

## **SEND YOUR CEO TO SUMMER CAMP**

By Stephanie MacKendrick, CWC President

As a parent, the last thing you want is a call from your child's school. Worse yet is a call from your child's summer camp, because it's gotta be something you don't want to hear about since they are not in the habit of calling unless they really have to...

So it was that this summer I received a call from my son's camp, at which point a series of Pavlovian responses set in, having been honed through dozens of calls over the years. You have to understand that my son is a delightful young man, but prone to a rather individualistic way of looking at life that doesn't always mesh perfectly with institutional settings. What could it be now? My mind raced through the possibilities. "He wouldn't start fires, would he? I'm sure he hasn't organized a camper rebellion – no, that was just idle talk last time we visited."

As always, the camp instantly reassured me that it was not an emergency call. On the phone was the assistant director, "\*Brad", calling to say there had been a spot of mischief by the senior boys, including my son, who had apparently taken the mischief one step further, and in so doing, had crossed one of those "fine lines".

Brad, who is probably all of 21, was tactful and constructive. He approached the problem – both with my son and with me – sensitively, yet at no time could either of us ever get the impression that there was any wiggle room; their line was firmly drawn. However, in addition to the firmness, they had taken the time to consider whether this was out of character for my son or a recurrent issue (I was grateful to find out they considered it out of character). They provided consequences that made perfect sense. They then had an in-depth discussion with my son to talk about leadership, how the behaviour was self-defeating and, in so doing, created a camper who not only was unlikely to re-offend, but who understood the nature and importance of good judgement and had bought into the notion that it was in his best interests to set a good example.

As far as I'm concerned, it was alchemy (which any of you with teenage boys will understand) and it convinced me that we should be developing management expertise for corporations throughout the world at summer camps.

I say this with tongue planted not-so-firmly in cheek. Although by definition a summer camp deals in the business of fun for children, here is a setup that not only handles incidents superbly as they arise, but also has a few other key management best practices under their belts. There are many corporations that could take their cue from the guys in khaki shorts and red t-shirts.

They have a strong succession plan. Each year, I can see various staff members progress through the ranks as new leaders are groomed. These guys have bench strength! They do extensive training (at least compared to anything I ever experienced as a camp

counsellor) and staff briefings. They have clear standards of skills and behaviour and they take steps to ensure compliance.

But what they really have that I think is all too often missing in other settings is leadership. This is an organization that works on values and character, that pays attention to the spirit of the rules and the outcomes those rules are meant to support. We've all experienced the opposite – organizations that comply to the letter, but in a way that puts the process above the ultimate goal, whether it's educating children, or entertaining them at summer camp.

And it's the same for businesses. Rules and regulations are great, but they don't work if you don't have the leadership in place to ensure that rules and compliance are value-driven.

A good example is the response to the corporate ethics crisis spawned by Enron, et al. More and tougher rules in themselves won't solve the problem. Without strong leadership ethical corporate values will not rise above the need for short-term results.

So my advice would be to create a summer camp for CEOs, train them all to be counsellors and don't let them go home until they can all clearly distinguish right from wrong.

(\*Names are changed to protect the innocent.)

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