

# LET'S GO FISHING

## The YMCA Camp Counselor Recruiting Process

**Smart anglers know** that you just don't walk out the door with a stick, some twine, a hook, and old bait and expect to land the big one. The great ones know that it takes a lot of preparation before you're ready to catch that prize-winning fish. Recruiting is no different. You've got to be prepared. POWER Hiring and YMCA of the USA have spent months talking with YMCA camp directors, looking through YMCA camp Web sites, and surveying various people about their camp counselor recruiting processes. The ideas that follow are a direct response to the observations we've made about the processes currently being used in YMCAs to attract camp counselors. Our goal is to provide you with tangible ideas for improving the hiring process, shortening the time to hire, and, of course, attracting better camp counselors. Your camp may already be doing these things (in fact, we saw some great examples), but many camps could improve their processes dramatically. In the pages that follow, we'll highlight some of the best practices for each stage of the hiring process. We'll also provide a summary checklist of the things that you should be doing as you begin the recruiting process for this coming year. The first step is to check your tackle box.



### Checking Your Tackle Box

Before recruiting season opens in full force, take stock of your standard tools for attracting top candidates from the perspective of a top candidate. Pretend that you are applying for a job in your camp and see what the process is like. Checking the tackle box means that you review your Web site, job ads, marketing materials, e-mails, and every other item that you use to reach potential candidates. You should know exactly what you're going to say to potential candidates and how you're going to let the little fish off easy and keep the biggest fish coming back for more. You want to make sure that every document, phone conversation, or e-mail that reaches a candidate is designed to make him or her want to come to camp. It's all part of the bait you need to attract the best. Here are some suggestions:

### Tackle Box Checklist

As you read through these "Definite Dos," decide who at your camp or office will do each task, and set a date it should be completed by.

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*October*

**Review all aspects of your Web site from the perspective of a great camp counselor applying for a job. Look for the following:**

- Make job opportunities highly visible from the home page by providing a direct link to your "Summer Jobs" page.
- Keep jobs current on your Web site. Make them more compelling. Describe the benefits of having a camp experience.
- Have compelling career information available. This should include compelling testimonials from prior counselors. This is critical. It's important for the candidate to think about the camp and talk with friends and family throughout the spring.
- Have specific and thorough application instructions including a quick, online application process.

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- Have a specific application for each camp if multiple camp options exist in the same source of information.
- Implement a “quick application” to start. You’ll catch the best applicants when they don’t have to complete a long application form. Most keepers won’t take more than five to 10 minutes at most to apply. Save the long application until after the phone screen.

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*December*    **Rewrite your job ads to include what a person will do, learn, and become.**

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*December*    **Review and complete all recruiting materials.** Have these available in both paper and electronic formats: quick application, longer formal application, former camp counselor testimonials, e-mails, offer letters, and required payroll forms.

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### Choose Your Fishing Hole Wisely

Top anglers know where the fish are and what they are eating. There’s nothing more discouraging than spending a whole day fishing and not catching anything. No camp has enough money in the budget for recruiting camp counselors, so you have to make every dollar count. Each YMCA camp should be able to “catch” its limit and ideally have enough candidates so it doesn’t have to keep everything it catches. Desperation leads to lower standards and drastic recruiting measures.



Let’s use a real example: It’s three weeks before camp and you’re still struggling to hire six additional counselors. What are you going to do? Most camp directors start working the phones. They call everyone they know, they ask for referrals, they twist arms, they give incentives—in short, they pull out all the stops. Recruiters call this networking. The funny thing is, it almost always works and it produces some great camp counselors. So why do that in May when you could do it in January and be done early? Every conversation you have between January 1 and the time camp starts should end with these questions:

**“Do you know someone who would make a great camp counselor?”**

**Would you mind if I called and invited him/her to apply?”**

Copy, cut, and paste these two questions in big print right by your phones to remind everyone involved in the hiring process to ask them!

**Don’ts:** If a recruiting activity didn’t produce good counselors last year, drop it! Don’t waste your time or money on efforts that don’t produce good results. Before you create your overall recruiting plan, make sure to review where your best counselors came from last year. Focus your efforts in those areas.

