

The Organization and Function of the Camp Board

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Don't be a camp board member unless you are prepared to spend some time! For nine of the last ten years I have been a member of a camp board and in that time have spent an average of one day every two months in board meetings. I never cease to be amazed at the amount of work required of a camp board of directors, yet I can honestly say that serving on the camp board is one of the most rewarding responsibilities one can fill.

The organization of Christian youth camps varies widely. To a large extent it is determined by the nature of the camp. Is it a legal corporation of individual Christians or is it operated by a congregation? Does it own property or rent? Does it have a long or short camping season? Is it large or small? The bigger the operation, the better organized the camp needs to be. In fact, good organization is essential to a well run camp.

The Wisconsin Christian Youth Camp, with which I am connected, is a legal corporation made up of Christian people, but separate from the church. Each year we have an annual meeting to report to the membership, to conduct necessary business and to choose directors to replace those whose terms are expiring. The primary responsibility for the operation of the camp and the management of its property is then vested in the eleven camp directors. The directors meet about six times a year to conduct camp affairs. Originally we had nine directors, but the number was increased after we purchased property and the amount of work falling on the directors increased. Some camps have even more. The difficulty with too many directors is that there may be too much dead wood or that not enough of them may actively participate in camp affairs.

In Wisconsin we also have an advisory board which is essentially a group of interested men through whom we seek to keep contact with the general membership and those with whom we are working. In this way we hope to maintain better relations with those not on the board. The members of the advisory board are informed of actions of the board and future programs and asked to publicize these plans. They are also welcome at the board meetings. Some camps have an executive committee which has a considerable measure of responsibility in the absence of the whole board.

Let us consider five areas in which the board of directors has a major responsibility.

1. CAMP POLICY.

Fundamental to any camp is its philosophy. This philosophy will determine its policy. For example, what restrictions will be imposed upon campers and staff during camp operation? Will smoking be allowed on camp grounds? What about mixed bathing? How tight will the reins be drawn on the campers in their personal conduct? If the camp owns property, what restrictions will be placed on camp use? Will the camp rent to others? The ones charged with the actual operation of the camp, such as the director during the camping session and the caretaker need to have these and related matters clearly spelled out by the board so that they have authority behind them when required to make a decision. No camp representative should be expected to act decisively unless he knows in advance that the board is behind him.

2. BASIC ORGANIZATION OF CAMPING SESSION.

There is a wide variation among camps in how they are set up during the actual camping session. However, even if the camp director is allowed wide latitude in choosing staff, someone has to select the director and this is the responsibility of the board. In our camp the board chooses the director, head counselor, and educational director for each session. We also choose a procurement director to be in charge of recruiting a staff. This new position was tried for the first time last year and helped immensely in reducing the burden on the directors of the camping session. We also select certain other key positions such as publicity director and registrar, but the directors in each session have the primary responsibility for lining up their staff in cooperation with the procurement director. The tentative staff is then presented to the board for its approval.

3. COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY

Every board has the responsibility to report to the general membership. This may involve reports at membership meetings and newsletters to the members. Lack of communication with the general membership is often at the root of financial difficulties of camps. People will not support a camp unless they know what is going on. Also in this area is the need to publicize the coming camping session by publishing bulletins or brochures giving information to prospective campers.

4. PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT.

Sooner or later most camps must decide whether to rent or buy. Many camps that start renting end up acquiring property to meet the increasing demands of the camp. A decision of such importance may ultimately rest with the general membership rather than the board, but of necessity the board must make its recommendations which more than likely will be followed. Once property is acquired a thousand and one questions must be answered by the board in whose hands the primary responsibility is placed. Can a caretaker be secured, and if so, what will he be paid, if anything?

What about repairs, tree cutting, new construction? Many of these matters involve so many details that they must be delegated to committees, but even here the final decision usually rests with the board.

5. FINANCING.

Although I have listed this item last, it is by no means the least important responsibility of the board. It is especially important once camp property has been acquired. Seldom do fees charged cover the entire cost of camping if purchase of property, upkeep, and capital improvements are considered. There are five general sources of camp revenue that we will notice here. First, there are camper fees which should be high enough to defray much of the costs, but not so high as to make it impossible for many campers to attend. There are general membership fees, both annual and life. Then some camps are fortunate enough to receive outright gifts which are often solicited in a fund raising drive. Some camps rent their property. In our camp we employ a variety of this by selling twenty-year cabin leases (when organized camp is not in operation) to those who are life members. Finally, camps often find it necessary to resort to a fund raising program such as candy sales, auctions, etc. The decision as to which of these means shall be used must be made by the board as well as the determination as to how they will be implemented.

The boards of Christian youth camps would do well to examine the structure and operation of other camps. We can help one another immensely, simply by the exchange of ideas.