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RAISING THE BAR: Staff Development

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Are you concerned for your churches? I don't mean the churches that support your camp, although you should be concerned for them too. What I am referring to are the "churches" you plant—your staff.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:28 that despite everything he suffered, his greatest burden was his daily concern for all the churches. Paul was a fantastic church planter, and one thing that is clear is that he had a real burden for the spiritual growth of the churches he started. He says in verse 29, "Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?" (NLT) How is that for concern?

Do you have a similar concern for the staff you will be shepherding this summer? In many ways the staff that will serve at your camp is like a "church" for which you are responsible. Every staff member has distinct needs and gifts, just like the churches that Paul planted back in the early days of the faith.

So how can you help your "church" grow? How can you strengthen those who are weak? How can you equip them so that when they leave your care at the end of the summer they will not be led astray?

The area of spiritual development is of vital importance. Many of your college students and high school students will arrive at camp suffering from "dehydration." They are not being spiritually fed, and you will have a great opportunity to provide them with solid Biblical teaching that can help sustain them. You will have an excellent opportunity to lead them to the spring of Living Water. Are you ready for such a challenge?

Through my work with Character Building Ministries, I have heard the success stories that directors have experienced in the area of spiritual development, but I have also heard their frustrations and discouragements. Let me share some suggestions based on the successes and some ideas to cope with the frustrations.

Developing a staff that hungers and thirsts for God (as described in Psalm 63) begins with you. It doesn't start with expensive curriculum or seminars; it begins with you daily going before the Lord in your own personal quiet time—studying, meditating and seeking God. Then you must strive to begin to get the camp's leadership on the same page. You can only achieve as much as the leadership team envisions. If you don't ask God to do great things and don't expect your staff to grow much, then they probably won't. What are your expectations and goals for summer 2002?

Write them down, prioritize them, and pray over them.

Once you get a spiritual mindset developed and nurtured in the camp's leadership team, then comes the next step—developing a program that facilitates spiritual growth. This needs to be a program that communicates to your summer staff that you are serious about their spiritual formation. This vision is communicated by providing solid Biblical teaching that encourages and captures the bigger picture of your ministry—leading campers to Christ for the glory of God. One of the biggest problems I see with frustrated directors is that they shy away from the meatier and deeper truths of the Christian faith. Don't underestimate the spiritual maturity and comprehension of your staff. It is almost always better to aim high—seeking to raise the spirituality of the staff, rather than to aim in the middle and challenge no one. Let them ask questions if they don't understand the teaching, or better yet, let them seek answers in the Scripture.

In order for your staff to minister effectively to campers (no matter what their role at camp) they must themselves be ministered unto. Group worship and group Bible study—as important as they are—cannot replace regular personal quiet time with the Lord. That is ultimately what CBM's devotional books are about. Each summer we produce a tool to help staff members equip themselves in the Word of God. Be protective of the time your staff members need to have personal devotions and be diligent to follow up with them. When was the last time you asked someone what God was doing in their life or how someone's prayer life was? Do it this summer and you will see an amazing difference in the spiritual level of the staff.

Perhaps the most often heard frustration is that directors do all of this and more—they provide their staff with a devotional and may even provide time in the schedule for them to be alone with God, but the staff won't utilize it. You must remember the old proverb, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink." That is very frustrating, but be reminded that you will be judged by God, not on whether they used what was given them, but rather on whether you took the responsibility to be sure that they were well equipped.

Other examples of things you can do to raise the spiritual bar at your camp are establishing prayer partners, encouraging accountability groups, enforcing proper time off for physical rest, providing resources for their growth *after* camp, as well as modeling a consistent devotional time yourself. Whatever happens, though, remember that one of your main, although often forgotten, responsibilities is for the "churches" you plant in the lives of the staff that God brings to serve at your camp in the summer. May this be your daily burden!