## Picking Your Fishing Hole Checklist: Finding Candidates

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*Start early*  
*November* Catch the Big Ones before they get caught by others. Implement a process **to nurture last year's camp counselors**. Send newsletters, birthday cards, and e-mails; remember to ask for referrals; invite them to a party to kick off recruiting season; and call and request referrals for other potential camp counselors.

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*January 1* **Casting your net.** Create your sourcing plan: It should include a list of sites where you will post want ads, newspaper advertisements, on-campus events and career days, direct mailing pieces, etc.

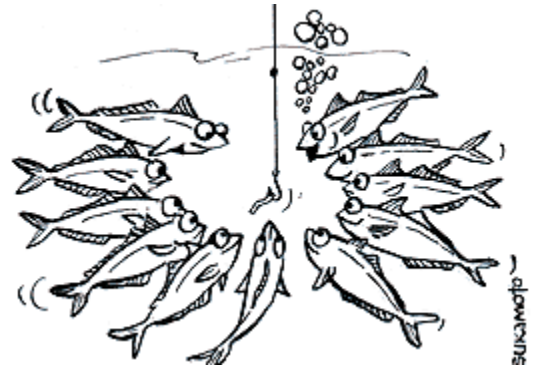
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*January 15* Divide the list and **start calling**. First, write out your pitch. Remember, it must show the benefits of your opportunity. (For example, it must answer the question, "What's in it for the candidate?") Next, make sure you know your pitch and you've called everyone on the list before January 15. Call each referral you receive within two weeks. If the person is not interested, don't let him or her off the phone until you receive the name of someone else to contact. Repeat this process until you've filled all of the positions.

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## The First Nibble: Responding to Applications

How you handle the first contact with a candidate can make or break your recruiting efforts. If the process is too difficult, time consuming, or frustrating, good candidates will just swim away to less-troubled waters. Below are some proven techniques to make the process shorter and easier for candidates to apply. Many camps today require very long applications and three written references before they will even look at a candidate. This approach is sure to turn off many good candidates.



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*Ongoing* The best fish require the best bait. The best candidates won't spend time completing long applications and waiting for you to get back to them. By the time you do, they'll be long gone. **Use quick application forms to make it easier and faster for the best to apply, and save your long applications for later.**

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*Every day*      **Keep fishing.** Always have a hook in the water, and be alert for every nibble. **Review all resumes as they are received, and don't wait until you get a stack of resumes before you start evaluating them.** Someone needs to be assigned to look at resumes as they arrive. Review all candidate inquiries within the first 48 hours and acknowledge the applications immediately. Call or at least send a positive e-mail stating your interest, the schedule, and background information on the value of the camp experience.

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*Within 24 hours*      **Contact hot candidates within 24 hours and schedule an immediate YMCA Camp Counselor Phone Screen (see Appendix E, page 36).** The best counselors have multiple opportunities. If you are not interested in a candidate, respond with a turndown letter as soon as possible.

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*Real time*      **Pay attention to every nibble and take immediate action.** If candidates apply in person, take the time to shake hands with them and thank them for applying. Spend five minutes with them and you'll leave a very positive impression, especially if you set up a phone screen within the next few days. **Establish immediate rapport, and, if you think they might be "keepers," offer them some fresh bait** such as the Job Expectations and information about camp life. Be sure to provide great testimonials from previous camp counselors.

