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“On-The-Job Training–At Camp”

Working As A Camp Counselor Provides Teens With Valuable Experience And Life Skills

By [Jess Michaels](#)

In today’s competitive job market, many parents feel their teen or young adult should fill their resume with summer jobs and internships that will give them an edge in their chosen profession after graduation. While internships can be a great learning experience, there are few jobs that can better prepare them with the life skills and experiences they will need in the workforce than spending the summer as a camp counselor.

“More employers look at the counselor job as the most valuable internship a teen can have,” says Todd Rothman, owner and director of [Deerkill Day Camp](#) in Suffern, NY. “Many executives were former counselors, so they know the challenges of the job.”

What other job entrusts a teen or young adult with the responsibility of caring for a group of children and making sure all their needs are being met? “If you can manage a group of 8-year-old boys through a full day of dodgeball, swimming, soccer, and ceramics, then you can handle any boardroom in the country,” Rothman adds.

Justin Mayer, director of [Timber Lake West](#), a co-ed overnight camp in Roscoe, NY, cites the value of the leadership skills camp counselors gain in their role. “Counselors lead a group, inspire and motivate children, and juggle schedules every day,” he says. “Those are skills that are more valuable than making coffee and copies at an internship.” Each day, counselors are gaining important skills that will help them prepare for the demands of being successful adults in life and work in the 21st Century. “Counselors have to think outside of the box at camp, and are constantly problem solving,” adds Scott Rothschild, director of [Kenmont Kenwood](#), an overnight brother/sister camp in Kent, CT.

Over the summer, counselors work in groups, just like in a typical work environment. Counselors learn to work on a team and be team players, which is an extremely valuable skill in any future occupation. Counselors are also constantly managing time and multitasking, skills that are important in any profession. Rothman adds: “All at the same time, you’ll have some campers who need to go to archery, some to swimming, and others to arts and crafts. As their counselor, you need to make sure everyone gets to where they need to go and arrives on time.”

Each day, counselors are problem solving. When managing a group of children, there are always a number of moving parts and the camp staff often has to make quick decisions. “If it starts to rain in the middle of an activity, counselors need to think quickly and change the plan. They are constantly thinking on their toes and making decisions in real time,” Rothschild says.

In the camp environment, teens and young adults learn the responsibility of having a job. “You have to be available 24/7. You work when you are tired, or have a cold,” Mayer says. Teens also learn that at work, you can’t always get what you want. Rothschild adds: “I’ll have counselors ask to have the same day off as their friends, which I can’t always make happen. They learn to cope and move forward, realizing this is a job and things don’t always go the way you want them to go.” Counselors receive real-time feedback every day from camp directors, division leaders, and campers. “When a camper grabs for your hand, gives you a smile or tells you a story, you know you are doing a good job,” Rothman says.

There aren’t many summer jobs that give young adults such autonomy. Counselors lead a group, help campers with all their daily needs, and are role models to their campers. “A good camp director hires the best people, gives them training and support, and then empowers them to do their job,” Rothman adds. “Most directors will also go to the mat for their counselors and help them succeed. We tell staff: ‘We expect the best of you and you should expect the best from us. Once you leave camp, you will always have our support and we will be a reference.’ We remember all staff members, and they aren’t just a face or a name.”

Now, can you name an internship that can provide your child with all of this?