

Advance Praise for Resources

Culture resource

Bob Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW, Camp Consultant

“This is a great and important book for the camp industry. Any camp professional truly interested in delivering what they say they deliver -- quality experiences for children -- or making changes in their camp that increasingly make them "better" needs to read this book. People tell me I've changed the industry over the past 20 years. True or not, this book is the next level. You can publicly say I said so.”

Please see Ditter's full message starting on page three.

Linda Erceg, Ph.N. Executive Director, Association of Camp Nurses

“How did you manage to develop such a succinct yet thorough writing style?!? I want lessons. Amen. I found it quite excellent and intellectually stimulating -- for the Villages, ACN, ACA, etc. I feel very honored to have read your work and quite glad that I know you.”

Norman Friedman, Dean of Gene Ezersky Camp Safety College

“I am very pleased with what you have accomplished. The book is excellent. The content is quite valuable to camp owners/directors who wish to get an understanding of what they experience. I enjoyed it thoroughly.”

Tracy Hans, M.S., Bonnie Brae Center

“Dr. Grayson's engaging reading is broken down into short, digestible sections, replete with examples. It offers tremendous insight into the dynamic culture of camps: how to understand, create, and maintain the delicate balance that is so important to achieving valued program outcomes. Furthermore, this learning (on cultural congruence) can be applied to almost all organizational and community frameworks. I was surprised to discover the degree to which program outcomes are intricately linked to organizational culture. Dr. Grayson's book helped to broaden my definition of culture and my understanding of what influences it. This will now inform my suggestions for program improvement within my agency.”

Jeff Jacobs, Director of Camp Henry and author of “Growing your camp culture”

“This book will be a great resource for those interested in truly understanding and enhancing their camp culture. It would make a great addition to any Camping Professional's collection.”

James Neill, MA, University of New Hampshire

“Great - really enjoyed reading this material. I was stimulated by the material, had practical strategies to improve camp practices, etc. Highly readable . . . I found it clear, succinct, interesting, practical and inspiring . . . Stories - great material for an appendix and brought the concepts life, with recognizable examples.”

Gwynn Powell, Ph.D., Professor at University of Georgia

“Great concept. Thought provoking. Good exposure to a variety of resources. Good concrete examples at the end . . . You have MUCH to offer and you’re a true gift to the profession!”

Elliot Danzig, Ph.D., Clinical psychologist, & Organizational Consultant

“This book is complete, accurate, and insightful. In short order, you have managed to put together both a clear and exhaustive resource on camp culture. I know that camps will benefit enormously from it.”

Joel Meier, Ph.D. Chair of the Department of Recreation and Park Administration, Indiana University, author of “Camp Counseling: Leadership and Programming for the Organized Camp”

“Dr. Randall Grayson’s new book brings a refreshing new perspective to the world of organized camping. This resource has been needed in the field for a long time. The title really says it all – Organizational Culture at Camps: Understanding, Assessing, Developing, and Changing. Once I started reading the book, I couldn’t put it down. Every camp administrator should become intimately familiar with the information herein. This valuable resource not only helps you understand more about your camp’s underlying culture, but also provides easy to follow directions for determining what changes are needed, as well as how to bring about those desired changes.”

Staff motivation resource

Whigger Mullins, Director, Trails Wilderness School

“It was a breath of fresh air to read something written above the lowest common denominator. We all have to hold some sort of college degree if we are serious about advancement in camping yet I too often hear staff and others complaining that something was written over their head in terms of construction and vocabulary. Second, the piece is relatively short and sweet. It is filled with good, tangible and implementable information and techniques.”

Kim Shafer, Camp Black Hawk Director

“I enjoyed this piece very much. I learned a lot about things that I had not even considered trying in my camp programs. Camp directors from all types of camps will benefit from this. In some ways this forced me to think out of the box, which is what is needed to keep our program innovative and our staff coming back.”

Rev. Robert Vodra, Director of Camp Greenwood

“First off, great stuff! I think that too often we look for the quick fix when staff moral is going down hill, and you really set the idea that the whole issue of staff motivation starts before you hire staff, and continues throughout the season (or year), and beyond. It also helped me to understand that it is more of a system rather than individual pieces (without fitting together). I have read in camping magazine (and other places) pieces of bits of insight into staff motivation, but they don’t offer the critical framework and ideas, and thus do not hold up for more than a few days.”

