

**Business meetings don’t have to be boring**

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Top of Form

[**Dan Miner**](https://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/bio/13771/Dan%2BMiner%2B) Reporter

*Buffalo Business First*

Yet another meeting under gloomy fluorescent lights.

Or not.

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Several businesses have popped up in Western New York that offer leaders an opportunity to take their employees out of the office.

It’s a chance to recalibrate the office dynamic, open up new perspectives and gain appreciation of what team members bring to the table.

One of those opportunities takes place in the hills of Ellicottville, where [Dione Kress](https://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/search/results?q=Dione%20Kress) and John Rounds team up to offer activities and events on and around Spruce Lake at Holiday Valley Ski Resort.

Both entrepreneurs started recent businesses in the area, with Kress opening Groove Health & Fitness and Rounds starting Adventure Bound. They’ve had a steady stream of interest from Western New York businesses, which bring teams ready to undergo leadership coaching while they do yoga and paddleboard. Sometimes they do yoga on paddleboards.

Kress said Ellicottville’s idyllic surroundings help mollify stress and anxiety, which in turn gets people to lower their defenses.

“When you take people out of their office and work environment, you put them into something that’s more relaxing but challenging at the same time,” she said. “You and I might work together but mostly we’re concentrating on our computers. Then you go out there standing on a paddleboard and someone falls off. You both start laughing.”

Kress said businesses have come to Holiday Valley for her classes from Buffalo, Olean and Erie, Pennsylvania.

On Hertel Avenue in North Buffalo, [Erica Swiatek](https://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/search/results?q=Erica%20Swiatek) has wedded the concepts of corporate team-building and escape rooms with her new business, 3600 Escape. Groups are taken into a room where they have to utilize different skills to complete a puzzle.

Then they sit down in a classroom where Swiatek and her team apply professional assessments to analyze how the group worked together.

Swiatek said she approaches companies with a pitch about the value of play in adults, where a group of people can learn through a collective exercise.

“Participants come, play and learn about themselves and how to appreciate things that probably bothered them about their teammates prior to the experience,” she said. “When we play we are also more vulnerable, and this openness enhances the learning because people seem to truly want to understand how and why what they do benefits the team.”

Swiatek said the typical workday, full of deadlines and stress, suppresses the kind of creativity that can lead to a better employee. Creativity researchers cite the value of an “excursion,” she said.

“I often ask groups, ‘Where do you get your best ideas?’ People say things like, ‘When I am driving, walking, cooking, in the shower, etc.’ No one ever says at work,” she said.

Deadlines “keep us from having time to incubate so when we walk away our brains are still processing the challenge ... and like magic the ideas seem to pop up later,” she said. “Having time away from our usual setting helps this to naturally occur.”

*Dan Miner covers startups, education, manufacturing and public companies.*

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**Erica Swiatek on how her escape room can help Buffalo businesses**

Mar 8, 2017, 9:14am EST

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Top of Form

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Bottom of Form



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Reporter, *Buffalo Business First*

[Erica Swiatek](http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/search/results?q=Erica%20Swiatek) had an "aha moment" while she was earning her master's degree in creative studies at [SUNY Buffalo State](http://companies.bizjournals.com/profile/buffalo-state/210077/?mkt=buffalo). Swiatek realized she learns most effectively when there are playful elements to her learning.

That experience informs Swiatek's new venture as the owner of [3600 Escape](http://www.3600escape.com/), a Hertel Avenue escape room where groups tackle puzzles to escape from a room. Swiatek purchased the facility last year after the former owners decided to pursue other opportunities.



Erica Swiatek is the owner of 3600 Escape Room at 1643 Hertel Ave. in Buffalo and also… [more](http://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/news/2017/03/08/erica-swiatek-on-how-her-escape-room-can-help.html#i1)

But it's not purely about fun: company groups exit the room and sit down in a classroom, where Swiatek and her team apply professional assessments to how they performed. She spoke to Buffalo Business First recently about how games have big implications for the workplace.

**You've built corporate team-building into a business that's typically about recreation. Why?**

The philosophy behind what we're doing is providing an opportunity for people to have a playful learning experience that really sticks for them. What we're doing with the assessments is, I might have your personality preferences before you go into the room, and as a facilitator I'm watching what's going on. I might see, say if you're a developer, that you're sticking with a challenging puzzle trying to refine everything and get it perfect while everybody else just left that to you. Later, when we unpack things that happened in the room, it will showcase how important you are to the team even though your skill set might be easy for people to overlook.

**Why is it helpful to gain clarity on team roles?**

It's paradigm-shifting for people because it's not an instructor doing 'pour and snore;' these people have just experienced something. The team really gets to understand how they can leverage each other's strengths and work together back in a more traditional workplace. Everybody has different strengths and different personality preferences. We see the world differently. It's going to help people who work together to understand each other.

**Describe the connection between fun and learning.**

If you look at children, they learn like sponges. Through research we've learned that adults can learn the same way. It's been a passion project to take what I learned at Buffalo State and to use intentional play to get these really good results for people. Participants are actively engaged in the activity from start to finish and we go right to the classroom afterward.

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