

Summer Staff Care -- Supervision and Discipleship
How to help staff avoid burnout (sustain throughout the summer)
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I want to approach this topic from two angles—one that is very tangibly practical, and the other that is more spiritually practical. We've been the Staff Directors for three full years, this will be our fourth summer in the role and my 20th consecutive summer at KBC. So we've had some experience with this program and have seen it morph and grow over the years.

1. We host a Vision Weekend each summer, the couple of days before our camp season starts. This weekend is designed to get our leaders ready so they are prepared and equipped to receive and be an example to the incoming staff.
2. Leadership Training Camp is designed to help jumpstart relationships (through care groups), teach the ropes of the work (through work crews), and give a taste of our heart for the staff and counselor roles (through meetings, workshops, and chapels).
3. We work to strategically place leaders in the staff's path that can help guide, counsel, and listen throughout the summer.
 - a. We are available as Staff Directors and plant ourselves in roles that keep us out of an office and in the midst of the staff/counselors.
 - b. We have a wonderful single lady who comes each summer as a "head counselor" role, and she is always available for counselors.
 - c. We have staff leaders in place. These are relationship-minded college-aged KBC alumni who come and disciple the staff throughout the summer.
 - d. We only ask Program Directors that we feel confident will be able to see the needs of both campers and counselors and pivot as necessary throughout the week.
 - e. We bring in 8 speakers/week to garner age-appropriate, specific teaching for both staff and campers.
4. Saturdays are a day of refreshing. We plan optional activities (coffee shop, movie, special pool activities, etc.) on campus for those who don't go home on the weekends.
5. Counselor Bonding Time is a fairly new thing to us. But on a rotating schedule, each counselor has one of three times during the day,

each day, to meet with a Program Director and other counselors to be refreshed. Our Grade School program gives the counselors access to their phones and a fun, cold snack/drink during that time. Our JH program instead offers something spiritually enriching for the counselors, something to be refreshed and encouraged.

(I have people balk that counselors of today need this time to step away, and to that I say, these young people are facing so many distractions. They don't know how to self-regulate, so it is our job to teach them how to self-regulate until they can do it for themselves)

6. Staff Camp is designed to be a reward, something to which our staff (just from the current summer) can look forward. We try new things, provide special treats, and focus on the ease out of summer and into school/regularly scheduled programming.
7. Our Winter Staff Reunion is another opportunity to be refreshed and rejuvenated in the midst of the school year. We listen to a plethora of complaints and ideas in meetings and accommodate plenty of free time for the refreshment of relationships.

When we speak to our staff during our annual training week, Leadership Training Camp, we talk about this shift in responsibility when they come from the camper side of the program to be on staff. This shift involves more than just access to the staff fridge and 5 free items from the canteen. This shift requires a strong work ethic, stamina, communication, maturity, and one more major factor.

We explained it this way last weekend at our annual Winter Staff Reunion:

When we invite people to be on staff at KBC, we are inviting them to join the work the Lord is doing at Kansas Bible Camp. This is unlike a party or a wedding or some other event. None of the people with Director in their title are actually the ones hosting the event. We're inviting you to a party we didn't conceptualize. We are inviting our staff to something God is doing, and in doing so, we are leaving the responsibility for their care and nourishment, their sustenance, in His lap.

When I host a party, I am responsible for the invitations, the food and drinks, a chair for every person, making sure the room is a comfortable temperature for most, a party favor, accessible facilities, a big enough parking lot, and any other cost incurred. But by inviting these staffers to God's party, I am relinquishing both control and responsibility for that provision.

There has been a major shift in the culture around us in the arena of self-care and mental health. Not all of those shifts have been a bad thing. We are also seeing that shift seep into the KBC culture. More and more, our staffers are relying on substances, techniques, or others (including us) to provide for their needs and expectations. The problem that we're running into, like each of your camps is, we can't.

This past summer, we had multiple staff, from our leaders to our first year staff lamenting to us that they could not carry on here.

- One was a back injury where she wasn't allowed to climb stairs (girls housing is on the third floor!).
- One was illness because of the humidity in the dorms (which is hard to make better in Kansas overnight).
- One was because the Program Director for that week wasn't taking care of their mental health needs.

But the other side of that coin was that they were unwilling to go home. They felt as though they *needed* the people around them, their peers, or us as leaders, to make it through this trying time, and they were unwilling to follow our instruction to go home and rest. Some of this stems from a place of **needing the attention** of the 200+ people at camp, some of it stems from a place of **hiding issues** from parents, and some of it stems from a **reliance** on a water source that runs out.

To me, the best thing we can do as leaders at our camp is teach our staff to drink deeply from the Living Water, the Author and Perfecter of their faith.

So we teach them what Scripture says about where to turn when they are low, feeling exhausted, feeling overlooked, feeling burnt out, feeling depleted.

We see one of two main problems:

1. they don't know how to drink deep of the Living Water
2. they have bought into the lie that the Living Water doesn't satisfy.

I want to address both faulty lines of thinking:

Jeremiah 2:13

13 "For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns That can hold no water



You remember that first time you give a baby a drink from a regular cup at a restaurant or at home? They're used to the sippy cup, and then they sputter and gag their way through those first several experiences with an actual cup. These young people do not know how to take a big drink because they've been sipping all of their lives. Sipping from broken cisterns, from Sunday school stories, from shallow (if any) conversations about spiritual things. So we teach them to return to the Fountain of Living Waters.

Romans 1:18-25

25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Instead of looking to the Creator of the universe, we watch them time and again look to one another for help. They're each struggling with these same things--anxiety, depression, mental health labels--and instead of doing the hard and heart work of looking to Jesus, we watch them turn to one another for help. They worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. And of course, God gave us one another as a source of encouragement and edification and tangible love. But when our focus narrows to only see one another as the source for those things, we will not find true rest.

So we teach them how to stand firm like Ephesians 6 describes. We teach them how to flee youthful passions and instead pursue righteousness as 2 Timothy 2 tells us. We teach them to make no provision for the flesh as Romans 13 tells us. We teach them how to rest well as Jesus did, going

away to a secluded place to be with the Father. We teach them to turn to the Creator of the Universe, not His creation when we need refreshment.

And we teach them by example. That is the hard part. And I'm *really* glad I don't have to teach a session on how to avoid burnout yourself. In my experience, teaching these young people how to avoid it is usually (1) exhausting and (2) makes you a prime target for the Enemy's schemes.



For a lot of these kids, we act as a sippy cup filled with the source of Living Water. (John 7 speaks of rivers of living water flowing from the innermost being of those who believe in the source of Living Water). Our job is to teach them that they have access to the same water. And drinking of it for themselves is not only so much better, but they will never be disappointed.

How do we help our staff avoid burnout? We teach them, both by word and by action, to run to the Fountain of Living Waters, not to another broken cistern. We show them-as best we can-to worship the Creator, not the creation (one another). We remind them that we are fighting a battle we cannot see, so we must learn to drink deep.

Ephesians 6:10-13

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

John 4:10-11, 13-15

10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

11 She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?"

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;

14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, so I will not be thirsty nor come all the way here to draw."

John 7: 37-39

37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.