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Team Spirit

Spas and yoga retreats are now more popular than river rafting and rapelling as bonding destinations for young managers, reports RANJENI A SINGH

Two years ago, sales manager Prateek Chopra's team was a demoralised, stressed-out lot. They were tired of trying to meet unrealistic deadlines and targets. Worse, any credit due to them was hogged by the boss.

Today, however, Prateek's teammates no longer call him "Hitler Chopra" — he is patient and understanding and meeting deadlines is no longer dreaded; there is so much more camaraderie among team members and the boss.

The change happened when the company found something amiss and resolved to do something about it. Young recruits were sent to a retreat to bond, instead of the river rafting, and rapelling, an annual feature. The results were positive: the team returned not just happy but more focused, positive and calm. Their intelligence, emotional and spiritual quotients seemed to have converged and their perspective was now more universal.

Many corporations including Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle, Fiat, Bharat Petroleum, Wipro and Maruti are encouraging employees to participate in corporate training at ashrams and spiritual retreats where they learn to synergise and be at peace. **Isha Foudation's Wholeness Programme,** Art of Living's APEX, Prasanna Trust's Corporate Harmony, Tej Gyan Foundation's Wisdom Training and Brahmakumaris' Management Programme — are some of the packages popular with corporations. They are in fact tailormade to teach mind management, yoga and spiritual psychology. The duration of courses range from one day to a whole week.

Inside-Outside Connect

Gurus maintain that since ashrams are consecrated, they stimulate the release of all physical, mental and emotional blocks "If you live in such spaces, your evolution need not stick to the Darwinian scale. You can simply leapfrog. Fundamental building blocks in the human system can be changed rapidly if you live in a consecrated space. Your physical body and mind would definitely function at their peak, and that is the basis of your success with any activity you choose to do," says Sadhguru of Isha Foundation.

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"Companies have realised that the ambience in spiritual retreats makes a huge impact," says Ramesh Raman, CEO-Team APEX, The Art of Living. Nitin Ahir, senior trainer at Tej Gyan Foundation believes that traditional outbound training programmes like games, trekking and river rafting for team building touch only the surface of an individual's psyche and the effect could wear off soon. Companies have come to realise that the quality of work cannot be separated from the quality of 'self'. As Ahir says, "If you peel an onion, one layer after another, you reach the core. The onion may not taste good in the outer layers but is sweet at the core. True spirituality touches the core of the individual where he experiences 'oneness' with the self and oneness with all; hence the effect is lasting."

Leadership coach and mind trainer Lama Kenden Bhutia says, "If you are at peace with yourself, it reflects in the way you treat people around you."

Blending Old And New

Programmes at spiritual retreats, according to Barbara Heyn, a Cincinnati-based consultant, "bring out the feminine spirit and its traits such as warmth, affection, nurturing and intuition in management and leadership."

At the Brahmakumari Om Shanti Retreat, executives are taught Raj Yoga meditation which "enables one to return to a state of inner peace, personal power and self-worth through re-kindling of the soul's original qualities," says B K Ranjana, programme coordinator. "The underlying philosophy of the programmes is that authentic, inspirational leadership requires a firm foundation of self-knowledge, acquired through managing one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour," she says.

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AOL's APEX programme is a combination of ancient practices and modern management techniques. "You need a balance of both. APEX modules are structured to bring deeper levels of understanding that harmonise body, breath, mind, intellect, memory, ego and the Self. It touches the inner core by using the Sudarshan Kriya — a powerful breathing technique that impacts the body, mind and spirit. The individual gets inspired to explore, is open to change and willing to take responsibility through ownership," says Raman.

Isha Foundation's Wholeness Programme is all about Inner Engineering. The programme features interactive discussions, *asanas, shakthi chalana kriya* — powerful yogic processes, and shoonya meditation or conscious non-doing.

Indus Management Consultants takes corporate groups for outdoor activities like camping and trekking as part of team-bonding. Director Amarjit Singh says, "We help participants look inward and connect to the Self through yoga and meditation. This improves health, relationships and general well-being, so central to being an effective team member."

Humbling Experience

Amrit Ratti, who runs the Galaxy chain of beauty salons in Delhi, takes her staff of 45 to destinations like Ajmer Sharif, Vaishno Devi and the Golden Temple. "Besides helping us to understand different faiths, it's humbling and inspires you to do your best. Perhaps that's Divine grace," she says.

Touching base with the Self also means reinforcing values such as sincerity and integrity. As Ahir says, "True spirituality implants the seed of which sincerity, integrity and loyalty are fruits."

When you are sorted out inside, you can take on external challenges effectively. Whether surfing the rapids or breathing deeply together and learning to look within, the idea is to achieve a harmony that binds and boosts, a harmony that's as essential in life as it is in business.■

ranjeni.singh@timesgroup.com