

# Organizational Factors

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# Introduction

These very brief discussions are intended to provoke thought, as well as provide some specific ideas. The topics presented here are definitely considered by camps, and often agonized about at length. The goal is to hopefully offer a nugget or two of new information, or new lines of thought. To those ends, your camp might be able to enhance its ability to improve the outcomes of a camp experience for campers and staff.

## Camper return rate & session length

Sure, camper return rates are important because recruiting costs are reduced, staff get to see kids for more than one summer and vice versa, and return rates are at least some indication that the campers enjoyed themselves. Additionally, the return rate has other implications that are just as important to consider and evaluate, along with session length, i.e. the amount of time a child spends at camp.

Two primary questions will be considered:

- (1) how much exposure to camp is necessary to achieve a desired outcome?
- (2) what difference does it make in terms of outcomes who comes back and who doesn't?

In all of the research done at summer camps so far, there is no consistent evidence indicating how long children need to be exposed to a summer camp experience in order to receive any specific benefits. The muddled waters are due in part to three factors.

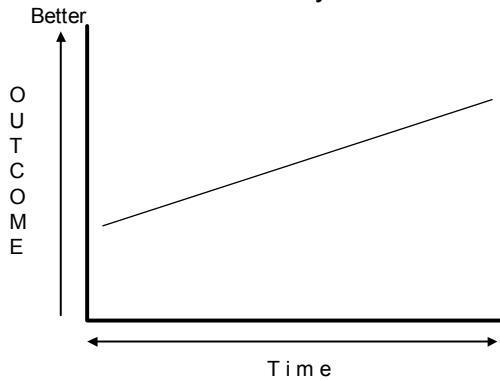
- ❖ There is a lack of research (especially quality research) in this area. Despite the fact that camping has a history that predates modern social science methods, there is very little camping research. It is exceedingly rare that camp philosophies and methods have been rigorously tested.
- ❖ Camps often have very different sets of outcomes that they consider primary. Out of say 40 possible outcomes, the combinations and permutations can be diverse for different camps.
- ❖ The picture is further complicated by the fact that camps often try to achieve the same outcome through very different means. Comparing camps is therefore a little like comparing apples and oranges.

Thus, any discussion *here* of how much time is necessary to achieve a given outcome must take place in the abstract.

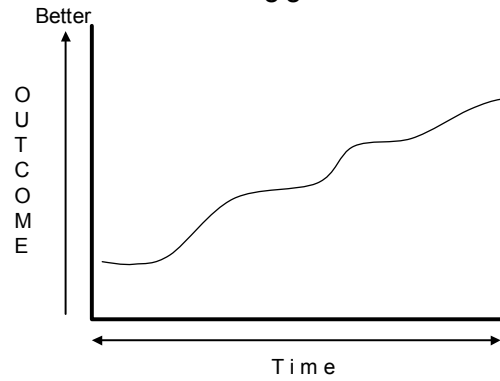
Length of exposure necessary varies depending on the outcome of interest. For example, the following outcomes likely require different levels of exposure: self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, leadership, free-time activities at home, skill achievement, physical fitness, self-control, environmental education, responsibility, cooperation, assertiveness, empathy, interpersonal relationship skills, self-confidence, moral reasoning, creativity, et cetera. There is guidance available on how long it takes to influence a specific outcome based on the enormous amount of knowledge about them outside of a camp environment, but such a lengthy discussion would literally be a book in its own right. The “Process maps” resource offers some guidance here.

Graphing the effect. The three main models for considering the positive effect of camp are graphed below. All models apply to at least a few outcomes – they're all relevant. Longer is better (steady) assumes that more exposure to camp continues to increase the benefit the camper or staff member receives. The staggered version assumes that continued growth will happen, but that it occurs in stages, perhaps after certain amounts of time have elapsed, or after some other necessary element is in place. Diminishing returns assumes that camp can help a child achieve a given outcome, but that after a certain amount of exposure, there really isn't much appreciable gain. The final model delineated here is that of delayed onset, which indicates that campers must attend for a certain period of time before the benefit will start to take effect.

