

# **From Little Acorns to Mighty Oaks: Building Camper Leadership Programs**

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## **BRIEF BIOGRAPHY**

Marianne Esolen has worked in a wide variety of environments with children and families for twenty years. She has served as a Camp Counselor, Youth Service Director, Career Coach, Crisis Counselor, Oncology Camp Director, Education Specialist, Trainer and Consultant working with United Way, FECS, American Cancer Society, Camp Happy Times, Camp Hope, Camp Comfort Zone, CASA, Tuesday's Children, & New York State Education Department. She has firsthand experience seeking and maintaining ACA Accreditation for a children's camp and overseeing all facets of risk management, program design, community outreach, donor relations, and staff recruitment, supervision, and training. In the education arena, she has provided technical assistance and customized trainings for school districts in many areas including: stress management, policy, safe & drug-free programs, grief and trauma response, resiliency, peer leadership, parenting, and community-building. She has successfully obtained and managed grant-funded projects, served as a regional and state reviewer of grant applications, and provided trainings on the Principles of Effectiveness in project planning. As a licensed social worker she has worked with children and adults and specializes in the areas of coping with grief, chronic illness, and managing life transitions. Dedicated always to learning and teaching best practices, she believes first and foremost in fostering resiliency and promise in people & programs.

## **Consulting Services for Camps and Agencies**

- Customized trainings and professional development for staff and volunteers
- Technical assistance in obtaining required permits and ACA Accreditation
- Short-term and long-term strategic planning in organizational goals and objectives and related program design
- Staff recruitment, selection, orientation, supervision, and recognition support
- Support in promoting staff wellness & stress management
- Support in designing and promoting staff and youth leadership programs
- Support in strengthening parent, community, and donor relations
- Support in fostering youth resiliency and positive youth development
- Technical assistance and guidance in development of new programs and projects including needs assessment and evaluation support
- Creating and updating written resources including manuals, guides, & forms
- Technical assistance and support in change/transition management
- Risk management assessment and crisis planning and response
- Review and recommend revisions of policy, procedures, and programs
- Grant-review and grant writing services

## Customized Professional Workshops

Most workshops or training events can vary in length and complexity from one-two hour overviews to five to seven hour intensive classes or even multi-day retreats. All trainings are customized to best meet an individual camp's or agency's needs. Reduced consulting fees available when scheduling more than one training or hiring consultant for additional project support. For a free consultation, please call: Marianne Esolen at 631-219-3400 or via email at [Marianne.esolen@yahoo.com](mailto:Marianne.esolen@yahoo.com).

- ❖ Leadership Training and Coaching Guidance
- ❖ Health and Wellness Topics for Administrators, Staff, Youth, and Parents
- ❖ Stress Management and Coping With Change
- ❖ Positive Youth Development and Resiliency
- ❖ Peer Leadership, Peer Counseling, and Peer Advocacy Programs
- ❖ Tobacco, Drugs, and Alcohol Prevention and Policy Development
- ❖ Tobacco Cessation and Pre-Cessation Support for Adults and Youth
- ❖ Partnering with Parents and Community
- ❖ Program Planning on Shoe String Budget
- ❖ Safety Planning and Risk Reduction
- ❖ Crisis Response and Support
- ❖ Social and Emotional Health Issues
- ❖ Community Building and Team Building
- ❖ Service Learning and Character Education
- ❖ Staff Support, Supervision, Recognition & Retention

