

For Camp Counselors Only

Describing your job skills to future employers

by Julie Tippett

In this day when college students lobby for internships and field experience, the professional values of camp counseling seem to take a back seat. In truth, camp counseling is a position which fosters many professional skills, such as responsibility, patience, and flexibility. It is also a position in which one is responsible for children's lives — what could be more important than that?

In a professional market, employers are looking for characteristics that the hard-working camp counselor has gained through summertime experience. While tossing a water-ski rope over a dozen times a day, counselors are solving conflicts, adapting to the needs of various campers, and enhancing their ability to work with others. Identifying these skills and translating them onto a resume is the first step toward a career in any field.

Skills Counselors Build

Working with people is a crucial capacity in any profession. While knowledge of technical skills involving the basics of canoeing or archery remains important in the camp setting, the ability to work as a team player and build a sense of community will give counselors an edge in the professional world.

At camp, the counselor witnesses the workings of a community on a small scale. This environment, much like the set-up of a small business, compels the counselor to take initiative and become a self-starter. While working with others, counselors are able to see the results of their initiatives and receive praise for the measures they have taken.

Spending nearly every minute of every day with a group of people certainly enhances skills in working with others. While these working relationships are established, other traits are also being fostered in the camp setting, such as patience, tenacity, the ability to stick with a job, and being a dedicated employee.

Displaying flexibility ensures an employer that a worker is a leader as well as a team player. Leadership is conveyed at camp in many situations. The camp counselor is not only a leader herself but instills leadership, participation, and cooperation in campers and other staff members. Inspiring others to action shows an employer that a worker cares about the productivity and general operation of an organization.

Selling Skills to an Employer

Translating one's skills to an employer can be as difficult as getting campers to go to bed at night. Career counselors suggest the key is to identify skills and illustrate them accurately and specifically in the resume, cover letter, and job interview.

The use of effective language on a resume will attract the attention of an employer. Action verbs and phrases such as "organized events for all ages" or "developed swimming lesson program" explain a counselor's role in the camp structure. Listing

accomplishments and achievements on the resume demonstrates the results produced in the counselor's position.

In an interview situation, camp anecdotes can provide a colorful description of predicaments that have been handled successfully by the counselor. Conflicts in the cabin are just one example. The counselor handling these conflicts is not just a referee but also a people manager and problem solver. A job candidate relaying these actual stories gives the employer a sampling of techniques exercised in times of distress.

While you're at camp wielding the water-ski rope or brandishing your paintbrush in arts and crafts, stop to think of the tremendous impact you're having on children. Think also of the responsibilities and rewards you have been given through the camp experience. Dedication, loyalty, compassion, and consistency comprise the actions of a camp counselor day after day in the camp setting. Any employer oblivious to such attributes would certainly be passing up a good thing.

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