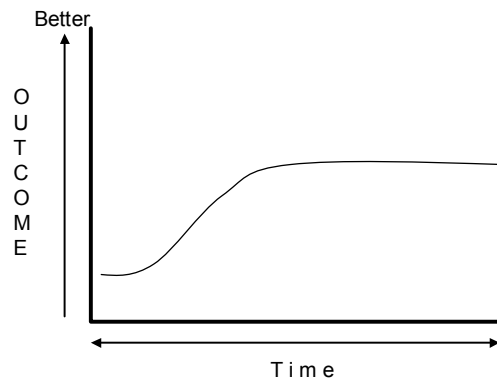
## Longer is better Steady



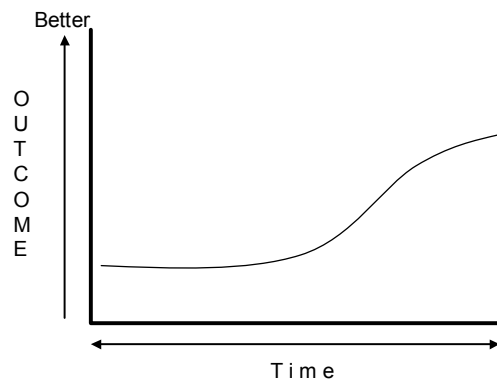
## Staggered



## Diminishing returns



## Delayed onset



Note that on all the graphs, the time scale is left open. It isn't specified if that time is measured in increments of one week, several weeks, or even months. Is one week of exposure the same as three weeks? Are two and four weeks equivocal? How about four weeks and eight weeks, or one week versus eight weeks? Are "booster" sessions needed to receive or maintain outcomes? Again, the answers are complex and depend on such factors as the *quality of the program*, the *nature of the activities/program*, the *characteristics of the child*, and the *specific outcome under consideration*. For example, the level on an outcomes a child walked in the door with would make a difference (i.e., already high self-esteem). As a general heuristic, more exposure is probably better.

It is important to note that the graphs do not take into account “broken exposure,” which means that the time frame occurs over several summers. Is broken exposure the same as continuous exposure? Are eight weeks at one camp the same as eight years at a one-week camp, or four years at a two-week camp? Probably not. Then there is the issue of skipped summers in between exposure to the camp environment. Based on the delayed onset model, some camp professionals argue that longer sessions are necessary, because shorter ones don’t allow children to reach the point where benefits start to accrue. In other words, they believe that the clock is reset every summer, and that enough continuous time at camp must be spent in order for benefits to start and stick. While that is probably true for some outcomes, others surely fit the other models.

The answers to such questions are fundamental to the decisions a camp makes. For example, if a particular camp came to the conclusion that its chief outcomes (the ones it values and tries to instill) could be achieved for most participants in two weeks, would it be wise to change current session lengths in order to serve more or less children? In another example, a non-profit camp finds that after three summers, there is a diminishing returns effect for its primary outcomes. To better accomplish its mission of serving (providing the beneficial outcomes) as many children as possible, does this camp limit attendance to three summers? Of course, the decision takes numerous other factors into consideration, but all of the questions raised throughout should be included.

### **From theory to concrete knowing**

With a clear understanding of the nature of the outcomes and the processes utilized at your specific camp, an evaluation program can be undertaken. That evaluation makes it possible to assess to what degree outcomes are achieved, after how much time, and for what kind of camper. With that knowledge, a camp could better achieve its mission and vision. The “From good to great” and “The learning camp” resources provide vital information in this regard.

In the interim, a camp could make an educated guess based on *thorough* knowledge of the outcomes desired, the quality of the program, the nature of the program, and the children who attend. This “thought experiment” – already exercised in various degrees by most camps – is the first step until an evaluation produces more objective data specific to your camp. See the evaluation resources.

**Yes, this is a complicated topic with many facets, which have only received surface attention here, but these issues strike at the very core of every camp’s ability to give kids a world of good. Their careful, thorough consideration is elemental to every camp’s mission.**

# Return rates as indicators of achieving outcomes

Camps utilize return rates as one measure of how well they are achieving their outcomes. While return rates can be good measures of satisfaction, satisfaction isn't a good measure of outcomes. One reason is that satisfaction measures have inherent flaws that make them poor measures. The discussion of that point is included in "The learning camp" and the "Organizational culture at camps" resources. There are other reasons why return rates aren't good measures of outcomes. Some of those are briefly detailed below.

## **Qualitative observations by parents are often suspect**

For one, parents are not logical, bean counting psychometricians capable of accurately assessing all outcomes. Two, parents might send their children back to a camp for numerous reasons. Let's look at the first point now, and cover the second next.