## From Little Acorns to Mighty Oaks: Building Camper Leadership Programs

### Marianne's Top Ten Teachings for Camper Leadership Programs

1. Identify clearly your leadership program's broader VISION, MISSION, GOALS, and OBJECTIVES. Know WHY you are offering the program and WHAT exactly you hope the program will accomplish and what the participants will accomplish, complete, discover, change, and believe.
2. Be INTENTIONAL and STRATEGIC in ALL aspects of the leadership program, from the process and forms for application to the daily schedule, meeting agendas, training, assignments and activities. Everything you do for and within the program should be linked to your identified goals & objectives.
3. Develop JOB DESCRIPTION and ROLES for your leadership program participants. Are participants still considered campers or staff? What SPECIFICALLY are the daily tasks, responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities for participants? Specify the scope & limitations of the role.
4. Ground your leadership program in solid RESEARCH and YOUTH DEVELOPMENT THEORY. Get a refresher on developmental needs of late adolescents and young adults. Use Search Institute's asset outline or Nan Henderson's resiliency wheel to plan, shape, and frame the program.
5. COLLECT IDEAS, resources, manuals, schedules, and templates from other camps AND other school peer leadership programs. ACA is a great place to start and so is the education arena, with programs like Natural Helpers having a proven track record at fostering peer leadership & growth.
6. Select and dedicate STAFF to coordinate and support the leadership program with great care. Don't add this program to somebody's already full plate of camp responsibilities. Be sure the STAFF you select LIKE and

UNDERSTAND late adolescents and young adults. Be sure from prior experience that your late adolescents and young adults relate to and respect the adult leaders. Be sure the Staff have good judgment, boundaries, spirit, creativity, patience, and humor. They will be tested often and creatively.

7. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION of your leaders is essential. The clearer you are on the mission, goals, and objectives, the easier it will be to effectively and with greater confidence identify potential candidates. Applications and the process of selection are crucial to the integrity and substance of a leadership program. If you are only trying to maintain involvement with older teens, then plan a senior camper program instead. Make the process legitimate and serious, and from the beginning you are modeling leadership traits and setting a tone of challenge and opportunity.

8. Remember it is a PROGRAM within your PROGRAM, be attentive to all the intricacies and logistics. Again, this is easier said than done and only manageable with dedicated Staff leading your leadership program. The devil AND the angel of opportunity ARE in the details, from housing and meal times to meetings and special events for your young leaders. Be intentional!

9. Make it magical, manageable, memorable, meaningful, and motivating. For the program to succeed, your leaders need to be fully engaged and committed to their own growth. Just like camp, make the learning and the doing fun and worthwhile. Remember we take better care of what we build.

10. FEEDBACK and EVALUATION aren't something, they're EVERYTHING! Create multiple tools and methods to gather feedback from your leaders and the staff working with them. This is a lot easier when you're clear on goals!

11. PROVIDE specialized training and education for your young leaders both PRIOR to camp & at camp. Make learning fun, relevant, & challenging.

## Reinforcement of Skills and Knowledge:

Many times we wonder how much information really sticks in the minds of participants or if they even appreciate the relevance of what is being taught and how it applies to them and their role as leader at camp and in the broader world as a peer leader in their school or community. A good way to see how much participants gained over the training and the camp season itself is to have them engage in ongoing self-reflection and when possible large group discussion. It's good to follow Michael Brandwein's WIBYT Principle here - "write it before you talk" so that everyone is actively engaged in reflection on their own learning prior to any group discussion.

Providing every young leader with a journal (which can be decorated or created as an activity in itself prior to or at the start of the camp season) sets the tone that this experience is also about self-discovery and growth. During regular meetings, leaders can be provided with guided questions or reflection topics for the day or week. In the education world, reflection and process transforms simple volunteering to service LEARNING. Journal Topics and Reflection Questions:

- Your thoughts and feelings about being at Camp in this different role
- What you think it means to be a leader in training
- What it's like to share who you are on the inside and out
- What it's like to take risks in meeting new people and how you handle the challenge
- Write about any of your feelings about the games and activities we did today
- Identify the strengths and resilient qualities of a camper that has been particularly challenging with other campers or the staff. What are their positive qualities, traits, resources? How can some of the challenges also be an advantage?
- How you see yourself as a leader - your strengths and challenges. At camp how have you shown leadership so far? What does it feel like to be a leader in training?
- Write about a counselor, teacher, or mentor who impacted you in a positive way
- What opportunities, experiences, & challenges are you grateful for at camp?

