



CHRIST-FOCUSED CAMP PROMOTION

***First priority: remember why you are taking students to camp
in the first place!***

Youth Camp in my church has always been a very important event! Frankly, it was my own experience as a youth minister seeing what God did in students' lives at camp that led me to include youth camps as one of the key facets of Global Youth Ministry. In case you have not thought about this deeply for awhile, let me share my top four reasons for "pushing" camp with my students! As a youth minister camp is:

- **THE BEST WAY TO INTRODUCE LOST STUDENTS TO CHRIST:** Camps provide a unique 5-day "window" in which unsaved young people can be exposed to the claims of Christ! Think of it! Where else can I get that amount of time in that kind of spiritual environment to "show" an unsaved student what it is like to be part of the eternal family of Christ? They are surrounded by His love, His people, His Word! Hey, they come for the friends, the girls and the sports and recreation, but they could leave with the best friend of all, Jesus Christ!
- **MY BEST SHOT AT STRENGTHENING CORE STUDENTS:** Camps provide the best opportunity to deepen the spiritual walk of my "core students." Teens are so distracted today with so many things tugging at their busy schedule...my kids have palm pilots now, for crying out loud! Camp is my best shot at getting their undistracted attention for at least a week! During camp, I spend time with my campers re-enforcing their love for Christ.
- **MY BEST (if not only) HOPE OF BUILDING UNITY:** Camps do wonders for the unity of my student group! Only mission trips exceed the bonding effect of camp, and it is usually more costly to get ALL my students to participate in a mission trip (plus the focus is on others' needs, not our needs) so that leaves camp as my best opportunity to spend a week building the loyalty, togetherness, and focus of my ENTIRE youth group!
- **MY BEST TIME OF THE YEAR TO PREPARE MY STUDENTS FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR:** Camps help me focus my students both on their commitment to Christ AND on our purpose as a youth group...to glorify Christ by reaching our unsaved friends at school. It is my best time for my group to regain focus before school begins again and we are back into the heavy school-year schedule with plays, sports, clubs, etc. It is my favorite time to ask, "Okay gang, where are we going this year? What do we want Christ to do among us?"

Second Priority: remember—the price you pay in time and effort is worth it!

People want to be part of exciting things! So my job as the youth leader is to make camp IN, happening, exciting, the place to be! I already know that my students are going to have a blast at camp, so that ought to be easy, right? Not with the ones who need it most! So, I can't depend solely on the usual ways to communicate camp—the posters, videos, and announcements. I'm going to have to engage in "guerilla warfare" against Satan to enlist my students, because HE knows as well as I do how important this single week of the year will be for many of them. The regular promotional efforts will just not cut it—these methods are not enough to convince my "uncommitted" students to risk a week of their lives on an "iffy" thing, or convince them that camp is really that important to THEM, not just the youth group at large!

So what kind of guerilla warfare is required for an "over-the-top" impact at camp?

1. I personally enlist key students to pre-register for camp.

Since teens are very relationship-oriented, they will feel a lot more secure about going to some event if they know that other students are going. So, I always sit down with certain key leaders and ask them to pre-register, because—as I explain to them—they could be indirectly responsible for some other student (s) attending the camp whose lives will be forever change for the Kingdom! Only God knows how they can use their influence for Christ to impact the Kingdom. This is a "stewardship of influence" issue which I bring to their attention. If they know they are going to camp anyway, then why not use their influence for Christ by pre-registering, and thus encouraging others to do the same?

2. I phone every student who has not registered by a certain date.

In my days at FBC/Orlando, this was a Herculean task! Thank goodness I had already seen the value of it in smaller churches! I went through the Sunday School rolls and compiled a “calling list” of nearly 600 names of students who had not yet signed up for camp. At first, I called them all myself. Why? Because I knew some of these students—many who were marginal attenders or absentees—would never come to Jesus without someone’s intervention in their behalf! Since I was unsure whether any other adults in their lives would be either as aggressive or desperate as the situation required to get these students to attend camp, that job was left to *me alone!* (Later, some adults began to invest in this phoning effort with me as they saw the importance of it!) Some summers I didn’t make it through my list, but I will never begrudge the effort, even though I got a *lot* of very discouraging excuses, and often felt personal rejection from some of those phone conversations!