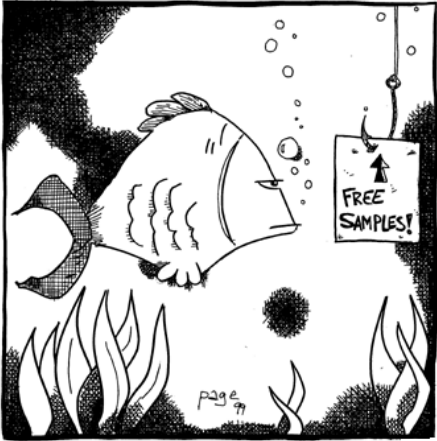
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*Ask for referrals in your first e-mail and in the phone screen*      **The best fish often can be found in the same bodies of water.** The best candidates often will refer their best friends and may even want to spend the summer together as camp counselors. **Ask all candidates to provide you with referrals each time you interact with them during the recruiting process.**

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**First Looks: Phone Screening**

We recommend that you use the YMCA Camp Counselor Phone Screen for every candidate before you meet in person to help you measure your catch. This process will save you time and allow you to really understand the candidate's accomplishments before a face-to-face interview (or scheduled one-hour phone interview).



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*Seven or more days after receiving application*

**Use the POWER Hiring YMCA Camp Counselor Interview as your official fishing guide.** Study the Performance Profile and the Phone Screen instructions. Anticipate potential questions and concerns and know how best to respond. You'll need to be able to address them, so be ready.

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*Ongoing*

**If they don't quite meet the standards for a keeper, let them know right away.** Send your turndown letter. Remember, this step is excellent public relations for the YMCA and is always important.

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*Ongoing*

**Keep using your best lures. You've got to be at the top of your game to recruit the hot candidates.** Remember to send persuasive information to them. Have returning counselors contact them to help provide great reasons for considering your opportunity.

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**Don'ts:** We encourage you NOT require written references be submitted before you conduct an interview. In many cases, requiring these written references up front will keep great people from even applying. References ARE critical, but later. Ask for names, phone &/or e-mail, and relationship to the candidate of three references. **Your notes on a reference call IS a written reference,** but more accurate and much faster.



### Sizing Up Your Catch: Interviewing and Assessing Candidates

The face-to-face or one-hour phone interview is the time to really size up your catch. If used effectively, the interview can eliminate the weak candidates easily at this stage and qualify the best ones. (NOTE: The POWER Hiring interview is proven just as successful on the phone).

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*Within 14 days of application date*

**Conduct a complete face-to-face (or telephone) performance-based interview with all good candidates.** Use the official YMCA Camp Counselor Interview and follow the instructions throughout the guide. Describe your opportunity in compelling terms.

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*Immediately following the interview*

**Complete the 10-Factor Candidate Assessment Form** and decide if you want to continue and hire this candidate right after the interview.

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*Within 48 hours of the interview*

Great candidates are in demand, so start and try to complete **reference checks,** ( and if possible, background checks, and drug screens within 48 hours after the interview.

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*Within three days of the interview*

**Once you have this additional information, make your hire/no hire decision immediately.** Start the offer negotiation phase while references are being completed, but don't make a formal offer until this step is completed.

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**Don'ts:** Don't wait until you've seen every candidate to start making offers! If you find a good counselor, hire him or her right away. Trust your scoring ability on the 10-Factor Assessment form. You must move quickly. If you know you want to hire the person after you complete the face-to-face interview, start phone reference checks immediately. It may take two or three days for you to connect with the references, but place the first calls right away. Also, immediately start the processes for background checks, drug testing, and any other preliminary testing you require.

### Reeling Them In: Negotiating and Making the Offer

It's not over yet. Now that you are sure you want them, you have to get them to say "yes." The best counselors will have options for how they spend their summers. It might be at another camp or in a higher paying job. It's your job to recruit them and help them make a wise choice. Here are some tips to help you reel in the best counselors every time.



**Don'ts:** Don't just send written offer letters to hot prospects. Make sure you test the offers verbally and get them to agree with you over the phone.

### Let's Celebrate with a Fish Fry

Good job! It's definitely time to celebrate, but wait: You aren't done yet. It's amazing how many fish twist and flop out of the cooler and back into the water. You've spent so much time, money, and energy getting them to accept the offer and you want to make sure they don't get away again. Some camps have as many as 10 percent of their counselors who have already accepted their written offer back out just before camp! Now is the time to get your new catch fully invested in your camp.

