

Introduction to Team Retreat Facilitation

I'm Nami Ishihara, a group process facilitator and founder of HappyTeams. I specialize in offering specially tailored team retreats that engage all members of a team and help them to talk about what matters most—whether it is about improving their work processes, looking at the “big picture” trends, or making a decision about their goals and priorities.

Teams today are under pressure to do more with less, at ever-shorter cycles, in contexts that are constantly shifting. It is imperative for teams to periodically take a step back from their everyday work routines and evaluate how well they are functioning as a team. I can help teams:

- Create a personal connection with each other, and build trust and camaraderie
- Appreciate each other's strengths and contributions
- Surface underlying tensions and conflicts in a safe environment
- Evaluate existing practices and improve work processes
- Look at the “big picture” trends and potential risks
- Make decisions about future goals and priorities

By carefully planning the process and maintaining neutrality, I help teams dig deep into issues which may not be immediately obvious or are difficult to address for those who are internal to the organization. “We haven't had this kind of conversation in years” is a comment I often hear from my clients. As a facilitator, I support groups to come up with their own solutions, which are more likely to “stick” in the long term because everyone has been included in the discussions and people feel ownership over the decisions.

As a result of past retreats I have facilitated, organizations have, for example:

- Cut back on unnecessary activities and re-focused on their priorities
- Revamped their organizational structure from an issue-based to function-based division
- Identified opportunities for cross-functional collaboration and experience sharing
- Overcome underlying conflicts, leading to less stress among the team

Sample Agenda

A half-day team retreat for a group that wants to integrate new members, build camaraderie, and identify areas to improve their work processes:

Time	Activity	Objective
9:00-9:30	Introduction and Impromptu	To integrate new members, and for

	Networking activity	everyone to share their expectations for the retreat
9:30-10:15	Building Towers team-building game and discussion	To generate energy and excitement, and identify preliminary team issues
10:15-10:30	Break	
10:30-11:15	World Café activity: Divide into small groups, groups rotate and answer the question: "What are we doing well as a team? What can we do differently?"	To generate ideas on improving work processes in a non-threatening way that surfaces disagreements as well as alternative solutions
11:15-11:45	Harvesting of ideas from the World Cafe	To identify a group consensus around common themes and solutions
11:45-12:15	Individual reflection and sharing of thoughts. Agree on actions, decide on follow-up.	To give people time to reflect individually on what they will change, and decide on next steps
12:15-12:30	Closing circle	

About me

I am a Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF) with the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and received my accreditation in 2017. I have been facilitating groups, mostly non-profit and international development organizations, since 2014. I am an active member of the IAF and the Mid-Atlantic Facilitators Network (MAFN), of which I am a board member.

Past clients include the Global Fund for Children (Washington, D.C.), Alexandria Country Day School Board of Trustees, Commission for Women, Commission for Children and Youth (both in the City of Alexandria), Association of Public Health Laboratories (Silver Spring, MD), United Nations Population Fund (Vientiane, Lao PDR), Swiss Development Cooperation (Vientiane, Lao PDR) and the German International Cooperation Organization in Lao PDR.

Prior to becoming a facilitator, I taught political science and conducted research on Middle East politics with a specialization in gender politics. My multicultural background informs my facilitation practice, as I am adept at navigating cultural differences and helping others see beyond their cultural assumptions. I spent my childhood in both Japan and the U.S., and in my adult years lived and traveled extensively in the Middle East, the UK, and more recently, in Vientiane, Laos, for six years between 2011-2016.