

New England ACA Spring Conference
ECP – DEPARTMENT HEADS

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What skill set do you look for in a department head (not specialty specific)?

Leader; Good Listener; Willingness to Help; Patience; Follower; Enthusiasm; Creativity; Confident; Buys into the Camp Culture; Part of the Leadership Team – Not “Just a Counselor”; Positive; Makes Good Choices; Motivated and a Motivator; Role Model; Flexibility; Jewish (Religious) Identity; Likes Children; Caring; Proven Track Record in Teaching a Particular Skill

What kind of interview/discussion questions do you use to determine whether or not the candidate has these skills?

- Describe your “Work Ethic” when you are hired to do a job.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What causes you to lose your temper or get stressed? How do you deal with stress?
- What do you think makes you a good candidate for working with kids?
- As a camp counselor, how do you think you might define doing a good job?
- Describe any leadership positions you have had, including volunteer positions.
- What would you most like campers to learn from you at camp?
- What characteristics would you use to describe a good, hard worker and how does this describe or not describe you?
- What is your idea of a good Leader?
- What contributions can you make at camp?
- What areas of strength do you have that you believe you can impart to others as their supervisor/mentor?
- Who is your mentor? Why? Who is a role model to you? Why?
- Are you ready to accept the responsibility for other people’s children?
- Are you ready to accept the responsibility for other staff member’s actions and decisions regarding other people’s children?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What kind of support (from co-workers and supervisors) is most important for you to be successful at camp?
- What annoys you most about the people you work with or your classmates?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a challenging child’s behavior. What did you do? If you could go back, would you have changed anything that you did or said?

What do you do to support your department heads?

- Hold weekly meetings with all department heads. (2 x per week)

- Visit department areas on a regular basis to check in and see how things are going.
- Constant feedback – especially positive feedback.
- Different privileges (in some cases) than regular staff.
- Make oneself even more available to department heads as a voice of the staff.
- Make oneself (dir or asst dir) available at “safe-haven” during specific times of the camp day. (same time each day).
- Bi-weekly “official” performance reviews. You leaders need guidance this way too.
- Bring Refreshments to Reviews
- Follow Through!

What do you do to train your department heads?

- Hold specific training for department heads during orientation.
- Give the department heads tools such as last summer’s lesson plans, write ups of activity areas, etc and go over all of this with each department head.
- Use a particular meeting time during the week to refresh your leaders about their training. Train them on how to package their comments to other staff (especially during evaluation times).
- Professional development prior to camp. (conference, mini-sessions, send them stuff in the mail).

Some Expert Advice We Found Through Doing Research Into This Topic – Which We Wanted to Share!!

Greg Cronin Article: “Creating a Leadership Team is Like Making a Cake”

- Staff are considered or retained on the basis of character and purpose as well as suitability and certifications.

- You must first hire people who, by fundamental character, will possess the ability to be leaders.
- First, decide exactly what qualities are desired and develop a set of questions and scenarios that will help determine the resourcefulness and character of each applicant. Then, design your interviews and tours to evaluate the potential leadership of each applicant given the camp's specific criteria.
- Here is where the magic begins. Hire a cross-section of people who represent each stage of development in terms of maturity, ability, and potential. Have a full understanding of age and gender differences prior to developing the final criteria.
- Make sure interview questions have been carefully designed to illicit the specific responses necessary to complement your returning staff's existing skills.
- For lead counselors and supervisors (main ingredients), develop an interview process that allows them to convey the type of leadership qualities they already possess. Questions should be directed toward determining the inherent abilities of what is considered to be important. If current questions do not CLEARLY reveal attributes such as good communication skills, being personable, coping with stress, having a positive attitude, being creative, showing initiative, having a strong work ethic, relating to campers with special needs, demanding excellence, or possessing good problem-solving skills, then revamp the interview.

William Hendricks and Marlys Hanson: “How to Hire Great Leaders”

- 3 Pieces of the puzzle: Leadership Motivation, Functional Expertise, Industry Knowledge
- Top 10 Critical Behaviors for Effective Management: Visionary, Actively Collaborative, Proactive, Concern for multiple results, Persevering, Seeks to Influence and Empower, Both a Leader and a Doer, Customer-Focuses, Pioneering Spirit, Entrepreneurial Drive

Randall Grayson, Ph.D.: “Magnificent Camp Staff Motivation”

- Set expectations: let staff know what to expect, so that their reality matches (or even exceeds) their expectations. When that is the case, people are satisfied. When expectations are higher than the reality encountered, people are dissatisfied. Working with expectations should be a major part of the hiring process. One camp had the philosophy of trying to talk potential staff out of the job by way of setting some realistic expectations, so that they only hired truly dedicated and informed people. Directors sometimes scoff at driving away staff, which are hard enough to find as it is. Yes, greater recruiting efforts will need to be made, but the payoff is staff motivation, and a better return rate.
- Formal performance reviews: In all cases, people need help meeting the goals set for themselves and the camp. Performance reviews are just a formal and systematic look at the progress being made toward those goals. They serve as a discussion tool around goals that are truly subscribed to by the evaluator and the person being evaluated. Both parties benefit from the clarification of expectations, recognition of efforts well spent, suggestions for improvement, and plans for supportive coaching. It is possible for a performance review to be an enjoyable and useful experience for all involved – rare, but possible.