- o IQ is the most frequent assessment in the country, but teachers are poor predictors of it. They've had these children for nine months in a focused learning environment where they should have the time and expertise to judge IQ accurately. The truth is that they are not good predictors of children's actual IQ. It is for that reason that we must assess cognitive intelligence in a valid and reliable manner.
- o Self-esteem is most accurately assessed by the person, not others. Let me offer some specific camp examples to illustrate this point. I had counselors and directors at two different summer camps try and predict children's self-esteem levels and change. At the first camp, the counselors had over three weeks exposure to the children in a residential setting. At the second residential camp, the counselors were with the children for one week. The campers were given one of the most reliable and valid self-esteem measure available, which has been proven over decades. It turns out that at both camps, the counselors (and supervisors and director) were unable to predict the children's rough level of self-esteem any better than you would have expected by absolute chance. Furthermore, they were unable to even grossly predict whether the children's self-esteem went up, stayed the same, or went down any better than chance.

## **Assume parents are very accurate**

Even if parents were accurate predictors of outcomes, the model would be complex and different for every parent and child.

- (A) return decision = .43 fun, .12 self-esteem, .27 safety, .18 liked director
- (B) return decision = .21 fun, .24 extroversion, .55 friends returning
- (C) return decision = .36 environmental attitudes, .41 social skills, .23 creativity
- (D) return decision = .36 fun, .22 liked director, .42 don't want to pick another camp
- (E) return decision = .75 fun, .15 safe place, .10 liked feeling of camp and director

The items in the equation and their accuracy would vary widely. As a result, there is no way to use return rates as outcomes measures, except for gross assessments of things like relative fun and satisfaction.

# Staff return rate

The average staff return rate appears to be about 40 – 50%. It's a number most everyone would like to see increase. Although the benefits of a high return rate are lost on few, let's take a quick look at the advantages. Keep in mind that there can be disadvantages as well, such as the possibility of limiting innovation, creativity, and the degree to which the culture can change. Following a list of some benefits is a short brainstorm of things camps can do to increase the staff return rate. For more information, see the "Staff motivation" resource and the enculturation section of the culture resource.

## Benefits of high staff return rate

- Staff are able to take on more challenges with equal or less effort. As an analogy, when one first learns to ride a bike, one has to continuously think about it. When it is sufficiently practiced, one can start to really focus on how to do it well, and enjoy the scenery at the same time. See the "Staff training best practices" resource.
- As a group, staff enter the "performing stage" faster. This ability also helps camper groups achieve the performing stage faster.
- With a high staff return rate, people come back in part to be with those returning. Provided returning staff are excellent, they are the ones who love camp (for the right reasons) and "buy in" to the mission. New staff want to conform to the presiding culture, which the returners create from day one. It feeds on itself and builds energy and momentum. See the culture resource for more.
- Nearly everyone defends the philosophy and the organization. People act like an immune system where the staff are the white blood cells, instead of an organization where the leadership staff primarily are, and it's more a game of cat and mouse.
- Staff training takes on a whole new feel and direction with >50% staff return rate. It can be more fun, and include more information. It becomes continuing education for most, rather than education. Two models help this work. One is to have some breakout sessions where returning staff get new material, while new staff get the core material. Another method, which also gets the two groups mixing, is jigsaw or cooperative education. In this model, small groups of 6 to 8 are formed. Each group is given a task to learn and then teach it to the entire staff. Depending on how you structure the information, you can take advantage of the returning staff, or not.
- Returning (excellent) staff are harbingers of the philosophy, program, and constant models for how to do things well. How that influences a specific camp varies quite a bit, but some key benefits and tacit knowledge areas might include: how to run successful cabin hours or evenings; behavior management skills staff can put into action; good co-working relationships from the beginning; the campers want to come back to see and be with John and Jane; counselors know where all the short hikes in camp are; they know the proper mood to set for council fire, vespers, and campfires; they know the right and wrong way to interact with one another – personality quirks; they know how to do really cool early morning experiences; tripping program (where to go and how to get there; successfully leading the trip; how to process it – adventure, efficacy, group process, nature. . .; how to really prepare a group; etc.); et cetera.

