

# Fun in the sun, it isn't

## Winter sales junket is much sought after, and then endured

February is when companies fly you to a beautiful tropical resort and lock you in a windowless room where you can't see the beautiful outdoors. This is called a "sales meeting," and the noble objective is to "motivate and build teams." But it's really an excuse to escape the office while earning airline miles and Marriott points.

Pre-sales meeting, all non-sales personnel claim *deep* ties to the sales force, insisting their presence is vital to the future of sales as we know it. By the time the guest list is complete, the sales force represents 5 percent of attendees and the only employees left behind at the company offices are those who stock cafeteria vending machines.

Months ahead, women scour stores for "business casual" clothes they would never wear in real life, and for swimsuits that reveal less than one cubic inch of exposed flesh. For women, the thought of wearing a swimsuit around co-workers creates such angst that psychiatrists have added a

diagnostic code for "pre-traumatic sales meeting disorder."

Men, meanwhile, wear swag, the free logoed apparel they get at company outings. And, in the unlikely event anyone sees the pool before sunset, men with abdomens resembling a tub of Cool Whip will strut poolside like they just defeated California's governor for "Mr. Universe."

The sales promotion department works hard to keep attendees conscious during presentations. The meeting room temperature is set at a comfortable 35 degrees to keep people alert and mask the effects of decaying flesh. But, with a planned half day of "recreation" in the offing, they cram 27½ hours of material into two days. The audience inwardly screams "once more with expression" as speakers robotically read scripts until everyone but the person cueing slides is sawing logs. This is interspersed with occasional doses of "executive decongestant" — senior management members performing awk-

ward skits designed to make them seem less "stuffy."

"Team building" exercises are very important. These generally involve tests of physical strength such as wrestling, weight lifting, full body contact volleyball, and tackle football, all opportunities for women to demonstrate they are "good sports" as they take a soccer ball to the head or get knocked unconscious. With the competitive nature of sales people, on-site medical assistance is necessary.

Food can make or break a sales meeting. Management surprises you every year with an international buffet, and a "theme night" relevant to the meeting slogan, like "The Future Is Now," where waitresses wearing aluminum foil serve NASA-approved freeze-dried hors d'oeuvres on razor scooters. During meeting breaks, there are always really good snacks. On the first day, most attendees vow they'll consume only fresh fruit and green tea. By the last day, people are scarf-

ing down cookies the size of Frisbees, stampeding the sundae bar, and stuffing pockets with M&Ms to maintain sanity.

Then there is cocktail hour. By day two, it becomes akin to the movie "Groundhog Day," where you talk to the exact same people in the exact same place about the exact same things you talked about at the last cocktail hour. There are, however, land mines to avoid. Every organization has a "close talker" who affixes herself to those not quite quick enough to move. Friends find creative ways to extricate the victim. These rescues are collected like IOUs specific to the "close talker" as in "I owe you two 'Karen Flahertys.'" Senior management is available for no more than two sentences per attendee because they need to mingle. Note: These are generally the same two sentences.

At dinner, all intentions of "networking" are abandoned as everyone makes a beeline for a table of people they already know. If it is a long table, the most senior people sit in the middle, and as with the "two-sentence rule," trespassers will be re-

**Continued on next page**

VIEW FROM THE CUBE

*Continued from preceding page*

moved and shunned. No matter which \$75 entrée is served, guests will be unhappy. If it's meat, they want fish. If it's fish, they want meat. If it's surf & turf, it's either "cold" or the sauce is "unacceptable." Back home the same connoisseurs frequent Wendy's and love it.

Not once in the history of sales meetings has anyone *ever* complained about the alcohol.

The Big Closing Dinner often features "entertainment." In this instance, many people crawl along the floor to get out. Many companies have instituted dinner cruises because, like Alcatraz, it's difficult to escape without a wetsuit and scuba gear. Other times there are Big Sales Awards where the audience offers polite "pinky applause" while inwardly seething that the winner surely sandbagged their numbers. It's always a very special moment.

The next day, with luggage ready for the buses at 5 a.m., everyone returns home with copies of the presentations they slept through, 5 extra pounds, and the contentment that comes with knowing they won't return for another year.

*If you want to write about the view from your cube, send e-mail to [cube@globe.com](mailto:cube@globe.com).*



GLOBE ILLUSTRATION/ANTHONY SCHULTZ