

Camp Counseling as Career Development

By Elizabeth Dawson Shreckhise assistant director at Camp Alleghany

One of the things that's most important to us in running the Camp Alleghany Counselor Staffing is that we approach being a Camp Counselor as more than just a summer job. Just as with our campers, we treat the people in our counseling positions as unique individuals who we are privileged to help nurture in the pursuit of their life goals. Because most counselors are at a stage in life where they're looking at long-term career development and opportunities to get them there, our counseling program supports that through deep level staff training that includes but goes beyond their role with the campers. Instead it looks at a suite of life and career skills that both make them better counselors and also stronger candidates for later job and career options.

In this way we're confident that choosing camp counseling from among other job choices at this stage in a young person's life — such as internships, work-study, and volunteering — is a competitive option worth serious consideration.

Here, there, or anywhere

It doesn't matter whether it's at Alleghany or another camp, being a camp counselor helps you gain real world and life skills that you'll take with you forever.

Now, we do feel that aspects of our training are unique and that, of the counseling jobs out there, being at Camp Alleghany affords you even more in terms of professional development.

But one thing is for sure, wherever you are in the camp world, there are many skills you'll learn as a counselor that will greatly benefit you when entering the workforce or advanced degree programs down the road. Some important skills counseling offers are:

- **Responsibility.** You're responsible for your tasks and duties. But equally importantly you're responsible for setting a good example and being a strong, consistent, approachable, and exemplary role model to your campers at all times.
- **Time management.** Staying on task to complete a lesson while also managing many different personalities and skill levels is one aspect of this. But you must meet goals while remaining within the overall daily, weekly and session long time frame as well. It takes focus and consistency.
- **Nurturing.** At camp this is about putting your own needs aside for the needs of your campers. But in the larger job world we call this emotional intelligence, understanding interpersonal dynamics and effectively working with them. It's a skill as important to teachers, nurses and caregivers as it is to business leaders, managers, and executives.
- **Work ethic.** At Camp Alleghany our standards for camper satisfaction (and that of parents) is extremely high. It's uncompromising. To that end we're always in a process of personal accountability. That sounds strict, which it is, but because you are well supported in the process, it feels more like the culture of the business rather than a harsh

control since everyone, all the way up to our top director shares this mission. What happens is that you internalize this work ethic and it becomes an asset at camp and beyond, in all that you do.

- **Initiative.** We welcome self-starters and creative ideas that fit within our mission and objectives. To that end, your initiative in everything from safety and cleanliness to activities and new approaches have an outlet here. We help cultivate leadership this way, making you more competitive in the job market beyond camp.
- **Conflict resolution.** It goes without saying that living in close quarters for weeks on end with only a small amount of off time asks much of each person in terms of flexibility and working well with others. IN those rare moments when all is not perfect we provide effective communication tools and mediation to help work through problems — whether it's an issue with a struggling camper or a challenge in your work. Experiencing such a supportive process gives you tools that translate well to other situations, whether personal or professional.
- **Work/Life Balance.** Camp is a short but intense six weeks, with some mandatory training sessions before hand. Learning to meet your own needs in short windows of time is critical to success. Developing this skill proves truly beneficial in later situations like work or school projects, event planning, or those crunch times in life when there doesn't seem to be enough of you to go around. Mastering this at camp is like a graduate degree on its own!
- **Learning how to talk with different audiences.** The perception of campers, parents, and your fellow staff and superiors requires something different in each setting. We help you develop appropriate business-oriented social skills that tap into the needs and expectations of various people to meet them where they are while also maintaining your confidence and authority. Many counselors comment of how the testing ground of camp gave them an understanding of how to work with so many different kinds of people.

A take away

If you're successful at camp counseling at Camp Alleghany (and the vast majority of our counselors don't just do well — they soar!) then you can also expect reliable, timely, and enthusiastic references and letters of recommendation. We view our relationship to our staff as we do that of our campers — once they've left the job they are staff alumni, and as such, are important persons in the history of our camp. We want to help them into the next phase of life and are delighted to hear back about their adventures, pursuits and successes. Former staff (and the parents of adult children) can rely on our commitment to your future aims.

Choose Counseling

When considering a summer job for yourself or in helping a young adult child to make that decision we encourage you to seriously consider camp counseling. Unlike internships — too many of which either don't pay and offer only very limited work contexts within the chosen field — or work-study which may not offer enough income for the summer months, or volunteering which may have limited hours, camp counseling is a full-time, intensive job with multiple responsibility, task, and development points that leave the worker with a whole new tool box (and paycheck) after a summer's work. At Camp Alleghany it also leaves you with specific

career development, many new and dear friends, and connection to our organization (and by extension other professional connections) throughout life.

We hope you'll apply and see the difference that camp counseling can make.

By Elizabeth Dawson Shreckhise assistant director at Camp Alleghany

Elizabeth is a life-long Camp Alleghany camper, then counselor, and now the full-time Assistant Director. She has a Masters in Education and Human Development and is a former School Counselor. Elizabeth lives in Staunton, Virginia during the year with her husband Matt and sons Mason and Ellis. In addition to staffing, program planning and camp management duties, she helps keep the website current, writes and updates camp literature, and manages the blog.