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## Mistakes Camp Directors Make

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- 1. Believing in accreditation standards.** Some standards are minimum requirements; others are best practices. None is a guarantee of quality. Of course, abiding by national or provincial standards helps ensure that you won't be convicted of negligence should a serious accident or death occur at your camp. But how many directors run around the day before an accreditation check back-filling safety logs and stocking safety equipment? That kind of "mirage compliance" is disingenuous, wasteful, and potentially damaging. True investment in camp quality means reliably implementing procedures that *exceed* industry standards. Yes, you should start with accreditation standards. But then become your own toughest critic.
- 2. Relying on criminal background checks.** Even the best checks only tell you whether a prospective employee has been convicted of a crime, not whether he or she is a predator with a sketchy past. Failure to request personal references—and *then talk with each of those references*—is asking for trouble. Adults who want access to children are cunning. Find out what a previous employer, *and* an adult mentor, *and* a community leader think about that carefree university student you are about to hire. Know how to spot a candidate that's too good to be true and call a former boss or two *not listed* on the applicant's résumé.
- 3. Reading from the staff training manual.** The death knell of any staff training workshop is standing up in front of your staff and reading from your manual. Research on learning is clear: Lectures are the least effective of any teaching method. *So stop.* If you've spent time editing that tome and added an index, it will serve as great reference material. But learning how to resolve conflicts, treat homesickness, spot abuse, supervise effectively, and lead by example can only be done with active engagement. Videos, role plays, scenarios, games, projects, writing exercises, and small group conversations will always trump lectures in both intellectual engagement and lasting impact. This year, switch from rows to circles.
- 4. Allowing double standards.** How many of your staff swim with buddies during staff swims? How many wear life jackets in power boats, stay off electronics, keep their language clean, and use appropriate physical touch *with each other*? Remember, their example is their most powerful teaching tool. When staff follow the same rules as campers, they earn the kids' respect. But when you let them slack off, that respect dissolves. Their vain attempt to look cool also introduces serious safety risks. Moreover, if you fail to fire seriously under-performing staff, you erode staff morale by condoning mediocrity. Exude integrity.
- 5. Limiting training to six days or less.** No director ever has their staff on-site long enough to teach the policies, values, and leadership skills necessary to run a safe, intentional, and powerful program. That's the reality. Kids are complicated, parents are demanding, and your own conscience keeps reminding you of all the things you have to let slide in order to check the minimum number of boxes before opening day. Then there's the concern that you may be working the staff too hard before the kids even arrive. Yikes! The answer is simple: Combine fantastic on-site training with exciting, self-paced, *online* training. This modern combo allows you to cover everything you want in a simple, efficient, easy-to-document way.



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