

INSTANT HOLIDAY CAMPS FORMULA

Showtime!

Transcription

This is the fun bit, the Showcase. This is where all the fun the kids have had comes to fruition! Let's talk first about one of the more philosophical aspects of the showcase. In sticking with the motto of giving kids confidence, what is not helpful to this cause is when children miss out on being the star of the show, or even if they just perceive that they are missing out on something that another child is getting. So here is a really easy decision. Don't have any stars of the show. Make every child equal and require from your leaders that each child is front and centre at some stage. No child is to have more of a role than another. Full stop.

It just so happens that the best children's dance teachers I've ever met and worked with have a remarkable ability to rotate the children around the stage, often in groups, so that every child has their moment in the spotlight. When it comes to music, do you really need a vocal solo in that song or could you turn it into a small ensemble of three kids? It's going to be a much more comfortable experience for the kids by singing in a little small ensemble. This is all confidence boosting and vital to the success of your camp and your reputation. Remember the personal guarantee for the camp? That guarantee that your child will gain confidence from this experience or they'll receive a 100% refund of all their money? This is where you need to make it happen.

All activities to this point have been designed to prepare the children for a positive performance experience. You and the leaders need to be calm and excited at the same time, making the children comfortable and still buzzing with enthusiasm. Reassure and praise them constantly, affirming how brilliant, how wonderful they will be. In my entire business experience I have never once had to fulfill the money back guarantee, because the children were always thoroughly prepared and encouraged at every stage. I'd given them every chance to have a good time to have fun up there. Parents always recognised the professionalism and dedication we showed to making the children at ease in a fun environment. Give the parents what they are looking for and then deliver by following a system and we know can't go wrong.

I'm sure you can see the other advantage of this system. It's happened to me and I'm sure it happened to you, it's that awful phone call from a distressed parent who wants to know why Amy was given the solo, while her much more talented daughter missed out. This is the kind of headache that I seek to avoid at all costs. It's not just worth it and I'm not interested in dealing with it. The moment I decided that all the children would have equal time in the spotlight was the day I never had to take one of those hideous calls again.

That moment came one evening after camp when a parent called and verbally

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assaulted me for 45 minutes over something that her child had misunderstood. And the worst thing was that it was my birthday. Never again. What was a negative turned into an opportunity as this was one of the features that parents adored, if their kids are happy, so are they.

When planning the showcase, I made a little bit of a controversial decision. This was my personal decision, but I based it on my belief that it is really important for the parents to be able to attend the showcase, hence the slightly later time of 4:30pm. In my view it's better to have a full audience than not, so give the parents a bit more time to get there in the afternoon it's going to be a better performance. The kids remain at camp from 3pm, doing quiet activities with the leaders and getting ready for their big debut, get changed, warm up! This also gives you a bit of time after the day has finished to set up all the chairs for the performance and clear up the hall ready for your departure. Collect all lost property and get the kids to help pick up any rubbish as you want to leave the hall in better condition than you found it. This will help with keeping the rent down next time and to build your relationship with the school. Anyway, if you prefer to hold the showcase earlier, let's say at 3pm, that is totally up to you. By having a little bit of a later show though, it does give you extra time up your sleeve to run an extra dress rehearsal or spend some time polishing that item that really needs some last minute attention.

In the past, my showcases were a full production, with a specially written script and home made costumes and dramas all round, ending with me being up until 3am creating dialogue so that all the kids got a line to say, spray painting garbage bags for costumes. Until I got to the stage where I said - No longer, my friends! I have refined and finessed and produced a formula that makes the showcase a dream to run. Here's how it works. So let's say you have four age groups, we'll call them the red, green, yellow and blue groups. Each group performs an item each of singing, dancing and acting. Additionally, each elective group performs an item. Then there's 3 items per group to give 12 items plus the singing and dancing elective performances. To link these 14 items, the drama elective group is responsible for writing a linking script to introduce each item in as creative way as they like. It's perfect – it takes you out of the equation and the children create a performance they are so proud of. You just design an item run sheet, you list the order which you think the performance would go in, taking into consideration kids coming on and off the stage as well as not leaving any group sitting around for ages as that is a recipe for chaos. Some items will be shorter than others, some longer, but on average you will be working on a performance that is between 40 minutes to an hour. It is definitely achievable to produce a high quality show in the course of the week – in fact that is the most common comment after the Showcase – parents cannot believe that you produced a performance in one week equal to what their child's ballet school takes all year to achieve. Just smile and thank the parent, then direct the conversation back to the impact it is having on their child. Remember, this goes back to – you don't sell, you talk about what impact it's having, the difference it's making. And that's going to bring them back next time!

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There's more information in the leader manual about this, which I would recommend you have a look at, especially the schedule for preparing for the Showcase. After the showcase, thank your leaders, give them a bottle of wine or something for their hard work and their inspiration. Also give each child a performance certificate – and please, please, triple check that you have every child's name in that pile of certificates. A little tip is to have a leader sitting very close by with additional blank certificates and a marker just in case you forget little Annie and you can quickly write it out and avoid any tears.

While you still have all the kids sitting on the stage after they have received their awards, this is now your time. Begin telling the parents about the dates for the next camp, you might like to even place an application form on their chairs so that they can fill it in there and then. Let them know about what else you are creating – sell to them while they are still high after that magnificent performance. Then is the time to get them thinking about what they'll be doing next holidays.

This is a personal thing, but every single camp I donated 5% of takings to a children's charity. It was at this stage that I announced the total amount donated to date and that if any of the parents would like to further contribute to this wonderful cause, there are two wonderful 12 year olds standing by the door with a collection tin. Giving back is a big part of receiving and contributing is one of the most enriching things you can add to you life. And by adding that element to your business you're setting a great example to the children and you're also setting a really good path for your future as well.