

DEVELOPING LEADERS – HOW TO GROW LEADERS FROM WITHIN YOUR CAMP COMMUNITY.

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Growing leaders from within our camps is one of the most important elements of creating a strong & healthy camp program. How do you grow leaders from within? It is not a secret, just an ongoing, ever present challenge that most camps have. The challenge is especially prevalent in church camps that do not always have full time staff and/or a consistent director from summer to summer.

Developing Leaders is a process and not something that can happen overnight – long term commitment is needed for the successful camp to grow, develop, nurture and reward leaders. This commitment needs to come from all levels of the camp community: campers, staff, board members, parents, alumni, churches etc. The commitment goes far beyond just focusing on the summer.

There are a series of practical steps to help us make and grow our campers and junior staff into strong individuals and effective leaders in our camp settings and in our communities.

1. Leadership Development in Camp Programming

The first step is to have leadership built into your camp program. You want to create a culture of learning & leadership that makes the end goal, great leaders, attainable. This can be done through activity periods such as leadership, challenge course/group initiatives, teamwork/teamplay etc. What you are looking to create is a fun activity that teaches campers the skills that make leaders. It is not necessary to tell the campers that these programs are leadership oriented, it is important that the program leaders understand the importance of their programs.

2. Run Leadership Camps for older campers

A leadership camp is an important step in seeing campers and their potential. A leadership camp can follow you to see campers as they take part in actual leadership activities. It is valuable to pair up a leadership camp with a Primary Aged Camp (ages 5-8). Pairing the

two camps allows you to give the leadership campers the opportunity to work hands on with children and put the teaching into practice.

Invite campers and camper parents to consider sending their children to the Leadership camp. Send out personalized letters to all campers who will be old enough to attend and describe the activities and skills that you hope the leadership campers will experience over the course of the program. Mention to parents that Leadership Camp is a great opportunity for campers to see if working with children is something interests them.

3. LIT/CIT/Jr. Counsellor Programs

There are many names for these programs. The importance of a well thought out program can make or break the grow of leaders in your camp. A Counsellor-In-Training program should be long enough for you to see them in action in various settings. A good CIT program will have various "outs" for you as well. To truly establish an effective CIT program here are some suggestions:

- Limit the number of participants that you accept (20-30)
- Do interview acceptances for your CIT program; do not take just anyone who applies, interview them and make sure that you can grow them into a camp leader.
- Choose the right staff to train them; the right staff help create a culture of learning, excitement, responsibility and fun.
- Be flexible on age limits if it gets you someone good – then work out the details the following summer if they are too young to counsel (Jr. Counsellor Program).
- Accept some CIT's from outside your camp as well. This will ensure that new ideas and fresh eyes keep everyones creativity at it's best.
- Choose only the best – you do not need to fill all 30 spots; if you only interview 22 that you think you can grow into great leaders then take the 22.

4. Summer Staff - Counsellors/Programmers

Once campers have moved beyond the CIT program and onto staff, it is important to keep the development going. Let the staff help to shape the vision of camp, invite them to join a Staff Advisory Panel to discuss new ideas and suggestions. Make sure that you give all the staff opportunities to lead others and demonstrate their abilities. Work with them through honest evaluations, goals

sheets done each year and through interviewing each returning staff member to have them recommit to camp and set new goals for the upcoming summer. Staff training weeks are essential to creating the team atmosphere that you want and help you find hidden leaders within your staff. At this stage you need to make difficult decisions as well, some staff do not always work out.

5. Alumni/Board

Once you have grown great leaders they will go off and be successful in whatever path they have chosen. This does not mean that camp has to lose them. Invite young Alumni to return to be board members, committee members or volunteers. Keep them engaged at camp and they will help camp for years to come.

Developing Leaders is an ongoing process and you will need to refine the process from year to year. Different aspects will work at different camps differently – so use what you can and adjust what you can't.