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# Do Employers Understand Summer Camp?

Sam Hirt | December 17, 2023

We need to educate the workforce on why they should hire people who worked at camp.



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As someone who leads messaging for a large, independent YMCA camp, and as someone who used to work in communications for the American Camp Association, I know these two things are true: people with a camp experience really get the importance of that experience, and those without that experience can be easily convinced. It just takes a little effort.

If you believe that to be true, then let's look at who needs to be convinced: employers.

At Camp Tecumseh, we are tirelessly explaining to potential hires at career fairs the value of working at camp. We get on our pedestal and tell the engineering student who wants a mechanical engineering internship why they should work at camp, and that they'll learn the soft skills that all employers need. We've been doing this for years, and I know many other camps are doing the same, because I've talked to lots of camp directors and camp marketing staff about our shared mission in educating 18- to 22-year-olds on this value.

While we should continue to do this, a great deal of effort also needs to be put toward educating employers and the workforce in general about camp's power and importance in training and preparing future full-time employees.

Now, where to start?

# Tap into Your Camp Staff Alumni

Many camps have a vast network of alumni working in a variety of jobs. Whether you have an intricate and detailed database of your alumni (kudos to you if you do), or you're like the majority of us who sort of have something started but mostly know where people work off the top of our heads, it's time to take advantage of all those people who know how to talk about working at camp.

If you are early in your alumni efforts and are looking to build that database, one thing that's worked well at Camp Tecumseh is something we call Alumni Notes. From the small college playbook, we send a call for Alumni Notes about once a year, where we ask alumni to tell us what they're up to — where they work, where they live, if they recently had a life change like marriage or kids, or anything else they want to tell us. We give them a deadline and publish the notes in our quarterly magazine.

Our alumni enjoy it. It's a chance to see what people are doing who they may not be friends with on social media.

It's also a great way to see where everyone works and to add to a list of potential people to tap into when it comes to finding and developing staff.

Engage that network. Be open about looking for staff, but consider if there's also a chance for those alumni to mentor your current staff in relevant fields. Remind your alumni that their workplace should look for former camp staff as exemplary employees to add to their full-time teams when they have openings.

## Talk to College Career Centers

Most of what was just mentioned is what colleges do to ensure a high percentage of their graduates are finding full-time employment. College career centers know and understand this process, but they may not see just how beneficial working at camp can be for college-aged people.

Again, it doesn't take much to convince them. They just need someone to tell them all about it.

When we've attended career fairs, or when we table at colleges and universities, I have found that those who work in the career center are eager to hear your feedback and to find ways to meet your needs on campus. And as people with lots of facetime with all kinds of employers and students, they are great relationships to make.

## Get to Know Local Employers

Do you have connections to employers in your area? We have a couple of large employers near Camp Tecumseh that hire recent graduates for entry-level, full-time jobs, and those are ideal employers to get to know.

But beyond those large employers, what connections do you have, or can you make, in your community to continue to spread the word that everyone should work at camp?

There is only so much we can do to show the general public and employers the benefits of working at camp. But if we all focused on our alumni, career centers that we are in contact with, and our local area of employers, we could make a difference nationally.

*This blog was written on behalf of [Project Real Job](#) whose purpose is to support camps in their efforts to recruit, hire, and retain staff.*

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*Photo courtesy of Lakeland Hills Family YMCA in Mountain Lakes, NJ*

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