

What I Learned (And You Can Too!) From Being A Camp Counselor

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This past summer, I decided that it wasn't time to grow up yet. I may be in college, I may finally not need my parents' signature on paperwork, but I wasn't ready to give up on a summer of fun. Therefore, I was not going to get an internship; but instead I would work at a summer camp.



Now, I'm not trying to say that internships can't be fun—you learn a lot and maybe even get to work in a field you've always dreamed of having a career in. Yet, I wasn't ready to devote my summer to finding a “real” job. After attending a sleep-away camp called Southwoods in upstate New York on the beautiful Lake Paradox for four of my teen years, I was ecstatic that I was finally of age to be a counselor there. I signed up for the nine weeks of camp without looking back. Why would I spend my summer sitting on my butt on Long Island when I could finally be a camper again?

I was in for a rude awakening. Upon returning to Southwoods, I immediately learned that being a counselor was the complete opposite of being a camper. Yeah, you get to have so much fun, yet you have to be in charge of kids... caring for their every need, calming them down when they're upset, knowing every right word to say, mediating problems with their friends, getting them to participate in activities, making sure they don't come in contact with whatever it is they're allergic to or else they'll just die and it's all your fault... Oh, and also pretty much being their mom for the weeks that they're there. I kept thinking, *I'm only 18, how am I supposed to take care of these eleven-year-old girls?*

Needless to say, the first week of staff orientation made me feel like I was in way over my head. Not to mention, in my case, I was a group leader for the second session of kids who came (there are two sessions—each lasts for 3 ½ weeks of the summer) which meant that I was not only the one who had to deal with every little problem my campers had, but who was also in charge of the other staff in my cabin.

When I finally got over my fear of having to be responsible for these girls, I had the best summer of my life. I got to live on a beautiful lake up in the Adirondack Mountains, which meant a lot of running around, canoeing, rock climbing, hiking, taking part in sports, and water tubing. I got to be a best friend, but also a role model to these eleven-year-old girls who thought every weird thing I did was mesmerizing.



Yes, I was exhausted 24/7 and never had a moment to even take a seat or show that I was about to collapse on the ground and hibernate. However, finding a way to stay energized, positive, and happy for my campers made me learn values in life that I would have never learned from an internship. For nine weeks of my summer, I was worry free. Every time one of my campers complained about having to go to an activity they didn't like—archery, baseball, whatever it was—all I could think about was how they had this opportunity to be with their friends at an amazing camp, yet they were complaining about these insignificant problems. It put what is really important in life into perspective.

That being said, the sense of leadership and communication skills I gained from being a camp counselor was indescribable. I went from never being able to soothe any of my crying friends or knowing what to do in bad situations, to having about five pep talks a day with crying girls and having to clean up throw up at ungodly hours of the night about four times. When I look back at the first time I had a camper cry, I remember how I sat next to her, debating with my faltering hand about two inches away from her if I should pat her back to soothe her. By the end of the summer, my campers felt comfortable coming to me with any of their problems.

It amazes me how spending nine weeks in a bubble, rarely using my phone or laptop, not being able to use makeup or a hair straightener, and wearing gym clothes with a staff shirt every day changed me. Yet, I realized one thing: all that pretentious stuff doesn't matter. Being able to go outdoors and disconnect from technology made me really take a step back, breathe in, and admire the beauty of this world.

One morning I got to go out on the lake around sunrise while my campers went water skiing. I sat in the boat and watched one girl get up on the skis for her first time, while the fog was right atop the water, and the mountains surrounding the boat as we glided on. It was the most breathtaking sight I'd ever seen—something I would've never witnessed had I been interning at a desk.

This summer, I was stressed, I was exhausted, and most of the time, I was so annoyed with the things my campers were complaining about that I just wanted to break down in tears. Yet, every situation I faced helped transform me into a different person. I learned to not care about what others think; because at camp, you can be goofy and no one will judge you. I learned to see the best in any situation, and to just stop complaining, because being pessimistic just brings you down in life. When you look at things positively, you gain so much more out of an experience. I had the best summer with those eleven-year-old girls—I got to randomly dance and dress in costumes whenever I wanted, I got to climb mountains and see the world from different perspectives, I witnessed my campers overcoming their fears, and I had some of my proudest moments—not just from my own actions, but from watching my girls succeed—and that, my friends, is greater than any feeling in *this world*.

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