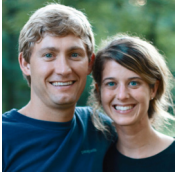


Don't Work At Summer Camp. Get A Real Job.

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By Travis Adams



Travis is [the CEO & Director of Fun](#) who carries the summer camp torch that his grandfather, Earl Adams, lit in 1965. Travis graduated from Texas Christian University in 2003 and received his MBA in Entrepreneurship from the Acton School of Business in 2009. Travis's passion is impacting youth in a profound, positive, and truthful way.

"Love the kids" is more than Camp Huawni's mission to Travis, it's his calling. Whether it's implementing a way for campers to grade their counselors or creating new cabin traditions, Travis is constantly looking at ways to improve campers' experience. This will be his 33rd summer at Camp Huawni, and yes, he's still a kid at heart.

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As the job market out of college gets more competitive, many college students are looking to land a stellar summer job or internship in hopes of landing on the payroll after graduation. But what makes a summer internship a good one? As they peruse their options, many students are advised, "Don't work at summer camp. Get a real job." And that's unfortunate, because working as a summer camp counselor can be one of the best, if not the best, summer internship opportunities available. Simply put, being a summer camp counselor prepares students for exactly the type of real-life skills that employers are looking for.

But what about building your resume? And how can you learn skills that will set you up for success post-college? What summer job will be the best fit? And where should you be looking? To answer these types of questions, let's look at the skill sets that employers are looking for in college graduates...

Top 10 Skills Needed For College

In a recent Forbes article, Meghan Casserly identified the top 10 skills that college graduates need in her article, "The 10 Skills That Will Get You Hired In 2013." Meghan looked at the skill sets for the top jobs of 2013 as defined by CareerBuilder as the occupations with the most jobs added using O*NET, the U.S. clearinghouse of occupational information.

Here's what Forbes identified as the top skills needed:

1. Critical Thinking
2. Complex Problem Solving
3. Judgment & Decision Making
4. Active Listening
5. Computers & Electronics
6. Mathematics
7. Operations & Systems Analysis
8. Monitoring
9. Programming
10. Sales & Marketing

Of this list, camp counselors thoroughly learn and gain experience in 7 out of the 10 highly sought-after skills. Here are some real-life examples of how camp counselors can practice and learn each skill on the job, so that they can also effectively and strategically apply those skill sets to all of their future work and life endeavors:

1. Critical Thinking: You're in charge of taking 12 nine and ten year olds on an overnight campout. You have to leave main campus before dark with supplies, tents, bedding, and food. Your goal is to make this a once in a lifetime experience for your campers, and you have to plan for the logistics of set up, tear down, and getting the campers to and from the camping site a mile away. On top of this, you need to be able to respond appropriately if one of your campers is scared of the dark or if it starts to rain. Time to think critically.

2. Complex Problem Solving: For two weeks you'll be living in close quarters with a dozen teenage campers. You notice after the first two days of camp that a clique is forming, and that your camper Madison is being left out. Cliques are not an option in the cabin, so it's time for you to take charge. How do you handle it? What possible solutions are available so that the girls in the clique have ample opportunity to get to know Madison and accept her? What's the appropriate message you use to squash the clique while still communicating love and acceptance to all of your campers?

3. Judgment & Decision Making: At Camp Huawni, our mission is to Love the Kids, unconditionally. We often say that "you invest with your time." So, each day you have 16 hours of which you can invest in the campers who need it most. Where will your time count the most? Which camper really needs you today? What's the cost and benefit, especially when you may never know the outcome of that investment until years down the road?

4. Active Listening: You happen to be matched up with another cabin counselor you don't particularly jive with. Two weeks can be a long time to live with someone you don't like. You must communicate well with your co-counselors or it could jeopardize your cabins' unity. When conflict arises, how will you handle it? Will you choose to seek to understand your co-counselor first before speaking? Or will you grow further apart? Conflict can be good, depending on your responses.

7. Operations and Systems Analysis: You have been put in charge of road crew on Opening Day. It's your job to make sure that hundreds of cars flow smoothly in and out of the one-lane, mile-long camp road. What's the bottleneck? What if it rains? What's the process for clear communication on the walkie-talkie?

8. Monitoring: At the end of each session, your campers rate your job performance as a cabin counselor on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). What did your campers say about your performance? Will you choose to use this as an opportunity to learn from constructive criticism, even when it's from a 7 year old? Or will you choose to become defensive about honest feedback?

10. Sales & Marketing: Learning to sell is not just about getting customers to say yes; it's about exceeding their expectations, time after time. Opening Day is a big day at camp, and first impressions can either leave parents (customers) feeling really confident about their decision or on edge of whether or not they made the right decision. So when parents walk into the cabin for the very first time, how well do you greet them? Are you confident and sincere, giving parents a firm handshake and looking them in the eye? Do you go above and beyond, helping mom and dad set up their child's bunk? What can you do to develop trust and communicate confidently and effectively in face-to-face interaction with your customers?

What's The Real Payoff?

So what about the cash? Let's do some simple math. Working as a camp counselor pays about \$200/week, while getting a summer internship for \$10/hour for 40 hours/week would pay \$400/week. If you worked 10 weeks, you could potentially make \$2,000 more per summer as an intern than as a camp counselor. But, the invaluable experience of being a camp counselor is still worth far more. Here's how...