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| <i>Within a week of acceptance</i> | Assign a buddy counselor to call and fill in new hires on what's next.   | _____    | _____    |
| <i>Ask again</i>                   | Ask for referrals to their friends. New camp counselors are a great source for other camp counselors.  | _____    | _____    |
| <i>Biweekly until camp starts</i>  | Make sure to send them something—an e-mail, newsletter, or personal note—every two weeks. If you can't meet in person, set up a conference call with your new counselors and have them share something about themselves. If possible, invite them to attend a "getting to know you" event. | _____    | _____    |

**Don'ts:** Don't let your counselors go for more than two weeks without getting some type of communication from the camp. "Buyer's remorse" is a big problem with counselors. Peers can have a big influence on their decisions. You must keep the connections with your future camp counselors open until the day they show up for training.



## SAMPLE Statement of Child Abuse Prevention (*Read to every candidate*)

I need to tell you about a policy that we explain to every one of our candidates. The YMCA knows that, unfortunately, there may be people who want to work or volunteer here for the wrong reasons. But I'm sure you'll be pleased to hear about the active and, we believe, effective effort we make to prevent sexual and physical abuse. First, we attempt to screen out offenders whenever possible; for example, we do a very thorough background check, including criminal history.

Second, we structure the program so that one staff member or volunteer is never left alone with one child or anyone else who is vulnerable. We try to prevent any opportunity for abuse, and we periodically interview children and others about their experiences in the program.

Third, we take any and all allegations, including those from children, very seriously. We refer all allegations to the authorities for investigation, and we cooperate fully with any investigation.

Wrongdoers need to know that this is a very risky place to attempt to abuse children or anyone who is vulnerable. Most everyone appreciates this thorough process, which not only protects the people in our care, but also minimizes the potential for false allegations of abuse against innocent staff members and volunteers. Do you have any questions about our policy?

## Pep-Talk and Review Before Your First Interviews!

- ❑ **Make yourself familiar** with the camp counselor interview before talking with candidates. Be sure to review and practice your interviewing skills and questions.
- ❑ Review the **Job Expectations: YMCA Camp Counselor** (Appendix F) so you know what "success" looks like.
- ❑ Use the **Most Significant Accomplishments** question to identify the candidate's trends in performance.
- ❑ **Fact-finding** is the key to understanding actual accomplishments. Use follow-up questions to "peel the onion" to find out the candidate's actual experiences.
- ❑ Get **specific examples** of everything to reduce generalizations. Challenge "I would" responses and get past examples of performance instead.
- ❑ **After 30 minutes, you may end the interview if the candidate has a weak work/volunteer history, shallow accomplishments, or limited capabilities.** If you feel that someone is not qualified end the interview by saying, "I've really enjoyed getting to know you, and appreciate the time we've spent together. For this coming summer, I'm afraid we don't have a position available for someone with your specific set of experiences. I'm sure you'll be able to find a job this summer that will meet your needs, so rather than wait for an unlikely vacancy to occur with us, I encourage you to continue looking at other employers right now for a position that both fits and is available. Thanks again for this time together."
- ❑ **A good interview, in person or on the phone, should take up to an hour or more.** The time you spend now will be well worth it later!
- ❑ **How the Interview Form Relates to the 10-Factor Candidate Assessment Form:** The scores for the various questions on this form are not meant to be tallied -- instead they are intended to help you take notes during the interview so you can score the candidate using the **10-Factor Candidate Assessment Form** after the interview. The interview form does NOT correspond one-to-one with the 10-factor assessment. Rather, as a whole, the answers to the questions in the interview should help you rank the candidates on each of the ten factors. Some interview questions in particular will help you rank certain of the factors. Those questions are noted on the form, i.e., above each factor there is a note like this, "Consider answers to questions 3, 5, & 7."

