

Awaydays

A biting article in the Financial Times rejecting the effectiveness of company awaydays has created a lot of controversy. Just how effective are awaydays and conferences for employees?

1 Which of the following have you attended? Compare your answer with a partner. Describe your experience(s).

Awayday Conference Team-building exercise Seminar

2 Skim the two letters and decide which writer agrees with awaydays, and which writer is against them.

(a) Sirs,

I applaud Luke Johnson for his recent article in the Financial Times. At last, someone has been brave enough to say out loud what many of us in the business world have been thinking for a long time – that company awaydays are an utter waste of time and money. Who in their right mind would spend £1,000 on sending someone as a day delegate to such an event? As Mr Johnson points out, most of the information given by the speakers can be found on the internet. I agree that staff attending such events have a nice break, enjoy a good meal and may possibly make useful contacts. But the author is right when he says that many events or conferences are just an excuse to organise a trip abroad at company expense. There has indeed been an increase in the number of specialist organisers of corporate awaydays; they are laughing all the way to the bank. They simply hire a venue, do a bit of marketing, then charge the earth for what is, in the end, a few unremarkable PowerPoint presentations or a sales pitch. And what happens in a recession? Well, all such events are the first to be axed. That shows just how essential they really are!

M. Short, UK

(b) Dear sir,

I have just read Luke Johnson's article 'An inconvenient truth about awaydays'. What nonsense. Most employees work long hours, and one of the great effects of organising an awayday is to encourage 'out-of-the-box' thinking. Mr Johnson has clearly not experienced the creativity generated by managers brainstorming in the relaxed environment of a good hotel, free from the mind-numbing daily routine of the office. Those sent on such awaydays feel valued. What better form of motivation is there? Such events provide the chance to stay at the cutting edge of industry. A team out-performs poorly-functioning individuals: so, money invested on team-building exercises is money well-spent. A weekend seminar can provide a wealth of refreshing ideas from experts in the field. Of course, there are good and bad awaydays. The best conferences enable networking and encourage the type of thinking which can never be achieved back at the office. I'm just about to register for this year's annual conference. I expect the outcome for my firm will be an increase in profits, which (I believe) is what business is all about.

F. Shaw, NYC

3 Read the two letters. Which letter do you agree with most?

4 Find words in the letters from the definitions below.

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| (a) someone who is sent to a meeting or conference | (Letter a) |
| (b) the statements and promises made when persuading someone to buy something | (Letter a) |
| (c) unusual or alternative way of thinking | (Letter b) |
| (d) the most modern and advanced point in the development of something | (Letter b) |
| (e) meeting and talking to people to exchange information and advice about work | (Letter b) |

Definitions from or based on the Macmillan English Dictionary 2nd Edition (Text © Bloomsbury 2007)

5 Work in small groups. You have been asked to organise an awayday for your department, with a budget of €1,000 per employee. Decide on the aim of the event and what it will consist of. Be ready to present and justify your idea(s) to the class.