



## Training Tool Sheet for Camp Directors Spring 2006

### Incorporating Different Voices in Staff Training

Creating community...that's what camp is all about...so setting that tone from the start is a great first step. Here are some tried and true ideas to allow many voices to be heard during pre-camp training.

#### Parent Panel

The goals for inviting parents in to talk with seasonal staff include an opportunity to:

- 1) hear expectation straight from the parents
- 2) remind staff who they are accountable to
- 3) strengthen the partnership with parents as they learn more about how we train

**Getting Started:** Invite 4-5 verbal, articulate parents to come spend an hour answering questions from your staff. It is better to have a fewer number of people willing to talk honestly, than a larger panel of people. Select a diverse group of parents, representative of your camper population, seeking to include a variety of professions (teacher, nurse, one new family, one long-time family, etc.). Parents appreciated having advanced notice of the "must ask" questions so they could prepare more thoughtful responses. The list of questions can be supplemented by asking staff to write down one question on an index card the day before the panel. This serves to get staff thinking about the upcoming event as well as helping the director organize the questions for the panel.

**Timing:** Holding this type of session right before a meal resulted in informal discussion spilling over to the mealtimes, and the parents and staff seemed to appreciate the opportunity for more in-depth conversations as follow-up. By spreading the parents out in the diningroom, more staff could continue the dialogue.

#### Questions to Ask to Get the Conversation Rolling:

Please introduce yourself and explain why your family invests in camp for your child and why our camp in particular?

What are your fears (be sure one parent is willing to say death of our child while at camp)?

What is your child worried about related to coming to camp?

What makes a good counselor?

What issues do you struggle with at home with your child that you think camp can help with?

What is most special about your child?

#### Camper Panel

The goals for inviting campers to assist with staff training include:

- 1) To remind staff that camp is for the camper...to help keep the focus youth centered
- 2) To allow counselors to hear what matters to the campers
- 3) To demonstrate the importance of the campers voice in the planning process

**Getting Started:** Invite 4-5 campers of different ages to come spend about an hour sharing their perspective with staff. Campers appreciated knowing some of the questions in advance so they could realize they really were the experts and could easily answer the questions.

### **Question to Ask to Get the Conversation Rolling:**

Please introduce yourself and tell us how many years you have been coming to camp and what you like best about our camp.

What makes camp different than school?

If you had a magic wand, what would you change about camp?

What things do bad counselors/teachers do?

What things do good counselors/teachers do?

### **Staff Panel**

The goals for inviting staff from a variety of positions to assist with staff training include:

- 1) To inform staff that all the jobs at camp matter and are linked to each other
- 2) To talk openly about the camp culture, traditions and philosophy
- 3) To demonstrate the value of open dialogue about issues and talk about peer expectations for support

**Getting Started:** Getting started: Invite 4-5 returning staff with different jobs in camp to spend about an hour sharing their perspective with other staff. Panelists appreciated knowing some of the questions in advance so they could realize they really were the experts and could easily answer the questions.

### **Questions to Ask to Get the Conversation Rolling:**

Why do you choose to work at camp?

What is the most challenging part of your job here at camp?

What does a “superstar” staff member at this camp do differently as compared to other staff?

What does a “slacker” staff member at this camp do differently as compared to other staff?

What is a strategy you have found helpful to reduce your personal stress level?

What is something we can do as a camp community to make your specific job easier?

What advice do you have for new staff members?

How can we all work together as a team to implement the camp mission and philosophy?

### **Involving New Staff in Session Leadership**

During the first couple of days while everyone is learning about each other, ask a different new staff member to lead a new song, ice-breaker or game. Ask them what they plan to lead so you can use the discussion as a teachable moment before it actually is played if it is not appropriate for your setting.

In addition, look back through your interview notes and remember the specific skill set you saw during the interview and brainstorm about how you can give them a moment to shine during orientation.

### **The Power of the Written Word**

Sometimes reading something while alone helps reinforce a message that is trying to be demonstrated. Here are some simple techniques to help reinforce a point:

Find a poem or song that communicates part of the camp mission. Put a copy under each person's pillow, in their lunch bag, behind their program equipment....someplace where you know they will find it ☺

Hide a quote in the cereal box, a basket of muffins, first aid kit, group day pack, etc.

Ask a key veteran staff member who can't return this season to write a letter to the new staff about what camp has meant to them and what they will miss by not being in camp this year. Then photocopy the letter and put it in the staff mailboxes.

### **The Bottom Line**

Giving voice to others during training can be scary...what if they say the wrong thing? What if the training session gets out of control? A safety valve for this scenario is to plan several times during the session a natural opportunity to re-direct or gently correct. Ask the person leading the session to pause a few times (especially at the end) and ask you (the camp director), “What would you like to add?” You then can respond, “Great job! Continue on.” or “Another way to look at this situation is.....”

Camp generates unique communities, built on cycles...each with an opportunity to begin anew. Sharing the power of many voices builds community and strengthens skills of the individual voices.

**Web Resources:**

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

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

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



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