

## Counselor Heroes

For years we have talked about hiring "counselor heroes". A friend unfamiliar with summer camps asked me to define what we mean by this and to explain what we do to get "heroes". I thought you might appreciate how I responded.

Our heroes are young men and women committed to being exceptional role models to our campers. These are individuals whose talents justify easier hours and higher pay, but who understand the power of working with young people (of course, they also enjoy having an active and exciting summer). While these heroes teach the campers a great deal, they inevitably learn some powerful lessons themselves. These include the joy of teaching, leadership skills, forming friendships with different age groups, and the fact that hard work and great fun can go together.

How do we go about gathering these heroes? We start with a very clear idea of who we are looking for. Our counselors do not all have the same personality type (for example, it is important to have both rambunctious and soothing counselors at camp), but they do need to have certain characteristics. They must have a positive, optimistic bias towards life - they look for solutions rather than focus on problems. They must enjoy children. They must be fun. They must have an interest in excellence. With this in mind, we go on the road.

Each year, we spend over four months recruiting on over 25 campuses. We often send two separate teams out simultaneously for weeks at a time. Once we identify great candidates, we put them through a rigorous selection process highlighted with interviews that last roughly 2 hours each. We also require them to commit to some strict behavioral guidelines, including a strict anti-alcohol policy (the policy is not a neo-prohibitionist stance on our part, but is instead a way to assure that our counselors are focused on our campers and not on their nights off). Once we have found individuals that are fun, talented and committed, we put them through a 12-day orientation (the longest we are aware of) to make sure that they have the skills to work with your child.

Through this process, we create the magic of camp. We believe that you can have a wonderful camp on an acre of asphalt if you have the right counselors. Of course, if you have a beautiful site on a highland lake, that only makes the magic greater, but it all comes down to the counselors. I hope you take the time to get to know your camper's counselor this summer (you might even write his or her a letter just for fun).

Steve and Susie Baskin