## Boosting the return rate

- Have staff work on a personal mission. Understand their needs and goals and check in with them frequently at camp, but also occasionally after camp. See the "Staff motivation" resource for more on this point.
- The camp should have process maps (see process map resource) for the outcomes they want their *staff* to obtain, and not just undergo this vital endeavor for campers.
- Provide some resume and interview language that staff can use to illustrate their experience. Many employers don't understand that camp isn't just about playing.
- Always provide those staff members whom the camp would want to return with a letter of reference.
- Conduct an exit interview with each staff member individually. Staff feel valued, heard, and the personal connection goes a long way, even if it has been nurtured throughout the summer.
- Include a powerful, ritual experience for just the staff at the end of camp.
- Try to hire people who will have the option of returning, if they should so desire

- Returning bonuses to make another summer more financially feasible and attractive – as much as \$500 – are a good investment.
- Reunions outside of the summer, and perhaps during it as well, for alumni.
- When the time comes for staff to sign up again, send a few camp related items to spark memories and sentiment. A recording of camp songs, a few pictures, poems, inspirational recollections, letters from campers and staff, et cetera.
- Web site section for returning staff
  - Rules of all the games played at camp
  - Cartoon map of camp
  - Streaming video of some areas of camp, people, and/or events
  - MP3 files of the songs sung at camp
  - Sentimental items as noted above
- Have staff write a “Hallmark” card to themselves explaining why they are working at this particular camp with these kids. Several food-for-thought questions could be supplied. Staff then seal their cards, address them, and the camp mails them out at around the time staff need to make return decisions.
- Create a staff only newsletter (paper is better, but an e-letter is better than nothing) that goes out two or three times. Sections can include updates on staff, news of camp, inspirational bits, and information of use to them.
- Provide money for continuing education related to a primary camp skill (e.g., archery, behavior management, ACA conference, etc.).
- Provide opportunities to return for another season with new responsibilities/challenges.
- In the off season, call the staff once when you don’t need or want anything.

More generally, when you provide the elements in the “Staff motivation” resource, you will have accounted for much of the decision of whether or not the staff will want to return. People will return to experiences that continue to add value to them and where they are valuable.

The “Culture book” details how to understand your culture and develop one that is supportive and magical for the staff and campers. When you have a strong culture in line with valued outcomes (including staff), a 60 – 80% staff return rate is virtually assured. This formula already works well for many camps who enjoy such numbers, and many other benefits. Exceptional camps who almost define strong, positive cultures that provide value to their staff routinely have 80% or higher return rates. Such a culture is difficult to develop, but the rewards are well worth it. See the “From good to great” and “Innovation and continuous improvement” resources.

# Staffing levels

Staffing levels have been frequently studied in large and small organizations alike. There are even complicated formulas for calculating appropriate levels based on empirical research; however such an academic and quantitative approach will not be delineated here. Instead, the main principles involved are discussed, as well as some questions that offer food for thought about the appropriate level in your camp.

## The Magic Number

Of course, there isn't a set one. The population of the campers, the mission, the program, and the quality of the staff are all factors that help determine an optimum staffing level. To elaborate, more challenging campers require more staff; the number and nature of the outcomes desired for campers and staff help determine how many staff are necessary; the activities and structure of the day governs staffing levels; and, as seasoned camping folks know, one high-quality staff member can virtually do the job of two mediocre ones. The camp culture and degree of staff motivation also make a big difference – see those resources.

Camps are definitely busy places and the jobs at all levels are demanding. *Yet, there are reasonable levels of busy, and exceptional camps create an environment where the level of staff support the outcomes and values the camp holds dear.* Thus, by definition, when a camp operates in an understaffed condition, it isn't meeting all its outcomes to the degree desired.

A detailed organizational analysis is necessary to determine the number of staff necessary for various roles, however, some general guidelines to consider and reflect on follow. Of course, the answers to these questions occur along a continuum. Try rating them using the following scale. Also, ask your staff (counselors and administration) to respond to these questions. Such a brave endeavor virtually always creates positive change.

Strongly disagree // Never	Disagree // Occasionally	Average // Sometimes	Agree // Often	Strongly agree // Always
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- Are staff able to meet their basic needs of sleep, down time, fun, and socializing? We usually can't give staff all the time off they desire, but we should give them the time off they need.
- Are staff members developing professionally and meeting their personal mission statements? The personal mission statement is what the staff members hope to gain from the experience – see the staff motivation resource. Do administrative staff have the time to develop themselves (e.g., read these resources and other books)?
- Do all staff members have specific times, without competing needs set aside, so that they may contribute to and utilize knowledge management (see that resource for an explanation)?
- Do counselors and supervisors have time to consult and contribute to camper reports?
- Do counselors and supervisors have time to meet and discuss individual development (or treatment) plans regarding each child on a regular basis?
- Some camps have “creative” periods or hours that appeal to enthusiastic and dedicated people. They can apply for some “free” time by using a form or just having a short conversation. A specific, special, often unusual project that requires additional time is pitched. If approved, it is arranged to have that person's duties covered for the required amount of time. In this manner, enthusiastic and dedicated people can have their cake (do more) and eat it to (have some time off). See the “promote passion” section in the staff motivation resource.
- Do supervisors have time to complete most all the items on their list? For a list of some items on an exceptional camp's supervisor list, please see the end of the staff training best practices resource.
- Supervisors should be able to ask and respond to the question, “Is there anything else I can do to ensure that the kids and counselors are getting the most out of the experience?” And they should ask the counselors, “What do you need to do a better job?” Certainly the answers would result in an almost unending and even unreasonable list, but those noted at the top are likely important. It's definitely valuable to ask these questions in the first place!
- Is there sufficient time for supervisors to provide perks, support, and benefits?

