

Trail Blazers

Alumni Staff Scroll - Prepared 2019

To the Current Staff of Trail Blazers: For the past two weeks you have learned a lot and have been preparing for the summer ahead. Whether it was 1 year ago or 50 years ago we sat in the same spot you are sitting now. Below are the lessons that we still remember from our training and our summers:

The Trail Blazers Program

- Remember that your small camp is your "home in the woods." not just a place where you hang your mosquito net; and that day to day "living" in your small camp as a family is as much a part of the program (and then some) as the activities you leave your small camp to do (swimming, hiking, archery, biking, climbing, whatever). So, be sure to spend time in your small camp, making it comfortable and pretty (e.g., build suitcase racks or end tables) or working on crafts, letter writing, group projects, or playing games. Go on a "wood run" and build a great tall wood pile for Pow-Wow; go on a scavenger hunt around your small camp to discover its wonders; get up early to listen to the special birds that share your home; sit around the Pow-Wow circle or at your table to plan your days, giving each child a chance to be heard. And, most importantly, set aside a good length of time for a well planned Pow-Wow each night.
- If you're a European counselor: make sure you understand how much an ounce, a gallon, an inch, a foot, ... is. It's kind of hard to estimate anything without some awareness about the American measurement system.
- If you invite the waterfront/kitchen/... staff over to your Pow-wow, be sure that they don't rowdy your kids up and then leave you to get them to go to bed and to sleep. In other words: invite them over and in the same breathe ask them to put your kids to bed.

Living in the Woods

- Using a latrine for the first time is rough, but look on the bright side, unless you're really unlucky it will never overflow.
- Try to keep a ziploc bag in your pocket as a habit. It can be useful for many things like gathering trash on the trails, collecting tinder, or holding dropped items/equipment.
- Make sure you have - at all times - a stack of dry wood, sassafras, kindling and the bigger chunks...
- When you stumble into a bees nest: DON'T move... FREEZE and you will have the best chance of not being stung too much or even not at all if you encourage others to run off, so the bees are probably following them instead of stinging you.

- If you do cook out: make sure you don't cook where you sleep and change the clothes you were cooking in. Otherwise a bear might think you're his next meal.
- In New York City interacting with nature generally means "shooing away or killing" something (pigeon, rat, cockroach). Realize that is what the kids are used to and take a few minutes to show how to appreciate and co-exist with nature at camp. Take a moment to appreciate the roller-coaster flight of the Goldfinch over the donkey pen, to count (and avoid) all of the red efts that come out after the rain, and observe the resourcefulness of chipmunks storing up nuts.

Co-Working

- Support one another. The summer can be full of stress and aggravation. You need to be there for each other.
- Get out of your comfort zone. As co-workers, don't just do the things each of you like to do and are good at, even if it seems like you perfectly complement each other. In other words, don't fall into "roles" (e.g., craft person, fire builder, cook, game leader, song leader, disciplinarian). Instead, learn from each other and alternate roles.

Working with Kids

- Find something positive about each camper on the first day. When they are driving you crazy every day after, reflect on that positive.
- Ask former campers for help and ideas. Ask new campers as well.
- Remember to breathe!
- Be willing to look silly.
- The camper that drives you crazy the most probably also needs you the most.
- Don't forget the quiet camper - be sure to include them.
- Overseas counselors - you have an advantage as you can always say "I don't understand, explain it to me"
- Many campers have never experienced the dark of the woods - we discovered one of our campers was "night blind" - no one knew prior to that because he lived in the city where it is never completely dark.
- Listen with your brain, not just your ears, when a camper says "Idonwanna" think about what they might be not saying and complete the sentence in your head before you act. So, "Idonwanna go swimming (because I don't know how to swim); Idonwanna ride the ugly donkey (because I weigh too much and might hurt him); Idonwanna go to the Great Hall for lunch (because I want your attention and figure you'll stay here to try to talk me into it), and many more Idonwannas. . .
- If you work with the smaller children: Always have at least one spare set of sheets at hand.
- Make sure you keep the kids busy or they will keep you busy.
- Remember to correct in private and praise in public!

- Remember that if you are cold, so are your campers and sometimes the little ones don't realize -- if you have a sweatshirt on in the Dining Hall or Wanagan, they should too!
- At all times: stay calm and think before acting.
- Swim with the kids. It's a relief for everyone and the best relationship-builder.

Take Care of Yourself

- When flying on a plane they always tell you to put your oxygen mask on before you take care of others. The same holds true at Trail Blazers. You can't help the campers if your own needs aren't met. Be sure to get enough sleep and eat all meals.
- If you want to save some coins, buy a box of powdered laundry detergent and leave it in your suitcase. Scoop some out into a ziploc baggie to take with you to the laundromat on your days off.
- Wool blend socks can be itchy, but worth it.
- Keep a stash of chocolate best are in the double tree or in the lodge. It comes in handy when you are stressed. (Note: peanut M&M's are highly recommended).
- Be good to the kitchen staff and they will be good to you.
- Go visit the Raymondskills Falls on a day off.
- Go up to Sunrise Mountain at night time. Grand view...

Embrace Trail Blazers

- Learn the songs and be willing to sing them. You can always be enthusiastic, even if not on key.
- You will probably get more out of this experience than the campers. It is a life changing summer. You will carry it with you the rest of your life. Embrace the process.
- Recognize any privilege you have. See where others may not have the same. Seek balance.
- Make the most of it: laugh often, breath deeply and know you are making a difference - in the life of a child as well as your own. Have fun!
- Love these buildings, these small camps, Lake Mashipacong, this property. Learn and embrace the history of Trail Blazers.
- Believe in yourself. You will cry this summer. You will hug, even if you are a Brit that doesn't believe in touching other humans. Be there for your coworkers, for your campers, and for yourself. You are about to experience the most amazing summer of your life.
- Embrace your mistakes. We all make them.
- It's the people you meet - both campers and counselors - that will go on to do great and small things. Treasure that as it will bring long conversations, reflections, connections long into the future.
- Enjoy every moment of the day, vagabond, lake, showers count, thumbs up for a full portion and the magic of camp. No matter where you go you will always carry the experience of TrailBlazers with you.

Finally, Trail Blazers has the power to be a formative experience for you as well as the children, but you have to be brave and go with it. This summer will be tough, and there will be times that you want to quit, but when you push through, you'll come out stronger and the lessons you learn at Trail Blazers will help you so much in life. It will get hard... but YOU CAN DO THIS!

*The previous generations of counselors, enablers, program staff, nurses/emt,
waterfront and kitchen staff*