



Character Building Ministries  
1320 Saddleback Road, York, PA 17404

(570) 772-1643

[www.CBMinistries.com](http://www.CBMinistries.com)

## SETTING THE STAGE: Spiritual Development of Staff

by Bill Klees

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There is a lot that must be done to set the stage for summer. But one factor that is often forgotten in our program-minded culture is the “setting” of your counselors. I was privileged to begin my camping career under a man whom God used to start a successful youth ministry in rural Pennsylvania. One of the things “Chief Bob” stressed was setting the *spiritual* stage for campers. He wrote “the ‘stage’ must be set on which the counselors can act to make it possible for the campers to see the inner self of the counselors.”

What Bob was saying was the focus of a camping ministry lies in the *staff* you hire. You can have the newest climbing wall or program gadget, but if your staff lacks the spiritual integrity needed to allow campers to see Christ within them, what dominates the emotional memory of the campers is merely the silly, the momentary, and the nonsense fun of camp life. These things of course, aren't bad, but the goal should be that Christ and His Word are the main memories associated with the camp experience.

### Preparing the Stage

The desire of a camp director should be for the spiritual memories to shine through his programs so that what is seen, what is remembered, is not him nor the activities, but Christ. So how can you go about setting the stage for *spiritual* memories to be made? How can you prepare your staff to be used by God in the all-important task of sharing Christ? At first reading, some of these suggestions may seem radical. After all, there is not always the luxury of being picky about which staff members you hire. There have been summers where I wonder if I am even going to have enough staff. However, I also know that when we have compromised on the spiritual integrity of a staff member just to fill a spot, we have usually regretted it later. There is always a fine line between running your camp like a business and like a ministry. When it comes to staffing choices, *ministry* must be dominant.

A practical aspect of finding staff with spiritual integrity is to make sure that you ask the right questions on the application and during the interview process. There are many people who call themselves a Christian and apply for a job at Christian camp who may not know what it really means to submit one's life to the cross of Christ. Many of today's youth are embracing elements of our post-modern culture and hold unorthodox views on key doctrines of the Christian faith. Their intentions may be sincere, but their knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures and the cross

are lacking. Questions that seek to ascertain the potential staff member's level of Biblical knowledge and its application are essential. Ask questions like, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" "Who needs Christ?" "What did Christ accomplish on the cross?" "In what ways do you live your life that demonstrate your commitment to Christ?" Have them provide Scripture references to answer some of these questions.

Make sure potential staff understand your camp's mission and focus. If they fail to grasp this, they may fail to provide the spiritual impact that you desire. There should be plenty of time during staff training to clearly communicate your camp's philosophy and purpose.

### **Before the Curtain Goes Up**

The writer of Hebrews needed to provide his readers with milk because they weren't ready for solid food. He wanted to leave behind elementary doctrines (milk) and move on toward maturity (Hebrews 5:11ff).

It is worth the time to teach your staff, who are to be teachers, what exactly it is they are to teach. At Camp Susque, where I serve, we realized that as a nondenominational camp, many of the staff may have different understandings of Biblical truths. We spend a whole weekend before orientation even starts laying out the essential foundational truths for the staff. We stick to the basics—What is justification? What is the gospel? How do we view the Scriptures? We take them through our statement of faith to make sure they know the foundations we believe and teach.

### **While on Stage**

Another important element to spiritual integrity is the ongoing spiritual nourishment of your staff. Once you have selected and trained those that will model Christ before the eyes of the campers, you must make sure that they stay connected with Christ through the long months of the summer. Don't send your staff to the front lines without providing them with the proper ammunition. They must be in God's Word daily. They must be in prayer. College students may lack discipline of a consistent quiet time with God. Teach and model the disciplines of study and prayer so that they know what it looks like.

What helps establish this discipline? It is the continual study of God's Word. It is the staff prayer times where men and women fall before the throne of God. It is encouragement from administration, board members and supporters reminding staff that they are being remembered in prayer. These are the "extras" that firmly set the stage so that Christ is seen in the actions, words, manners, and attitudes of your staff.

The question that remains to be answered is whether the integrity of your staff is more important than the programs you offer? Are the events you offer overshadowing the action and attitudes of your staff? May you never compromise the spiritual integrity of your camps for the pragmatic temptations of relevancy and numbers. Give God this part of your ministry, and He will be willing to bless the other parts. May His glory be the light of your stage.