- Are there enough backup staff (based on past experience) available to cover for staff who leave (fired, sick, quit, etc.)? The departure of a key person or two can quickly create an understaffed situation even though, in numbers, little has changed.
- Is there enough support personnel available so that people in other roles don't have to cover for their duties? Some examples include drivers, shoppers, and secretary(s). A "Director of Operations" is often a crucial role, for this person relieves directors and supervisors from tasks that don't require their particular experience, or that prevent them from focusing on their more primary functions. Although this can be overstated, when supervisors, directors, or sometimes counselors fill in, or take, these support roles, they are usually not focusing on their primary responsibilities.
- Do the campers present special challenges (e.g., at-risk, medical needs, physical needs)? If so, are there enough staff to address those needs, and still focus on camp and personal (staff) outcomes?
- Does your camp have a Director of Philosophy? Sometimes this position is also called the "Director of Camper Growth and Development." Usually, the regular director has so many hats to wear in the summer, that taking the time to really focus on the camp culture, staff motivation, the way the program is working toward the valued outcomes just doesn't happen. We like to think it happens, and to various degrees it does. But, camps with such a person have found that their level of improvement every summer is two-fold what it was before. They couldn't imagine going back to "the old way." Exceptional camps have a person for this role, who is neither primarily responsible for the logistical details of running camp, nor for direct customer contact/calls. This person is as active as anyone else and finds little time to sit around. A brief job description and guidelines follow.
  - Spends a little time in groups every day.
  - Deals with staff performance issues on a micro and macro level.
  - Focuses on staff motivation – see that resource
  - Should be the ultimate "forest" thinker. This person has the time and responsibility to reflect – really reflect – on all aspects of camp. This person examines all process maps (see that resource) and asks: how well is each structure, policy, process, or activity optimally functioning to achieve desired ends? This point will make more sense after process models are better understood.
  - Is centered or grounded in the vision, mission, and outcomes. Traditions are honored and defended, but not to the ultimate detriment of camp. Maximally benefiting the children and staff are the key concerns.
  - This person understands what camp culture is, and continually reflects on its state and development. See the culture resource.
  - Frequently sits down with supervisors and processes the day through.
  - Often, this role is a seasonal one, but some off-season duties might include: knowledge management, benchmarking, staff hiring, web site enhancement, evaluation, professional development of others, and maintaining camper files.

## Consequences of an appropriate staffing level

Imagine a camp where people are busy, but they aren't burning the candle at both ends. The important and semi-important items on the to-do lists get done, and get done well. The law of time reads that work expands to fill the time available. While that is often the case, the things that don't get done seem pretty inconsequential in an exceptional camp. The relaxed, high-performance environment extends to the administration, and even the director. These responsible, dedicated people meet their basic needs of sleep, down time, fun, and socializing. Directors often hold the red badge of courage for working like maniacs during the summer, but a maniacal pace for anyone at an exceptional camp is considered unreasonable and unhealthy. A healthy lifestyle is both preached and modeled by counselors, supervisors, and the director.

Most importantly, the valued outcomes of the camp experience for the campers and staff are not hindered by the staffing level. That would mean indicating "agree" or "strongly agree" for most of the above items relevant to your situation. On the emotional side, people don't feel like they've been through the ringer; they feel like they've been given a hug. If that seems impossible, unimportant, or unreasonable, please see the "From good to great" and "Innovation and continuous improvement" resources. It might take 10 years to get some camps to such a high level, but the only way to get there is to start now.

## Consequences of under staffing

It's important to point out what many camp people either know or have personally experienced. It is possible to run camp in an understaffed situation and still have staff be motivated and reasonably effective. Sometimes, that crunch of responsibility and desire to excel will rise to the occasion and yield even greater motivation than one might expect. Such an experience can be exhilarating and satisfying. However, when the long-term view is taken, and staff are considered clients as well, there are problems with understaffing. The staff can become burned out during the summer, or after. While burning people out is almost an American tradition (we are literally the workaholics of the world), it isn't healthy or desirable for numerous reasons you can likely surmise. Also, for the camp, not having enough staff means that the camper outcomes are not being met to the degree that is possible. Furthermore, the development of the camp is stunted, because the necessary contributions that grow the camp can't be made.

