning chief executive officer Howard Schultz. I was struck by some of his phrases.

In the Feb. 21 memo: Renewed focus. The return to our core. We have created a blueprint to transform the company. Reignite the emotional attachment. Make foundational changes. Continually analyze and review. Being strategic as well as nimble.

In the Feb. 25 memo: Together in an unprecedented event. To teach, educate and share our love of coffee, and the art of espresso. We will begin to elevate. We are passionate. It's to celebrate who we are.

As I read these memos, I was inspired. I began to think about the possibilities if all corporations closed the shop to renew their focus on their core, even if for just a few hours. Then, I decided it was much more personal than that. What if each individual sought that renewed focus, that return to his or her personal core?

Getting away from it all is a valuable gift to yourself and to those around you. That's the premise I use when planning my annual women's retreat, where I hope women will reignite their emotional attachments to their dreams and goals.

I am sure that many retreat organizers consider questions similar to what I ask myself: Will the women who attend be glad they traveled to Estes Park for the retreat? Will the speakers touch the participants' lives in a meaningful way? Will the women be able to apply their new ideas and knowledge when they leave the mountaintop experience?

In a survey following the retreat, one woman said, "It was a very inspiring and fun-filled but challenging weekend where I was able to meet powerful women from all walks of life." Another said: "You deserve to spend time and exert effort on yourself." A weekend that challenges you — whatever its focus or sponsor — is what you deserve.

Then, I think of speaker Carolyn Strauss, the former Ford model and entrepreneurial and creative force behind her multimillion-dollar apparel collection. She changed the way I and others now refer to nonprofit organizations. She even challenged me on whether to call my conference a retreat, when the time is designed to "advance" the lives of the women who join me, she explained. Carolyn and the other speakers took this opportunity to teach, educate and share. That's certainly a recipe for success for the various retreats.

There are many ways to close down the shop of your life and get away. On coaching calls, I consider those weekly half-hour sessions a way to continually analyze and review and become strategic as well as nimble, to borrow Schultz's words.

I had a tradition of getting away annually on my birthday for a few days. In a hotel room in a city or town away from where I lived, I'd relax, review, pray, journal and contemplate the future. Those annual weekends were my way of renewing my focus, returning to my core and making foundational changes. With the Inspire Higher Women's Retreat, I learned that I, as the organizing host, need to add a retreat after the weekend to give myself what I want the women to receive while there.

The bottom line is that this is the kind of get-away we all need a few times in our lifetimes, if not more often. There are all types of retreats: retreats for women, men, couples, and even young people (we might recognize them as summer camps). There are business retreats and spiritual retreats. The benefits are too numerous to name. Ultimately, the proof is in what happens after the closing bell.

Is Starbucks better after a three-hour shutdown? You'll have to tell me if the baristas are connecting emotionally with their customers over the shared love of coffee and if your cup of coffee is "perfect, every time," the Starbucks promise.

If Starbucks is better, this coffee giant has taught us an important lesson about getting away, renewing our passion and celebrating who we are. ❖