3. I never accept a student’s first “No” answer as my last answer until we are on the bus to camp!

You know what I did? I called my marginal students on my “phone list” at night. I spent about an hour or so on the phone each night until the job was done. And I said to each precious student, “*Hey, this is your youth pastor calling. Did you know that you were going to youth camp this summer?*” Usually there was stunned silence or even sputtering protests on the other end of the phone. But I never let their excuses stop me from being insistent and persistent about their presence at camp. I knew that if I gave up easily, it would only communicate to them that I didn’t really feel as passionate about their presence as I first had implied! I kept painting them a picture of how great it was going to be to give up EVERYTHING else to come to camp (YES, even that trip to Paris with mom and dad)! After all, if I don’t believe in the importance of this event in their lives, why should they?

4. I register students for camp till the busses depart from the church parking lot!

I chose to make student’s eternal destiny—not human deadlines—my foremost priority! Therefore I have never told a student he could not come to camp if I could humanly make it possible for him or her to attend, even if he missed *every deadline*. However, I also instituted a series of “graduated” payment deadlines that made camp less expensive for those who paid on time. I reward “responsible students” without eliminating “tardy” students! I could tell you many stories of “last minute campers” whose lives were forever changed...and who went on to become “life changers” in God’s Kingdom. I wouldn’t trade one of those kids for even one story about how I taught some student a lesson by not letting him come to camp because of a missed deadline! Can you imagine a student saying to Jesus, “I might have been in heaven had I not missed a camp deadline.” Yikes!

5. I enlist the entire student group to get their friends and acquaintances to camp!

We re-form the youth group into special summer-only “teams” to experience all the activities of the summer together in a new and fresh way that is different from the school year. (See *Global’s “Summer How To Guide”* for details on this very exciting and successful approach to summer ministry!). One of the ways in which teams compete with each other is to bring their friends to summer activities, especially youth rallies. We have even held a camp presidential campaign in which the students selected one of their older peers to be our camp “Pres.” These student “candidates” conducted a summer “camp-aign” (get it?) with silly skits, etc., about coming to camp. Of course the objective was to encourage guest students to come along with us to camp. It works! No one can motivate students to come to camp like their own excited and motivated peers!

6. I enlist church members to give PARTIAL SCHOLARSHIPS for campers!

Frankly, I’m not a big fan of “full scholarships” unless the need is dire. Most kids have access to some funds somewhere, even if only a nominal amount. When students invest nothing into an effort, they go into it expecting little. Or they drop out before the event even happens! Some investment on their part is good for them, for the budget, for everyone! But I also want to eliminate money as the excuse for non-participation!

7. I designate a “Party Bus” (or van) to the “winning team” who had the most students attending camp.

The winning team members ride in style to camp in the best vehicle. The party bus riders are provided with a free lunch, along with party favors, special individually-packed “party paks” for each winning team member, etc. Over the years, the Camp Party Bus became a big deal!

Yes, all of this is hard work! I know it will be, and I choose to pay that price. I know that statistically, more kids make life-changing decisions at camp than at any other single youth event of the year! But, oh, has my work ever paid off! Our camp attendance at the church where I put these ideas into practice rose from 62 the first year to 627 the last year! Meanwhile Sunday School attendance rose from 173 my first year to over 400 the last year. **The fruit of the hard work was evident! It pays off in long-term results in the spiritual lives of my students!** So, dear youth ministry friend, here’s the motto that you (like me) may need:

JUST DO IT!

Blessings on you as you labor in love!
Roger Glidewell