The following are just a few checklist items to illustrate the consequences. They aren't intended to be exhaustive, but rather to draw attention to the effects of understaffing. *It is essential to note that staffing levels occur along a continuum and therefore these consequences happen in degrees*, as opposed to always or not at all. The lists are also divorced from staff quality, which mediates (not alleviates) the degree to which the consequences might occur.

### R o l e i s s u e s

- Role confusion  
Things fall through the cracks and efforts are duplicated as it isn't clear who is covering what
- Role overload  
People are covering more than one role
- Inappropriate role evaluations  
People are evaluated by criteria that are inappropriate to their core competencies and job responsibilities. People are usually unforgiving of the situation and make unfair evaluations.
- Micro problem-solution trap  
“Small” or micro problems are the focus, when the macro issues are the ones that need to be addressed. Often, many problems are “solved,” but the pattern and the larger solution that would prevent the cascade of smaller problems is not discovered or implemented. Sometimes, the larger issue is clear, but the smaller, more immediate problems overwhelm staff members, who are then not as able to address the core problems.
- Admission standards  
Admission standards relating to the specific job environment are lowered and the fit for a specific role becomes less important. People who don't fit minimal requirements are allowed to stay in the situation, while others may have to take on tasks ill suited to their strengths and ability. This can be true for campers and staff.
- Treating people like people  
Less attention is paid to personality and other non-task related differences between individuals.

### J o b s b e g i n t o f a l l o f f t h e l i s t

- Good ideas that have been identified lie on the table un- or underutilized. For example, there is usually insufficient time to read all the resources contained in a book such as this one, to reflect on them, and to implement appropriate ones.
- Knowledge management (or OWL) – see that resource
- Benchmarking – searching for and adapting outside solutions that could actually improve the situation. See that resource.
- Developing staff – see staff motivation resource
- Quality of staff training – see staff training best practices resource
- Time to be creative – improve the wheel

- Developing a relationship with the staff members so that the summer runs better all the way around and a higher return rate is achieved. All administration should read the staff applications and have time to revisit them.
- Dedication to being a learning organization becomes hampered or comes to a standstill (see that resource)
- Ability to mold and manage the culture in an effective way (see culture resource)
- Not enough campers enrolled
- The campers were not screened properly for fit with the program and the staff
- Not enough staff, or the right kind of staff
- Obtaining money necessary to run the organization in a healthy manner
- Evaluating both the short- and long-term progress of campers and staff (outcomes). See the evaluation trilogy resources.
- People are less able to identify the needs of others and have less time to attend to the ones they do note. Camp becomes a less caring, comfortable, human place.
- Conducting thorough assessments of satisfaction by those who returned, and especially those who did not, isn't possible. Analyzing non-returning campers *and* staff is a critical activity.
- Going above and beyond customer expectations happens in fits and starts.
- While doing the necessary jobs, people are rarely empowered to reach their peak potential – to fly, to excel, to shine. The skills, talents, and knowledge of participants go un- or underutilized.
- Insufficient time to process the experience in general, and focus on all the processes (process maps) in detail. See the process maps resource.

#### B a s i c n e e d s

- Adequate time off to socialize, to be alone, and to take care of personal business
- To have fun
- Professional development is slowed or stagnated
- Enough rest, because with less than 7 to 8 hours sleep
  - learning doesn't stick as well
  - brain takes micro naps in stages – sections of it sleep while other less appropriate parts have to try and adapt on the fly, which impairs functioning
  - true personality can be buried under tiredness
  - enthusiasm and creativity are impaired or even functionally absent
  - attention span is shortened
  - decision making ability is hampered
  - emotions are more on edge

#### R e t u r n r a t e

Longevity of the administration, counselors, and others goes down. Such an effect doesn't help the situation, because there is a loss of tacit knowledge (see knowledge management resource), which is the most valuable in terms of outcomes and time savings. The ultimate, long-term growth and effectiveness of the organization, and the clients it serves, is diminished. Burnout occurs sooner when the environment is mentally and emotionally taxing or unhealthy.

