



5 qualities of a top notch language camp counselor

There are so many superior traits that make up a great camp counselor that it's hard to narrow it down — especially when each individual counselor is a unique person who does it their way.

Often people say that it's a counselor who's "fun," "energetic," or "bubbly," but personally, although those qualities do show enthusiasm and an sunny spirit, in my view a top notch counselor consistently brings the following five qualities to their job performance.

1. Initiative

My most basic way of defining initiative is, "doing something before someone asks you to."

I even describe it this way to my 5-year-old son Mason when he does something like get himself dressed, brush his teeth, etc. *before* I tell him to. I always praise him for taking initiative, and remind him it means doing something without being asked to do it. This is a huge asset in a focused and successful counselor.

When working with the leadership team (Unit Heads, Department Heads, Head Counselors) I always remind them that *they* should not be doing the jobs of the people they supervise. The people they supervise should do their own jobs, and the leadership team members are there to help them and support them, encourage their growth, and be a mentor.

The best counselors take initiative **in every aspect of their job**, not waiting to be told or asked or reminded to do the things they're responsible for doing.

It's also about taking initiative for other little things, like helping out when you observe that someone needs it, picking up stray things that need to be cleaned up or put back, and generally being a true stakeholder in the success not only of your job, but of the entire camp as a whole.

2. Selflessness

This is seemingly self-explanatory but it's worth re-emphasizing: The campers come first — it's not about you. (You actually do get so much out of camp counseling both personally *and* in terms of important career development steps.

Having this mentality coming into camp is very important, and the best counselors maintain this mindset throughout all of camp.

However, along with that is self-care and balance. The best counselors know when to take a break, when to go to sleep early, how to manage their own needs in a way that best supports their job. They know that being selfless is demanding, and they need to take care of themselves in order to be the best support for their campers.

3. Positive role modeling

Positive role modeling didn't truly click for me until I became a parent, so I know it's hard for counselors to fully grasp the weight of the importance of this. But speaking in simple terms, **kids watch every thing you do**, and they learn how to do things by imitating the way they see the important adults in their lives do those things.



Do you yell and storm off when you get frustrated? The kids around you will learn how to deal with frustration in that way. Do you talk behind people's backs? The kids around you will learn that that is acceptable. Do you run away from problems? The kids around you will learn that that is how to deal with problem-solving. Do you interrupt when people are talking, don't make eye contact, don't really listen? The kids around you will learn these communication skills from you.

On the flip side, do you take a deep breath when you're frustrated, and calmly take a break from whatever is frustrating you? Do you remain respectful of others, and walk away from gossip or shut it down? Do you approach a problem in a positive, head-on way, working through various choices to solve it appropriately? Do you stop what you're doing when someone is talking to you, look them in the eye, nod and ask questions?

All of these scenarios can and will be played out on a daily basis when working as a camp counselor. You have the power to choose how to model appropriate actions in



each situation, knowing that the campers look up to you and your every move (way more than you can know or realize at the time!)

4. Creativity

You don't have to be an artist to utilize your creativity. It's more about "thinking outside the box."

Counselors who think of new and different ways to approach an activity, a problem, a free time, a meal, etc. are the most creative ones

out there. They spice things up, keep things interesting and moving along, and keep the campers on their toes.

A camp day doesn't have to look the exact same every single day just because there's a schedule. Consistency is the underlying structure but creative differences and novel choices or approaches give a little spice and play to everything from a day, to a meal, to the whole of summer. Creative counselors find ways to switch things up, while always maintaining camp's traditions and values!

5. Resilience or "grit"

I place a lot of importance on the concept of resilience, or personal grit. Basically it's a way of saying you have excellent coping skills.

Life is unpredictable and the unexpected always just happens. You've got to be able to work effectively with change and even with setbacks and roll with the punches.

The mark of a superior person (or counselor) isn't that you never fail, or that nothing ever goes wrong — it's that you can learn from seeming failures or turn around something that's seemed to go wrong.

Resilience is not only about worse case scenarios, though. It's just a willing ability to adapt readily to a new plan, do something you've never done before, or bounce back even better than you were before.

In camp life this might mean getting one activity assignment only to learn that you're urgently needed in a different one and, even if you're personally bummed by the new assignment, you just go with it with a willing spirit.

Or maybe you get some bad news from the “outside world,” and while you’re certainly allowed to deal with it personally, you don’t let it interfere with your professional duties. Or maybe you’re trying to find your place or identity while at camp and it doesn’t click right away — still you plug along with a can-do attitude while focusing on doing your best. Resilience basically rocks!



Top 5 and then some

As I said above, it’s tough to narrow effective and engaging camp counseling into “just” five qualities. The above traits are essential to have or work on developing and in the meantime friendliness, openness, kindness, good communication skills, skill in your activity area(s), professionalism, follow-through, and...oh, I could go on and on. It takes a lot to be a camp counselor and while being one you’ve got an excellent opportunity to build these skills and more and then to use those skills in your career and personal lives.

— ELIZABETH DAWSON SHRECKHISE, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CAMP ALLEGHANY FOR GIRLS