First, take a look at some successful folks who experienced summer camp as either a camper or counselor. People like former Disney CEO Michael Eisner, co-founder of Google Lawrence Page, fashion designer and business mogul Ralph Lauren, theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, political scientist and diplomat Condoleezza Rice, singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, journalist and author Katie Couric, actor Robert Downy, Jr., and Camp Huawni's own David McGinnis—assistant head coach of the St. Louis Rams—all spent their summers

at summer camp. I doubt that any of these people would trade a few thousand dollars for some of their best memories, either as a counselor or camper.

Here's another benefit you can't put a price tag on: relationships and networking. Summer camp counselors work a relational job; and because of that, counselors' networks can expand immensely, both deep and wide. Just last year, one of our best nurse externs, Lauren, applied for a very competitive nursing position. She was 1 of 115 finalists for the position, and the hospital was only hiring 15 nurses. Because I had witnessed Lauren's professionalism, commitment, skill, and drive during her time at camp, I was able to write a detailed letter of recommendation outlining the important things she'd done at camp to keep our campers healthy, happy, and safe. I was also able to connect with one of the decision makers for the nursing position, and tell them why they'd be making a huge mistake if they didn't hire Lauren. A few weeks later, she beat out 100 other applicants and was hired. Now as a nurse right out of nursing school, Lauren could have easily not gotten the job and continued her job search for a few more months. Only two months of searching would have cost her thousands of dollars. But, not only was Lauren saved time and money by being hired quickly, she also is now using the skills and experience she developed as Camp Huawni's nurse extern, everyday, at a job she loves. Since being hired, Lauren has even reported that she feels she got more job experience as a camp nurse extern than some of her colleagues had received in all their summer experiences combined. Camp was more than worth it to Lauren.

From Camp Counselor to Political Journalist. Now That's Real.

By now you can see exactly how working as a summer camp counselor IS a real job with many different kinds of real payoff— monetary and otherwise. And, as you just read from Lauren's life and work experience, working at a camp can lead to other very real jobs. Take, as another example, Abby Livingston— a Camp Huawni alum who swapped out her college summer internship for a summer camp counselor position for four summers between 2000-2003.

Now, although Abby was active in Student Government at the University of Texas... and, although a lot of the politicking for the school year happened during the summer... and, although she had a good chance at running for and winning the role of Vice President of the UT student body if she remained in Austin over the summer, she chose to return to camp for four straight summers. She remarks on this life decision, saying, "Ten years later, I look back and have no doubt it was the right call. I had the rest of my life to run the rat race. There are very few things more valuable than one more summer of childhood."

But summer camp wasn't just about the fun and games for Abby, who says that being a Counselor at Camp Huawni taught her the invaluable skills of kindness, leadership, management, and a good handshake— skills she still uses today as a political journalist covering U.S. House campaigns at a newspaper in Washington, D.C. called Roll Call, which is read by members of Congress, Capitol Hill staffers, and political operatives.

As a camp counselor, Abby also learned life-long lessons about sacrifice and responsibility. "When you're a camp counselor," she says, "essentially, your wants and needs come last. Your first priority is to ensure that 8-12 little human beings under your care are eating, sleeping, bathing, taking their medicine, having fun, and are safe. Senior counselors make the trains run on time and keep the junior counselors on track. They have to delegate. They have to cajole. And also, the performance reviews are as instantaneous as the post office can deliver letters home. I haven't had that level of responsibility since." That's saying a lot for someone who has also worked in Tim Russert's news bureau as well as at NBC News and CNN.

Another valuable life lesson Abby learned as a counselor at Camp Huawni is the skill of committing or getting off the stage. Abby remembers that rehearsal for the Opening Night Show was not going well one summer. Still a teenager, she admits she felt too self-conscious and a bit above the subject material to fully commit to the silly performance. Chris Watlington, the camp's Director at the time, stopped rehearsal, telling the performers to go all in or get off the stage because their "too-cool-for-this" attitude was actually making everyone look like fools. Years later, while working in DC, she found herself in a similar situation: on a stage, performing a silly skit for her professional colleagues. At first she panicked, wondering if she was about to commit career suicide. But then she remembered Chris' words, "Commit or get off the stage," and she was able to finish with confidence. "What a great motto for life," she says, driving home exactly what those words have meant for her journey as a whole.

Monetarily, Abby says the lessons she learned at camp are why she survived, adding, "Camp is why I got my first job after college. Philosophically, I do something that I truly love, and it taught me to value an experience over salary." She adds, "Camp instilled into me a work ethic, a sense of integrity, a healthy sense of competition, and a love of people."

Stories like Abby's are not rare. In fact, they are quite typical of the counselors we've had the joy and honor of working alongside at Camp Huawni. What will your story be? What CAN it be? As you look at your summer employment options, we want to encourage you to dream big, work hard at your goals, and get a real job... wherever that may be. But know that it very well can be in the beautiful outdoors, under the big, blue sky, in the midst of friends and laughter.

Interested in getting a real job this summer? **APPLY @ camphuawni.com**



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