

TEN RULES FOR CAMP COUNSELORS

By Jeff Barrow

1) REMEMBER YOU ARE CALLED TO WORK AT A CAMP.

My friend and mentor, Jerry Manlove, is a champion of the word *vocation*. He reminds us that a call is sometimes to be asked to do what you really don't want to do. By its very nature, a call invites us to step beyond our self-imposed limits.

The truth is, no rational person ever decided to work at a camp. Camp is for those who, no matter what practical reason they might offer, are drawn to a camp in order to satisfy some deep hunger to discover themselves and to give of themselves. It is for those who long to hear the voice of God.

2) YOUR PRIMARY GIFT IS THAT OF PLANTING SEEDS.

Like most camp counselors, you will probably enter with a wonderful, even heroic sense of what you can accomplish with kids. Don't let anyone try to steal your enthusiasm nor your idealism. At the same time you will quickly discover that the time is so very short, the daily routine so often mundane, that you will never be able to accomplish all that you hope to accomplish, nor will you know the full extent of the impact you have had on the lives of others.

Nevertheless your job is so tremendously important. Your willingness to listen, the little extra things you do to make a day more fun, the patient encouragement of others, your willingness to forgive and be forgiven, your ability to be vulnerable will all be treasures that campers will learn to appreciate long after they have left camp.

3) DON'T BE AFRAID TO GET YOUR FEET WET!

Dare to try new things and things you're not good at. Particularly as you enter the job market, the world will teach you to capitalize on your strengths and try to mask your shortcomings. Living in a camp community offers you the wonderful freedom to explore all those things which are not listed in among your greatest strengths and greatest interests.

If you are willing to take such risks you will become a wonderful source of inspiration to uncertain, fearful campers and you will find great personal satisfaction in trying new things.

4) REMEMBER THAT THE LAND IS HOLY.

There is a tremendous difference between trying to worship nature (a common sin for camp staff) and in learning more of the creative, loving, playful God who stands behind the creation. If you take time each day to observe without intrusion the intricate, sometimes tragic, sometimes delicate set of relationships which exist before you, you will sooner or later be lured into the presence of that which is utterly sacred and will begin to see the breadth and depth of God's care for the creation.

My own observation is that God made the sun to renew our strength, the stars to inspire the Psalmist, storms to evoke our humility and the moon as a reason for cowgirls to kiss cowboys. Therefore, make sure to pack sunglasses, a Bible, rain gear and a pair of cowboy boots before you head west.

5) ALWAYS PUT YOUR CAMPERS FIRST.

Anyone who tells you he or she came to work at camp without some selfish motives are fibbing. We are all drawn in part by our own need to be loved and fulfilled. Those are legitimate expectations for being a part of the community.

However, I have observed time and again that camp staffs that become truly exceptional communities -- those individuals who experience the greatest personal fulfillment -- are the ones who lose themselves in the lives of their campers. There is some great blessing which comes in daring to believe in your most difficult camper, in having the patience to try to get inside her own little world, in having the compassion to see the beautiful, fragile creature beneath the tough exterior.

6) NEVER COMPROMISE ON ISSUES OF SAFETY.

You can improvise almost anything else at camp. Some of the best counselors are ones who read the manual and immediately discard it for their own outrageous ideas and ways of doing things.

The one area you don't want to ad lib is in the area of safety. Learn the safety rules and first aid procedures and then over learn them. If you implement them from the beginning you'll be more relaxed and your campers will have more fun.

7) LEARN TO IDENTIFY HORSE MANURE WHEN YOU SEE IT.

You'll encounter a lot of it everywhere you go, both literally and figuratively. Overall, people will respect you more if you learn to call it by its common name rather than any of its many pseudonyms. Don't get upset if you happen to step in it. Appreciate it for its nutrient value. Even learn to sling it if you want to. If you learn to accept it for what it is, you'll be less apt to consume it. (This rule is more important than you may think it is when you first read it.)

8) REMEMBER THE VALUE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN RELIEVING STRESS AND RENEWING THE SPIRIT.

Of course there are physiological explanations for why this is true, but for me it goes far beyond a discussion of endorphins. It has also to do with engaging a whole dimension of ourselves which we have lost in a pampered, push button world. Physical activity can include jogging on one's day off, but it is also about starting a fire on a cold, frosty morning, getting caught up in a game of capture the flag with a bunch of fifth graders, helping someone with chores when you're already dog tired, having the freedom to get dirty when there's no shower nearby, or walking an extra mile for a friend or a stranger.

9) EXPECT TO MEET JESUS IN OUT OF THE WAY PLACES.

It was no accident that Jesus was born in a manger or died on a cross. Part of God's plan for salvation unfolds in God's ability to find God's way into the hidden crevices of our lives. Sometimes God enters our world not at the point of our strength, but instead at the point of our utter poverty. The Gospel of Luke is a collection of all those others, all those on the outside looking in, the poor, the blind, the lame, Samaritans and other known sinners, who hear the Word and begin to believe in it. They in turn, not the righteous of the day, become witnesses of the Good News.

This summer, you will meet some who are exceedingly religious, some who are searching, some who are on the fringes. Expect to encounter Christ somewhere in your summer experience, but don't jump to conclusions too quickly as to when and where that might happen.

10) DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT YOUR LIFE.

My dad said so very little about his experience in World War II. Thus I remember vividly the night he told me about being on a ship in the middle of the Pacific when suddenly they were surrounded by a fleet of Japanese destroyers. He said simply "I was afraid, then I cried, then I prayed" and I've never been afraid like that again. For my dad it was not whether he was spared as much as it was a matter of his discovering that he was not alone, which brought him great comfort and strength.

If you learn nothing else this summer, if you discover one thing that you can keep, not for fleeting weeks, not for months but for a lifetime, it is that wonderful sense that you are not alone in the world. Your most noble accomplishments, your most miserable failings, your excessive pride and your nagging self doubts, all pale in comparison to having shared the company of a God who has always been there, who has never been able to look at us with anything other than loving eyes.

If you somehow begin to comprehend the truth of that promise and live it, you will begin to touch the desperately searching souls of your campers with the news that life is a gift and not a burden.