Dave Peterson, Cape Cod Sea Camps, 80 Years of Camping Excellence

“The piece is very comprehensive and representative of all the good things that can and should be done to motivate staff and show your appreciation for their work. It really applies to all staff and hopefully gets directors thinking about going the extra mile for their staff.”

Tim Cox, Raquette Lake Camps

“I read it over the weekend and then shared it with a couple of people in my office today. We liked the info so much that I am sending you a check. The focus of the paper is one that just about every camp I know of will find useful and the depth of information was appreciated.”

Aileen O. Traynor, Director, Camp Lapham, Crossroads for Kids, Inc.

“Let me first start by saying that I found it to be a great resource myself, and it is something that you don't hear everywhere, so I think it is extremely useful!”

The learning camp resource

Martin Graefe, MBA, Concordia Language Villages, Assoc. Dir. for Operations

“... it's time that camp organizations realize the time has come, to step up to the plate and evaluate the 'quality' of the experience they promise to deliver and how that is realized or not realized. Anyone who really applies these principles and follows through with the surveys and follow-up work can claim to operate a top notch professional organization.”

Note: I haven't been trying to collect quotes. These were just naturally offered with feedback to improve the resources. Sometimes people misunderstood my desire for feedback and just offered a quote first.

Message from Bob Ditter on Camp Culture

Much has changed in the twenty years that I have been working with camp professionals across the United States. Some camps have gone out of business, succumbing to the pressures of development, over-regulation and increased competition; while others have grown stronger, diversifying their programs and widening their alumni base. The industry itself has been infused with a fresh crop of young owners and directors who are even more knowledgeable about child development and the needs of today's families.

Perhaps the greatest changes have occurred in the environment in which camp now operates. First of all, parents are generally more demanding about what they want for their children, whether it be in school, day care or camp. Second, the industry itself has for several years been making more public noise about the value and positive impact that a quality camp experience can provide children. Third, camps are under even greater scrutiny and regulation by watch dog agencies, especially when it comes to the emotional and physical well-being of children in the custody of care-givers. Add to these factors the increase in competition for a child's time in the summer and the surge in the number of children coming to camp with challenging emotional or behavioral histories, and it is clear that camps have a lot to live up to. For all of these reasons, camp professionals need to be more aware of the conditions that produce a quality experience for the youngsters they recruit.

Enter Randall Grayson, whose notions about camp culture are ripe for this industry. As I have said to many camp groups over the past twenty years, it is not a question of *whether* your camp has a culture; it is only a question of *what that culture truly is*. Because, as Dr. Grayson so simply points out in this crucial work, “if culture guides the thinking and behavior of people, it is *wise to create and foster a culture at camp that best facilitates the outcomes you care about*.”

Consider, for example, the camp story of a long time friend and colleague. Ham Robbins¹ went to the boys’ camp he now owns and operates for eight years as a camper, junior counselor and full fledged staff member. He finally worked his way up to Assistant Director before he figured out a way to buy the camp himself. His love of camp and all it could do for young men is deeply seated in his own experience. Listening to Ham talk about “the good old days,” you can hear not only tales of adventure, but a solid sense of learned responsibility, love of Nature and respect for other human beings. By the time Ham was in college he was convinced that being a camp director was his life’s work.

For twenty-five years Ham has visited prospective and returning campers in their homes throughout the Southern United States. Ham sees his personal connection with families as a key ingredient to the success of his camp. What he tells parents is that he wants each boy that attends Camp to benefit from the experience like he did. Thus, it was no surprise when Ham met me at an ACA Fall Conference in Nashville in the mid-1980’s that he wanted me to come to his camp to work directly with his staff. My coming to Camp was just another part of the excellence Ham put into his work. He wanted his counselors to be as prepared and able to work with campers as possible. There was even a training session on “the Mother Functions,” a set of tasks compiled by a former Tennessee camp director that outlines the care-taking tasks traditionally performed by moms at home – things like making sure clothes are clean, teeth are brushed, tears are dried with reassurances and beds are made.

