

## **How CEOs Stay On Top Of Their Game**

Susan Hogg, co-founder and managing partner of the Richmond, Va.-based strategic branding and design firm Circle S Studio, recently spent three days at the Kingsmill Resort & Spa, where most guests golf, enjoy spa treatments and fish.

Only she wasn't relaxing--she was working.

Along with 80 other CEOs of small- to mid-size businesses, Hogg was attending an executive retreat sponsored by the Virginia Council of CEOs. With the lush Williamsburg landscape as their backdrop, the attendees traded tips, networked and discussed their growth strategies in small groups.

### **[In Depth: Seven Get-Ahead Executive Retreats](#)**

"The perfect setting with the right people," says Hogg, 49, "is the right combination." She had booked an extra day at the resort with hopes of unwinding, but a client "threw a curveball," so she canceled.

Even without a vacation day, executives often find that retreats are prime opportunities to regroup and recharge. They may loathe leaving the office, but executives attending effective retreats end up feeling that their time is used wisely; what they lose in time, they should gain in contacts or knowledge.

### **Why You Should Go**

"It's extremely important for CEOs to have a peer group they can talk to in an intimate, honest way," says Harvard Business School Professor Bill George. A retreat can be an ideal location for such candid conversations.

That's what happens at the annual meeting of the [Global Business Policy Council](#), where a group of 55 prominent executives, thinkers and policy figures convene to discuss best practices and strategy. Paul Laudicina, who founded the group in 1992 as part of the consulting firm A.T. Kearney, says the key to a frank discussion is limiting the presence of the competition. In fact, membership to the group is invitation-only and current members can nix the invitation of a direct competitor.

Laudicina declines to name specific members of the council but says they belong to a diverse mix of industries, including banking, communications, transportation and retail. When organizing the council members for the three-day retreat, Laudicina says destination is important.

"We select locations that are strategically important," says Laudicina. In the past, they have met in Dubai, Budapest and Kuala Lumpur. This year they will meet in Chicago two weeks before the presidential election to discuss new risks in the American and global economies.

### **Get-Ahead Get Togethers**

Though the Global Business Policy Council retreat is one of the most elite, there are other, more inclusive, gatherings with valuable benefits. The [Aspen Institute](#), an international nonprofit organization that works on leadership issues, holds several executive seminars each year at a resort in Aspen, Colo. This six-day retreat, which requires reading Aristotle, Rousseau, Vaclav Havel and others, focuses more on conceptual issues of leadership.

***What business issue are you most concerned with? Weigh in. Add your thoughts in the Reader Comments section below.***

A retreat for technology executives hosted by [AeA](#), a nonprofit trade association, is quite the opposite. About 75 CEOs and C-Level executives will convene at an Austin, Texas, resort in June to network and discuss topics like how to groom a company for acquisition or manage health care costs.

Clare Freeman, executive director of the AeA Texas Council, says the retreat will combine the vacation setting with the conference.

"[The resort] is a huge draw to get people away from the office, and that's our biggest challenge," she says. "We're not slacking on content, but it really helps."

Companies often cover the cost of retreats and conferences, which can vary in price depending on the location and length. The Aspen Institute charges \$8,000 for their program, which includes tuition, meals and lodging. AeA's retreat costs \$999 for members and \$1,099 for non-members, not including accommodations.

Beyond cost, Professor George, also the author of *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership*, says executives should look for value in a retreat. They should facilitate connections between peers, which can be cultivated afterward with monthly or weekly small group meetings.

"A lot of it has to do with working the 12- to 14-hour days and not being able to get away and clear your head," he says. "If you don't, you'll get caught up in the trappings of the office."