

Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted, and experience is often the most valuable thing you have to offer over time. Here are five essential lessons my 15 years of summer camp experiences have taught me about putting on your own summer camp.

1. **GOOD, FAST, AND CHEAP** As much as you think you can have all three, the reality is you can only pick two. If you want to do camp cheap and fast it won't be good. If you want to book a good speaker last minute, it won't be cheap. That means the only way to put on a great summer camp that is both good and cheap is to understand it takes a lot of time and intentional planning. This theory of "pick two" can be applied to every aspect of camp strategy.
2. **ENERGY MANAGEMENT** This is NOT "time" management. Energy management is one of the most crucial parts of planning. It's the behind-the-scenes planning of when and how students will spend their energy. Every hour of camp will produce some type of hype, and if you're not careful, your entire camp will be emotionally spent after day two. This leads to terrible game participation, students falling asleep in services, and pranks during serious moments. To avoid this, plan your camp around your high energy moments (last services, mega relays, late-night parties, etc....), and ask yourself when you want people to be the most alert. Then make sure your "time" management supports it.
3. **BAD B.A.N.D.S. - BAND, ACTIVITIES, NUMBERS, DINNER, and SPEAKER** Any of these can make or break a great camp.
 1. **BAND:** If your band is full of drama during the booking process, they are going to be even worse when they arrive at camp. It will be very obvious in the last session (when you're trying to bring it home) that the band is ready to pack up and leave.
 2. **ACTIVITIES:** This leads us to activities. Students want organization and games more than free-time. I cannot tell you how many times I have done camp where there is a full schedule of recreation, sessions, and team experiences, and we are placed next to a group that has one session at night and free time throughout the day. After 24 hours, the other youth groups are wanting to come to our camp and are frustrated that the youth pastor has not provided games and fun as entertainment. The students are bored, and freedom was only nice for about an hour when they first arrived until they saw another group organized and having fun.
 3. **NUMBERS:** Make sure your financial numbers are right. There is never a good feeling when the camp has been epic, and the speaker hit a homer, the band was insane, food was on point, lives were changed, but... you realized financially you are going to be in a wreck on Monday with the front office. Overspending on everything sometimes ruins all the hard work. My solution to this is pretty simple if you're not good with the money part of camp (what to charge, budgeting, and to collect), ask someone on staff, a parent, or a pastor to help

you plan the entire camp financially. This will take a huge burden off you and allow you to run with areas you are great in.

4. **DINNER:** Never forget, dinner is key. Your students will have used so much energy throughout the day that if dinner does not provide healthy, nutritious, and great tasting food, then you will find your group constantly hungry, thirsty, not wanting to worship, and very distracted. The key is to have coolers of water, fruit, and energy bars readily available at night.
 5. **SPEAKER:** I can tell you from experience that just because you are great friends with someone doesn't make them the right choice for coming and leading worship or speaking at camp. Your students hear you preach all the time, and they want a different voice of influence over the week or weekend. If everything goes great at your camp, and your speaker doesn't connect, students' takeaway from camp will be the fun they had without giving thought to anything spiritual.
4. **PARENTS** are key. The formula that never fails is this: the more parents that come to camp; the more students come to camp. Don't ask me why, but it has continued to be true year after year. Although the theory is usually parents equal problems, that's not the case if you use your parents right. If you give every parent one job and ask them to sign up for another job, nearly every camp aspect is overseen by a well-qualified leader.

In many cases, the youth pastor tries to run, setup, and clean up every aspect of camp and, after three days, realizes he/she has spent 72 hours trying to carry the entire camp on their own. And when they look back at their experience, they only have negative reviews on how camp went. If you delegate everything to all your leaders and allow them to make decisions, 72 hours into camp, you will have led camp and not missed camp.

5. **PRAYER** can easily be forgotten. What a shame to put on a camp, and God was never asked to come. This is, by far, the most important detail. Sixty days before you leave for camp, lead your staff, parents, leaders, and students in what and how to pray for camp. The more people you bring into this aspect, the better camp will go.

In closing, I will say that if you're not a camp person... use an organization to go to camp because students love camp, and God moves powerfully through it. If you are a camp person...trial and error is always the case. Learn from your mistakes and continue doing what you do best. If there is anything we can do at YM360 to help you by coming to Generate Camp by YM360 or help you put on an amazing camp, we'd be honored to serve you. Thank you for all that you do because youth ministry is as important now as it's ever been.