

Highering Staff to Motivate Success
From *Super Staff, Super Vision* by Michael Brandwein
Chapter 10

To get people to become part of our staff we hire them. When we're walking on Path 3, we support staff by helping them to enhance their skills and stay motivated. I call this process "highering."

Growth is for Staff, Too

We want our campers to experience personal growth at camp. We provide a positive, enriching environment in which they can learn positive things that will help them to become their best.

Now we have to ask ourselves: Don't we expect exactly the same thing for staff? Don't we promise such growth in our recruitment of staff? It's our responsibility as supervisors to do our part in fulfilling that promise.

Motivation and Perceived Value

Highering staff means helping them to develop in positive ways that they will perceive as valuable. The key word in the last sentence is "they." When staff get things that *they* consider to be worth their time and effort, then we can expect them to feel – and report to others – that working at camp is a good deal.

I'm often asked how to best motivate staff. Perhaps the most motivating thing in the world is to know that if we do good work, we will get things that we need and want. We can strongly motivate staff by helping them to reach their personal goals.

Highering Begins in the Interview

Some potential staff may come to us with a very clear picture of the personal goals that they would like to achieve at camp. Most staff, however, will need our guidance in identifying and prioritizing these goals. We can begin to do this during the interview.

We use the interviewing process to try to select people whose goals are consistent with the goals of our camp. If the word "party" figures prominently in their list of personal goals, we'll probably take a pass.

In the interview, we want to ask candidates how they want to grow from the camper experience. They will, we hope, talk to us about wanting to make an important contribution to the children. Knowing that one is making a positive difference is an important part of job satisfaction and motivation.

But we want to be sure that we also ask them what they want to get for *themselves*, beyond the great feeling one gets from positively affecting the children. We ask them what skills they'd like to learn or learn to do better as a result of working at camp. We emphasize that these should be skills that the candidates feel would be valuable to them in their own future.

If a person has difficulty identifying specific skills or other goals, we can help them by suggesting some that we can make achievable through the camp experience. But here's a very important technique: to make sure that the candidate is *really* interested in these things – and would therefore be truly motivated by working to achieve them – we must ask follow-up questions. For example, we can ask, "Why would learning that be important to you?" or "what is there about this that you think would make it valuable for you?"

In general, we want to get staff to begin thinking about achieving personal goals right away. Guiding them to do that helps us demonstrate our sincere interest in their development and shows them that we are serious about promoting growth of not only children, but the adults who lead the children.

Re-Interviewing Returning Staff

I frequently get asked about returning staff – “Should they be interviewed again?” I’ll give you my personal feelings about this, respecting that different directors have varying views on this subject. In my opinion, under no circumstances would I ever rehire a person without interviewing them prior to each season.

The type of interview for returning staff will be different, of course, and it can certainly be brief. If we’re considering having a person back, then we’ve already determine their level of qualification based on actual past performance. The purpose of re-interviewing is to determine *current* goals. We don’t ever want to assume that a person’s goals for one season will be the same for another season. They might be the same, but they might now. It is very important for us to find out why someone would want to return. Is it because they haven’t given it much thought and this – a job they know they can do – is just an easy choice? Or are they really interested in continuing their development as a leader – pushing themselves to an even higher level of performance?

The Term “Goals & Growth”

I use the term “Goals and Growth” to describe what we are working on when we are highering staff. Here’s why. Most staff will see value in developing new and better skills. But some staff – usually those who lack confidence or those who selves they already know everything – get defensive or uncomfortable if we tell them that we want to get “better” at their job or “improve their skills.” They may think, “What are you saying, that I’m not good enough? That I don’t know how to do my job?”

I have found “Goals and Growth” to be a more gentle way of saying that at all levels of experience, no matter how good we already are, there are always ways to challenge ourselves more. And when we begin challenging ourselves, we stay motivated as well.

I sometimes refer to the Goals and Growth as “G & G” – I believe that using this informal abbreviation helps keep this process less intimidating and more comfortable for some staff.

Explaining the Highering Process in Staff Training

I explained in *Training Terrific Staff* how to begin orientation by motivating staff with a clear and powerful identification of goals.

It’s important to explain to staff that there are not one but two sets of goals at camp. The first one is helping our camper to grow. In orientation, we ask staff, “What positive differences do we want to see in the children as a result of camp?” The second goal is helping our staff to grow. We ask, “What positive difference do we want to see in ourselves as a result of camp?”

We present to staff three reasons what make working on *staff* Goals and Growth important:

1. We describe our commitment to making sure that staff not only feel satisfied about what they do for the children’s future, but also what they do for their own.
2. We explain our concerns about burnout and how it is frequently caused by the absence of challenges. Without specific goals for ourselves, we don’t have much to reach for, which lowers our motivation and our personal satisfaction with the job.
3. We explain that if we push ourselves and reach for higher levels of skill, then we are serving as role models for our children. How can we expect children to keep on learning if we’ve decided that we’re not going to continue to learn ourselves?

The director or orientation leader then further explains that supervisors will be meeting with staff as soon as possible to talk to them individually about their G & G plans. The theme is simple: “Everybody, from the director to junior staff, will always be working on G & G, all of the time.” Working

on G & G means working on skills that we believe will not only be of value to us in our work at camp, but valuable throughout our lives.

We provide time near the beginning of orientation for staff to take a few quiet minute to write down some things of life-long value that they would like to work on. We tell staff that there are no wrong answers. To help staff do this writing, we can give them a sample list of some important areas for Goals and Growth. Here are a few examples of areas for G & G (camp administrations should, of course, add others that they believe are valuable options at their camp):

- Teaching others
- Listening
- Developing skills to solve challenging problems
- Promoting teamwork
- Presenting in front of groups, both large and small
- Being creative
- Organizing and planning
- Helping children learn to communicate their feelings
- Helping children learn how to solve problems
- Helping children learn how to work in teams and groups
- Helping children to make better choices about their behavior
- Helping children to be more responsible

Staff should be told that the examples on the sheet are intended only to start their thinking. They should be encouraged to write down any of their personal goals, even if they are not listed in one of the examples.

Certainly, all of the items listed above will help staff in their work at camp. But items such as “helping children to communicate their feelings” can be of life-long value to some staff because they intent to continue to work with children or raise children of their own. An item like “developing skills to solve challenging problems” may be of life-long value to staff because they believe problem-solving will be a core skill for advancement in a future profession that might have nothing at all to do with leading children.

Staff should be asked to identify the top two or three G & G areas in which they have the greatest interest, or otherwise prioritize their responses.