## Remember Recognition and Motivation are Essential!

Create special surprises like daily secret messages, behind the scenes staff coaches catching leaders succeeding, and silly "treats" to share messages of praise or encouragement: like a \$100,000 Grand Candy Bar on "pay day" or a pair of silly sunglasses to remind them to see the camp world in a new way. Think outside of the box and know that every message and item can be an ANCHOR for their experience. Consider providing a "survival kit" for peer leaders at the onset of the program. See some ideas below.

### A Survival Kit for Peer Leaders

- ❖ A BADGE - To make it official that you are now in training to be a LEADER, a role model, and a resource person for campers
- ❖ A RUBBER BALL - To remind you to bounce back from adversity
- ❖ A SAFETY PIN - To remind you to consider SAFETY first when making all choices and decisions
- ❖ SMARTIES - To praise your SMARTS and invite you to focus on learning more about YOURSELF
- ❖ AN ERASER - To remind you that most mistakes are both fixable and forgivable
- ❖ BUBBLE GUM - To give you something to chew on when you're asked a tough question
- ❖ SEA SHELL - To remind you to SEE the BEST in others, even at times of conflict or difference in opinion
- ❖ NOTE PAD - To give you someplace to note important reminders, questions, and inspirational ideas
- ❖ KALEIDOSCOPE - To help look at familiar things in a NEW way
- ❖ SWEET TARTS - To remind you that life can sometimes be both sweet & sour
- ❖ EXTRA GUM - To thank you a million times over for going the EXTRA MILE

# Marianne's Recommended Reading!

## Administrative/Organizational

Get Everyone in Your Boat Rowing in the Same Direction: 50 Leadership Principles  
Bob Boylan, 1995

The Manager's Role As Coach: Powerful Team-Building & Coaching Skills for Managers  
National Press Publications, Edited by Hendricks et al., 1994

Taking Aim On Leadership National Press Publications, Peter Capezio and Debra Morehouse, 1996

Principle-Centered Leadership Stephen R. Covey, 1992

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People Stephen R. Covey, 1990

More Than 50 Ways To Build Team Consensus R. Bruce Williams, 1993

100 Ways to Build Teams Carol Scarce, 1992

How To Supervise People: Techniques for Getting Results Through Others  
Donald P. Ladlow, 1998

How To Work With People: Understanding Team Dynamics Rockhurst University  
Continuing Education Center, 2000

FISH: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results  
Stephen C. Lundin, PhD, Harry Paul, and John Christensen, 1996

Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team Patrick Lencioni, 2005

## Program/Youth Development Resources

Learning Leadership: How To Develop Outstanding Teen Leadership Training Programs at Camp Michael Brandwein, 2003

The Essential Guide to Talking With Teens Jean Stunde Peterson, PhD, 2007

Mentoring For Resiliency Nan Henderson, Bonnie Bernard, Nancy Sharp-Light, 2000

Resiliency In Schools Nan Henderson and Mike M. Milstein, 1996

Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert, 1999

Building Assets Together: 135 Group Activities for Helping Youth Succeed  
Jolene L. Roehlkepartain, 1997

An Asset Builder's Guide to Training Peer Helpers Barbara B. Varenhorst, PhD, 2003

A Teachable Moment: A Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing, and Reflection Jim Cain, Michelle Cummings, and Jennifer Staunchfield, 2005

### Emotional Health/Violence Prevention/Risk Behaviors

The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do Lynn E. Ponton, M.D. 1997

The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids Madeline Levine, 2006

The Primal Teen Barbara Strauch, 2003

Hurt: Inside The World of Today's Teenagers Chap Clark, 2004

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them  
James Garbarino, 1999

Reviving Ophelia: Saving The Lives of Adolescent Girls Mary Pipher, PhD, 1994

Cliques: 8 Steps to Help Your Child Survive the Social Jungle Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, 2001

Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls Rachel Simmons, 2002

Fighting Invisible Tigers: A Stress Management Guide for Teens Earl Hipp, 1985