



Training Tool Sheet for Camp Directors Spring 2006

Outline for a Discussion with Returning Staff Regarding Expectations

The goals for having a discussion with your returning staff include an opportunity to:

- 1) Recognize that they have grown since the last season and establish that camp values them
- 2) Lay groundwork for continued growth in returning staff
- 3) Increase their understanding of changes for the current season
- 4) Engage them as leaders in the process of welcoming and training new staff members
- 5) Openly dialogue about the differing expectations for returning staff

Getting Started: Bringing returning staff together prior to new staff arrival allows them an opportunity to “catch up” with each other prior to shifting attention to new staff. It provides time to adjust to changes in camp, each other, and themselves. The following is an outline that can be used to lead a one/two hour session exploring the roles of a returning staff member.

Introduction of a Different Role: Thank them for returning and taking the time to participate in this reconnection process, and express appreciation that of all the things they could have done this summer (make more money, school, etc.) they came back to camp.

Returning to camp brings many layers of feelings: nostalgia about the past (whether a one-year history or 20 year history) and excitement as well as apprehension about the upcoming summer. The positive, meaningful memories seem to flood the mind, while the irritations of longer days and repeated instructions tend to be more easily forgotten. Often this results in the retention of a utopian and “never repeatable” memory. This holding on to the past can be positive and negative...it combines with new questions: Will I fit in? How will the changes in this summer affect me? Will they be to my advantage or make my job harder? How can it ever be the same without....?

The challenge for both camp and the returning staff lies in building on what was good and improving that which can be better. In leading the discussion, you might say:

- By the mere fact that you’ve been to this camp before, returning puts a whole different spotlight on you.
- New people have expectations that you “know the ropes” and will help guide them into proper procedure and subtleties of attitude and values.
- Peers expect you to keep growing, exert more leadership, and show more confidence, yet still be “yourself”.

Sometimes the space for new roles and responsibilities is difficult for peers to provide—they still view you as they knew you and felt comfortable with you. All of this sounds philosophical; putting this philosophy into operation is in itself another challenge.

Sharing: Depending on the size of the group either break into groups of 8-10 or stay as a larger group and ask each person to participate in the reconnecting by sharing a highlight and lowlight of the past year. Then join back to the large circle to share a “snapshot” of camp—to paint a picture of the most memorable scene from their last summer at camp in such detail that if someone 50 years from now were to pick up the picture, they would understand what is happening. Pay attention to the most meaningful three or four and ask these staff to share these stories again later in the training when old and new staff are together.

Specific Discussions Based on Years at Camp: Ask them to get into three different groups: 1) First year from camper to staff; 2) 2nd year staff members; 3) 3rd year and more. In these new groups have a discussion around the following questions:

- 1) What do you anticipate will be the toughest aspect of being a staff member this year? (for the first year from camper to staff and the 2nd year staff members, be sure to talk about the common issue of feeling disillusioned that camp is not completely a magical place...that a lot of hard work goes into creating the magic)
- 2) What are your expectations for support from your peers and camp administration?
- 3) What do you think new staff expect of you?
- 4) How can you help each other feel more confident and successful as returners?
- 5) Weave in issues from the expectations page that are not raised and consider adding to the list provided here with their ideas and giving it to them as a reminder.
- 6) We all contribute to the broader mission of camp through our uniqueness. What is your personal mission for the summer? How can you put that personal philosophy into action?

Closing: End with some type of affirmation circle such as: verbally pay each person a compliment, pass around different sheets of paper with a person's name at the top and have each person write a comment on each person's form; pass around slips of paper and allow each person to write a comment then give each person a basket or envelope and have everyone give their complement to the person

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS REGARDING EXPECTATIONS

Here are some suggestions which will be helpful to start the discussion and then encourage staff to add themselves:

During Orientation:

- Set the example of pace and tone for new staff members by:
 - explaining the "why" behind the policy and procedures supporting the logic and the value
 - going out of the way to discuss the "routine" rather than the exception so as not to confuse new staff who are just learning what is "normal"
 - giving attention to new staff instead of always sitting with your friends (please expect less attention to be paid to returning staff during the first few weeks)
 - approaching changes with a positive attitude, rather than being suspicious of change (just because it worked last year doesn't mean it can't be improved)
 - recognize that the expectations are different; every move and word is paid attention to by a new staff member as the "acceptable way" at this camp...new staff assume "they would not have hired you back if you were not good"
- Welcome and build connections with new staff:
 - go out of your way to include people
 - sit by a new person at each meal, meeting, activity
 - introduce yourself and ask people their names
 - find out who else is in your program area or works with the same age group and ask them for advice
 - be careful not to tell quite so many stories where you have to know people from last year in order to understand the story
 - if you notice someone is not adjusting or settling in well, let a unit leader or head counselor know so that we can check in and help them
 - speak slowly (but not louder!), so that internationals with English as a second (or third, or fourth!) language can understand more easily

During the First Few Weeks of Camp:

- Help diffuse misunderstandings or conflict, not help create it by bringing up the past
- Continue to grow and improve your skills and techniques
- Act as energy spark plugs for camp—keep people going when they start to get tired or wonder why they decided to come to camp
- Try to understand more of the overall operation of camp rather than just the perspective of your job
- You understand the daily routine, so be more creative with group activities and discussion leadership
- Be more flexible when changes are needed since you better understand the overall camp needs
- Provide leadership with programs, special events, and committees
- Pace yourself better and demonstrate more endurance, since you have greater knowledge of your personal limits in relationship to camp pace

Web Resources:

<http://www.acacamps.org/research/>

<http://www.acacamps.org/research/ydo.php>

<http://www.acacamps.org/knowledge/human/>



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