#### S t r o n g s i t u a t i o n s r e q u i r e p e o p l e t o r e s o r t t o e x p e r i e n c e o v e r k n o w l e d g e

When people are under any significant stress (long hours, sleep deprived, personal needs not met, time crunch, bad mood, situation is a crisis/overwhelming, enmeshed in situation and lose perspective, etc.), they tend to resort to experience as opposed to knowledge. Technically, it's called Cognitive Resource Theory and the military and large organizations are very familiar with it. When the pressure is on, people are more likely to resort to their gut reactions. Usually, the gut reaction isn't one's learned knowledge, unless it has been practiced so many times in real situations that it becomes one's second nature. That's why the military has learned to train people in as real a situation as is possible, as much as possible. Thus, if you stress people out, watch their ability to implement their skills and training go down. When the happens, valued outcomes suffer.

When you're tired, hot, overworked, and underpaid, it's very hard to care. A common refrain in the sporting world is: "Yes, but can you do it under pressure?" Pressure comes in both the intense and constant background forms. Both make it difficult to actually do what you know. Whatever the reason for the stress, when people start saying things like "I just can't think!" or "I know, I know, but I didn't have the time!" or "I know, but I'm tired and this is hard." you know that the ability to practice what one preaches is diminished. It's a principal reason why Parent Effectiveness Training and leadership trainings fail. Understaffing and under-qualified staff are often key culprits. A common example is staff reacting to behavior issues with campers or each other inappropriately – e.g., punishment, yelling, guilt, or some other means of external control.

Thus, the utility of trainings is severely diminished under stress, because people can't call up the mental resources to apply what they've learned.

## Staff quality

Certainly, stating that staff quality matters is perfectly obvious. Likewise, camps know that, in the end, the staff is where the rubber meets the road. They are the intervention. However, organizations frequently overestimate the abilities of their current staff to achieve the results desired. Careful, rigorous, scientific evaluations of camps' ability to enrich lives routinely find that outcomes are not achieved to the desired level. Sometimes, the reality is drastically different from the desired effect – see the "Issues with evidence that camps often use" appendix in the culture resource for further description of this point.

Thus, the goal here is to offer some thoughts about the nature and importance of finding and creating high-quality staff – selecting for quality, values, beliefs, norms, and then training staff well.

Perhaps competency based interviewing is already in place, but if not, see Bob Ditter's excellent resources on implementing this technique. The book *TopGrading* (Smart, 1999) is another example, but take it with the proverbial grain of salt. There are key job skill sets for every position. Those skills must be present to a sufficient degree. Beyond a program skill, being fun, having some leadership ability, a love for children, and being safe, camps want staff who are emotionally intelligent (see those resources).

That's a tall order right there, but there's more. In addition, camps need to hire staff that are in synch with their vision, mission, structures, processes, activities, and policies. You want someone who is in line with the norms and values alive at your camp. You want someone who is going to gel with how and why things are done at camp. This crucial point, which is often not fully addressed in camp programs, is covered in depth in the "Enculturation" section of the culture book.

It usually isn't possible to hire a staff that comes with the complete skill set necessary to be effective in the camp environment. To that end, there is a lengthy orientation and training period. In order to actually have a high-caliber staff capable of being instrumental in achieving your outcomes, the training must meet the best practices that have proven so vital. Those practices are detailed in the "Staff training best practices" resource.

The "Innovation and continuous improvement" and "Benchmarking" resources should also be valuable in approaching the task of finding and training exceptional staff. The "From good to great" resource also highlights the critical nature of exceptional staff.

## Training

### Trainers

Staff can be trained to understand camp structure, processes, policies, and obtain at least some basic skills in working with campers. Staff can also be initially trained (and inspired) to engender the spirit of the program, as opposed to just following the letter or rote of the daily activities. To achieve such ends, trainers need to follow the tenets of highly effective trainings (see staff training best practices), be very knowledgeable themselves, and have the time and ability to carry training beyond orientation. The enculturation section and appendix of the culture resource is also extremely vital. Excellent results require competent trainers.

Beyond training, it is important to have a lot of staff (preferably a majority) who already possess the competencies required to best serve the children. These people may have gained their skills while being trained at camp in years past, or have already received that training in another environment. Such a staff is also invaluable in setting the cultural norms and values. The need for some largely qualified staff from the get-go is discussed next.

