

# BEST PRACTICES

## Concerning the Termination of International Staff

*\*Developed by the partnership of International Cultural Exchange Organizations*

### Overview

Regulatory protection for employees, seasonal or otherwise, outside of the United States involves far more by way of documentation and due process than in the US. At most United States summer camps, we sometimes make the decision to terminate a staff member quickly. The reasons are often obvious, from performance or safety issues to breaches of rules or policy. In order to minimize disruption, termination usually involves swift removal from the camp premises. The entire procedure can take as little as a half-hour or less.

It is important to realize that the termination process, while standard procedure for us, to others may appear unduly harsh. International staff and their families are often outraged at the practice of summary dismissal. The following best practices can help us bridge some of these cultural differences. Following them in these unfortunate circumstances can go a long way in showing respect, dignity, empathy, and genuine concern for health, safety, and welfare of international staff.

### Educational Best Practices

In your staff manual and orientation program make sure to:

- 1) Outline your performance coaching system and termination procedures clearly and review them in detail. Make special reference to cultural perspectives and the fact that these procedures and policies exist to protect the campers.
- 2) Clearly enumerate those acts of commission or omission that result in termination. Give specific examples of circumstances in which staff have been fired in the past and describe exactly how you typically conduct terminations.
- 3) Be prepared with specific destinations (e.g., motels, youth hostels etc.) that international staff may go to should the need arise.

### Procedural Best Practices

Sometimes, thoughtful and deliberate coaching can eliminate the need for termination.

- 1) Administer your performance system consistently but be alert and sensitive to potential cultural differences in interpretation.
- 2) Get your placement agency representative involved as soon as there are any problems. Give the participant the opportunity to consult with your representative, and facilitate as much coaching and counseling as possible.
- 3) Once your representative has coached the participant, if appropriate, consider granting steps outlined in your performance system that might give a probationary period and/or the chance to turn the situation around.

- 4) Establish clear expectations and time benchmarks and be sure the participant and the agency representative understand those decisions.

When termination becomes inevitable, it is vital to proceed in full cooperation with your representative from the sponsoring agency.

- 1) Get your representative involved immediately! Call the agency before you take any steps to remove the participant from your camp. Coordinate the plan with your representative.
- 2) Schedule the actual implementation with your representative. Give the participant the opportunity to consult with your representative to be sure they fully understand what is happening. The representative will need to give the participant specific instructions on what to do and where to go.
- 3) Make it early enough in the day to allow sufficient time to travel during daylight hours. In the rare case where the situation is urgent enough to merit immediate dismissal at night, arrange for transportation to pre-arranged local accommodation.
- 4) If possible, take the extra step of allowing the participant to say a brief goodbye to their closest friends and colleagues.
- 5) Ensure that the participant is in possession of all personal belongings before leaving the camp premises. Also, confirm with your representative the exact amount of compensation that is due, and make full payment in cash.
- 6) Be prepared to deal with parents. Although the participant is an adult, cultural differences and geographic distance may motivate the parents to call the camp. A prepared simple statement that includes how to contact the sponsoring agency representative and the participant will help to keep the response focused.
- 7) Above all, orchestrate it so that the participant has enough time and resources to get to a secure destination safely and at a reasonable time of day.

### Ethical Considerations

Never terminate international staff:

- Without consulting with the sponsoring agency
- Because a camper session may be down in numbers
- In sudden anger over a particular situation or without just cause
- For speaking up about something or appearing to complain

Also, consistently threatening to fire staff can result in an unhealthy work environment and unnecessary morale issues.

### Rematch/Replacement

There is a broad range of reasons for dismissal. There are cases where placement in another camp is not possible for reasons involving child protection, drugs, alcohol or other serious issues. In many circumstances, however, it is indeed possible to give an international staff person another chance.

They have shown a great deal of commitment through a prolonged application and governmental, agency and camp screening process. International applicants put in a lot of effort, financial resources and travel vast distances in order to participate in the American camp experience and sometimes that participant is just not a good match for your camp situation.

Where terminations have been the result of minor errors in judgment, there have been numerous examples of successful rematches in other camps. Some of the best returning staff, and even interviewers, actually worked at more than one camp during their first summer! Sponsoring agencies, however, heavily rely on your recommendation before they consider the offer of another placement.

Terminations can be emotional and challenging for all parties, however reason should always prevail. When professionally prudent, consider endorsing the participant's suitability for another placement with the sponsoring agency or another camp administrator. Think perhaps of situations where you were given a second chance. It can make a huge difference in all sorts of ways.

*\* International Cultural Exchange Agencies participating in the development of these Best Practices*  
*BUNAC/Summer Camp USA*  
*Camp America*  
*Camp Leaders*  
*CCUSA – Camp Counselors USA*  
*Cultural Homestay International – Camp Adventure USA*  
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