## SAMPLE JOB PROFILE:

# Making a Difference in the Lives of Children Can Make a Big Difference in *Your* Life

If you've got what it takes lead a group of children through adventures, crafts, campfires and cabin life, we've got the job for you. The YMCA has day and resident camps located throughout the United States in urban and country settings, with a wide range of counseling and activity opportunities. Our camp counselors love an active outdoor schedule, working with different age groups and with other counselors. They take pride in helping children grow and develop personally, spiritually, and physically. You can bring your own special talent, whether it's swimming, riding, archery, music, or dancing. You'll need a desire to teach others and the energy and attention to detail necessary to make a busy camp schedule work. We'll teach you everything else you need to know. You'll work with some of the most dedicated and creative people on the planet and the friendships you'll make with the other counselors and camp leaders will last a lifetime.

### Here's what we expect from our top counselors:

1. **Our best counselors make a difference in the lives of their campers**, creating a unique relationship with each camper. They get to know each new group of campers quickly, ensuring each camper's growth, safety, and development during camp. And they have FUN!
2. **100% Participation – 100% of the Time.** There isn't a lot of down time at camp. As a counselor you are always on stage helping campers, being an example, teaching and playing games. It's up to you to make sure everyone has a good time. You'll make the games interesting by joining in and knowing that the sidelines are no place for a great camp counselor.
3. **Making It Happen.** Our campers have a full schedule of activities throughout long summer days and you're on top of it, planning to make sure the campers are where they need to be, doing what they want to be doing. And when things change, like the weather or the mood of your campers, you're always one step ahead with creative ideas for alternative activities.
4. **The Team Is Tops.** You have the opportunity to work with great children, great counselors and a staff that is dedicated to the success of camp, every hour, every day, every week. You'll know when to get help from other counselors or from administration. You'll know about all the resources available to you and your campers – and you'll use them to create that unique experience.
5. **It's Your Camp.** You feel like you own it: every activity, every camper. The reason campers will love you and write to you months later is that you were the role model of the camp's values – you were the one each camper looked up to during camp.
6. **Calm, Cool, and Collected – Even When You're Not by the Pool.** During hot summer days, hectic schedules, and all those campers and responsibilities, you keep your cool and pay close attention to how your campers are managing the stress of different activities, weather, meeting new people, and the unique living arrangements of camp. You know the one thing that matters most is the camper's safety, spiritually, mentally, and physically.

If you're up to the challenge, want to lead instead of follow, and really want to make the difference in the lives of dozens of children this year, we'll help you succeed. It's exhilarating, exhausting and challenging! But the rewards are out of this world. There is nothing quite like getting that short handwritten note and a big hug at the end of a long week at camp from one of "your" campers. And the friendships you develop with other counselors and staff will be equally special. Campers and staff will remember you forever! Years later the lessons you taught them at camp will stick with them as they send their own children to camp.

Ask \_\_\_\_\_ any questions you have about this unique opportunity.

## SAMPLE: Quick Application

To be used for showing interest with or without a resume. (Basic form adapted with permission from the YMCA of San Diego County, <http://camp.ymca.org/> )

### Summer Camp Staff Application for an Interview

|                               |  |             |      |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------|------|
| Name:                         |  | Date:       |      |
| Address:                      |  |             |      |
| City:                         |  | State:      | Zip: |
| Cell phone:                   |  | E-mail:     |      |
| Phone at school:              |  | Home phone: |      |
| University:                   |  | Major:      |      |
| Name of camp(s) applying for: |  |             |      |
| Dates available (From/To):    |  |             |      |

#### **Tell us about yourself!**

|   |  |   |  |
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| Any previous camp experience? Y N   |  | If yes, as a <input type="checkbox"/> camper or a <input type="checkbox"/> staff member |  |
| Please describe any awards or special recognition that you have received at work, school, or as a volunteer:                          |  |   |  |
| Indicate any areas of expertise such as archery, arts & crafts, aquatics, mountaineering, nature, or other:                           |  |   |  |
| List any hobbies or special interests you have that might prove beneficial to you as a camp counselor:                                |  |   |  |
| Please list any certifications you have such as CPR, lifeguard, ropes course, mountaineering, or other:                               |  |   |  |
| Please describe something you've done at work, school, while volunteering, or at a place of worship that you are especially proud of. |  |   |  |
| If you have a resume (not required), please paste it in here:   |  |   |  |