### The Billion Dollar Mistake

The Billion Dollar Mistake (Alliger, 1989; Goleman, 1998; & Tracey, 1995) refers to what Fortune 500 companies have learned the hard (and expensive) way – soft skills are extremely difficult to train and large improvements are rare. The recent book “Now, Discover Your Strengths” (Buckingham, 2001) is another redress of this issue. Having staff follow a prescribed program and be competent to teach activities (hard skills) is usually done well. Training evaluations and best-practice studies reveal that hard skills are relatively easy to train (Goleman, 1998). It’s the softer skills that lead to the social and personal outcomes at camp that are so difficult to train and find in young adults (Ballou, 1997; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Goleman, 1998). There are two things to do with this knowledge: a) hire the best staff you can, and b) utilize best practice training methods so that you can boost the skills of the staff you hire.

Camps often feel they hire just such an exceptional staff, but if that were true and commonplace, we would not witness the alarming rate at which large organizations, parent trainings, and camps have not met their objectives despite taking care hiring their staff. Keep in mind that years of experience playing tennis or teaching school does not necessarily make a great tennis player or a master teacher, and this is even more true for softer skills. Even exceptional college students rarely have the skills necessary. They haven’t had the time and experience to hone their behavioral ability – witness the long time it takes the apprentice method prevalent in professional trainings today to work.

The cost for the Fortune 500 companies was estimated to be a billion dollars due to poor hiring (hiring for hard skills and hoping the soft ones could be trained) and attempting to train people not fully utilizing best-practice methods. The cost for camps is falling short of the abilities and performance necessary to be an effective part of the intervention. The campers aren’t served as they should be or need to be. Competent people who are able to fully perform their roles as they must cover for those who can’t. Furthermore, the pool of appropriate staff available to return for another summer is diminished.

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## The blood supply

### D i v e r s e

One of the main reasons racial diversity is valued in organizations is that diverse work teams often have unique perspectives. The combination of the diverse skill sets and perspectives can be a powerful mix. It is one of the elements of a learning organization – see that resource.

Likewise, having a staff with diverse educational/experience backgrounds can be very valuable. Having some professional teachers on staff is often helpful. Utilizing professionals with a background in NOLS, Outward Bound, Project Adventure, or a similar background (see Association for Experiential Education) frequently offers perspectives and skill sets that enhance programs. Individuals with a strong scouting background can also bring a valuable perspective. In short, peppering the staff with highly qualified, diverse professionals raises the performance standard of the entire staff, as well as creating positive shifts in the organizational culture.

### F r e s h

A high staff return rate can be an incredible boon, but one that has potential drawbacks as well. Many camps with high return rates have a very insular focus. Both the exposure to new ideas and perspectives as well as the challenges they bring, tend to happen to a lesser degree. The infusion of fresh blood can hasten innovation and keep perspectives open; however, for fresh blood to be useful, you have to let it circulate. The “critical caveat” section in the enculturation section in the culture resource addresses this point in greater detail.

On a smaller scale, this can also happen to an administrative team, or as it was affectionately called once, the “Brain Trust.” This is especially (but not only) the case if *any* of the following are present: the team is strongly cohesive, it makes decisions in isolation, it has a closed leadership style, or there is decision pressure. If new staff members are rarely placed on the administrative team (with open access and equal say), having a counselor or two take part in the meetings can be effective.

### S u p e r i o r s u p e r v i s o r s

These people are experts in the program and camp. They are also *competent practitioners* in the realms of behavior management, self-esteem, social skills, and other central outcomes of interest. Supervisors have *specific and accurate knowledge*, which they’ve had *extensive practice* implementing in real-world settings. They model and scaffold with staff to continuously train them (see best practices in staff training resource).

A best practice is to have a first time supervisor mentored by an accomplished one. The mentoring role should be structured, active, and welcomed by both participants.

## Conclusion

This resource has been a hodgepodge of briefly addressed issues under the rubric of organizational factors. The goal was to offer food for thought in several areas. Session lengths need to be examined in terms of outcomes desired and outcomes that are possible given other constraints. Camper return rates are not a good indicator of outcomes beyond fun and satisfaction. A high staff return rate brings many benefits, some of which were detailed. The “magic number” of staff necessary to meet the needs of the campers, staff, and camp was addressed through a series of statements and questions. Camps often operate on an understaffed basis, and the consequences of such a state on five levels were addressed. Finally, the quality of the staff was discussed in terms of the selection process, training, and specifically designing the professional demographics of the camp.

As I noted in the introduction, which also seems a fitting conclusion, “These very brief discussions are intended to provoke thought, as well as provide some specific ideas. The topics presented here are definitely considered by camps, and often agonized about at length. The goal is to hopefully offer a nugget or two of new information, or new lines of thought. To those ends, your camp might be able to enhance its ability to improve the outcomes of a camp experience for campers and staff.”