From satisfied parents and happy campers, this seemed to be a model camp. Thus, it was a big surprise when one summer night a car full of counselors returning from a night off flipped on the highway at over 60 miles an hour. The miracle was that no one was killed, though there were several broken bones and a badly shaken group of young men bailed out by their faithful director. It had been determined that the driver and occupants were drunk.

The accident spurred some soul-searching by the entire camp community. What came out was the realization that for years, young, mostly underage counselors would join older staff on their nights off and come back to camp drunk. In addition to posing a danger on the road, it was common that hung-over staff were not as “present” the next day during cabin clean-up or coaching softball and other activities. Though the senior staff had been aware of this for some time, it was considered “a rite of passage” for junior counselors, who had finally achieved great status by being asked to become a member of the staff.

Ham, being the responsible Camp Director he is, initiated a new training session for orientation. He did all the right things – things most conscientious directors would do. He had the counselors involved in the accident tell their story. He had an “expert” come and talk about the effects of alcohol on performance. He had his staff sign an affidavit swearing they would not come into camp drunk on a night off, and even had them have a witness co-sign the document, which was then collected and put into each staff member’s file. This approach worked – for one year; the year in which the memory of the accident was still vivid enough to act as a deterrent. As the years passed, so did the impact of the story and the training.

I mention Ham’s story because many camps in the United States are run by competent, responsible, caring people who believe unconditionally that their camps provide safe, fun experiences that have the potential of increasing a child’s self-reliance and self-confidence. What most directors, including Ham, do not consider is the culture that exists at camp, which is the context for all behavior. What was never addressed, for example, were the deeply held beliefs, or what Randall Grayson terms “deep assumptions,” operating at Ham’s camp. These beliefs might be summarized as follows:

¹ While based on true occurrences, the identities of the camp directors and their camps have been altered for reasons of confidentiality.

- 1) boys will be boys and drinking is part of that;
- 2) camp doesn't end once you become a staff member; the activities just change and drinking is one of those activities;
- 3) counselor's time off is none of the business of the administration.

Until these beliefs could be addressed, the drinking behavior and the consequences that come with it do not change in a lasting way. Drinking was part of the *culture* at Ham's camp, and it was intensely affecting the quality of what happened there. It just never surfaced as completely as it did when the accident occurred. And it didn't change until a group of senior staff members got together and decided to challenge some of their own deeply held beliefs, one chief among them being that it was solely up to the director to enforce the "not drunk in camp" rule.

What happened was that a small but influential group of *senior* staff members went through some self-examination which resulted in a change in their deeply held beliefs about camp. The beliefs they established were as follows:

We are the community.

We share the responsibility of enforcing the rules (it's not just Ham's job).

We must make a personal commitment to camp.

Camp is bigger than just us, just this season.

We need to mentor the younger staff members.

Without this *critical mass* of *senior* staff members, the attitudes and behavior around drinking would never have changed at Ham's camp. Only by looking at their own behavior and attitudes could they impact the culture and thus change what happened. Indeed, we know how culture is passed along: the younger members of a group look to and mimic the older members of the group, who in turn look to the *most popular* members (not the ones with the most authority) of the group. Thus, the senior members put together their mentoring program, announced it to Ham, who endorsed it (heartily!), and then presented it to the entire staff. It worked. Drinking dropped and alternate forms of night off activities began to show up. The culture, after several years of sustained work, changed.

Had Ham known about culture and how it impacts everything that happens at camp, he might have known that simply telling a story and having staff sign a piece of paper would not change the culture that had existed at Camp for many years.

I can relate many similar tales of excellent camps that have cultures that operate largely out of sight and in opposition to the stated aims and goals of the camp itself. There is the nurturing camp in the Northeast where a group of male counselors, unmoved by extensive selection, training and supervision, tied their campers to their beds, wrote on them in their sleep and threatened them with various physical humiliations if they didn't "behave." (The deeply held belief on the part of those counselors was that "these kids are spoiled and need to be "toughened up.") Or the well known camp in Michigan known for its fine religious program where campers were "initiated" in ways totally counter to the teachings or stated goals of camp. The stories are all there, and they reinforce one basic notion: to deliver a "world of good," camp professionals must know how culture develops and how it changes. Reading this book is a great first step in this process of greater awareness and understanding.