



CADET ACTIVITY LEADERSHIP: LESSONS FROM SUMMER '22

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ADULT LEADERSHIP

1. Supervisory & Teamwork Basics. One activity lacked a clear organizational structure. If a staff roster existed, it was not conspicuous. Accordingly, roles and responsibilities were often unclear, which impeded mission success. This ambiguity affected the senior / cadet relationship, too. Cadet cadre believed there was no specific person supervising and assisting them, and so cadet conduct became more of a challenge than it would have otherwise.

Take-Aways: First, every activity needs a staff roster with contact information and job titles. Such a document is one of the first requirements if the adults are to function as a team. Second, every cadet activity needs a “commandant of cadets” or “dean of students,” the adult leader directly charged with supervising and guiding the cadet cadre and generally being the interface between the adult staff and the cadets.

2. Leadership by Example. We have reliable reports about one or two adult staff not setting an appropriate example. At one activity, adults would smoke in cadets’ presence, swear, and talk non-stop about how things used to be “back in the day.”

Take-Aways: Adult staff must set a positive example. If they’re not living up to the Core Values, they need to be corrected and, if necessary, sent home. Perhaps the lesson here is that some people feel a need to participate in CAP more than CAP benefits from their service. We should look at people’s track records and their demeanors when selecting adult staff for cadet activities.

3. Staffing Levels. COVID is making it harder to staff activities. Even pre-COVID, staffing is a challenge because we rely upon volunteers who have busy lives and limited free time. This year, several activities seemed to operate with the bare minimum adult staff, then if the unexpected happened – COVID symptoms, a cadet injury – they lacked the extra adult or two needed to respond to the incident without negatively impacting the larger group.

Take-Aways: One potential solution to an immediate challenge is to recruit local senior members to be placed on the “on call” roster. Although a given senior member might not be willing or able to serve on staff throughout the activity, there are probably more local people than we realize who are willing to help out for an afternoon.

There’s a larger issue with staffing levels. Current CPP guidelines merely require two adults per activity and leave it up to local leaders to decide how many additional staff are needed, depending upon group size. Perhaps it’s time for CAP to take a more serious and policy-driven approach to adult staff size requirements. We discuss this further in New Ideas, below.

4. Decision Making Processes. An adult volunteer experienced an acute emotional crisis. Accordingly, cadets and other adults felt at risk. The top three activity leaders conferred and decided to send him home for the day and allow him to return the next day for office duty only, where he’d have minimal interaction with cadets. This decision was overruled by someone not on-site.

Take-Away: Who was right? Our team doesn’t know and we’re not so much interested in second-guessing that decision as we are in looking at decision-making *processes* when cadet protection is at stake. Our observation here is that teams tend to avoid bad decisions more reliably than single individuals. We’ll come back to this point in the New Ideas section later.

5. “Old School” Training Practices. Training practices at one location were nonsensical, adding lots of risk to a situation while delivering no learning value. Cadets were running around forested areas after dark, no eye protection, for unknown purpose. Cadets were also doing their running and PT in combat boots. It’s the sort of outdated and counter-productive training practices perpetuated in bad movies about military life.

Take-Aways: It’s healthy to look upon our training practices and just ask, *Why?* What are we trying to do here and is this the best way? Good training matches operational realities, so if CAP would never have an operational need to dispatch cadet teams without eye protection, as one example, we shouldn’t train in that environment.

CADET DISCIPLINE

1. Kids These Days. Some of you say that cadet discipline was a challenge this year. Basic respectfulness toward adults was lacking. Horseplay was up. Some of you say just the opposite – you had fewer disciplinary issues than usual. Over at the American Camp Association, which represents nearly 10,000 summer camps across the US, there’s no spike in discussion about discipline. Our team

interprets this to mean that we are not experiencing a CAP-wide, systematic problem with cadet discipline.

Take-Aways: If cadet discipline problems do spike in your area, please reach out to us.

2. Success Story: Cadre Training. New York Wing redoubled their cadet cadre preparations, really diving into the curriculum and the operating standards found in the encampment manual. Senior staff there told us this was one of the most successful encampments they've ever seen; the amount of drama was negligible. The key, they said, was to train the cadre using the national-level standards.

3. Success Story: Calibrating Expectations. New Hampshire staff told us that success means calibrating their expectations. Customs and courtesies and drill and uniform wear were rusty at their encampment. Cadets started a couple steps back from where one would normally anticipate them starting. No matter. The New Hampshire staff knew their job remained the same – help the cadets grow and improve during the week. The cadets might have progressed slower than usual, and the result might have been a step or two off the norm, but leaders in New Hampshire wisely realized that the journey is the destination.

4. Downtime. When cadets have unstructured free time (for example, when flight academy cadets are sitting around watching their peers fly), that's when problems can develop. Unstructured time is a hazard.

Take-Aways: Activity staff should look at their training schedules and anticipating downtime. Is everyone fully occupied during a given event? If not, how can we fill it with productive activity? This is important from a disciplinary perspective as well as the core mission of maximizing learning at cadet activities.

PROGRAM QUALITY

1. Hands-On Activities. In a survey of NCSA participants, cadets report that they prefer hands-on opportunities to the maximum extent practical. Similarly, they appreciate opportunities to apply what they have learned in the core cadet curriculum from their squadron-level experiences. These points apply to encampments and NCSAs alike.

Take-Aways: As adult leaders and cadet cadre work together to develop the activity's program, a key question guiding that work should be, "How do we incorporate hands-on activities for this particular event?"

2. Role Models & Professional Connections. Through surveys, cadets report that they value opportunities to interact with military, government, and other public service professionals. They want to meet those experts, see them at work, and ask questions. Any kind of "meet with and see professionals in a behind-the-scenes environment" is well-received.

Take-Away: For activities located away from Air Force installations (see Air Force connections, below), the value in bringing the Blue to the cadets cannot be overstated.

3. Thorough Planning & Ongoing Communication. In surveys this summer, adult staff and cadets alike identified the need for thorough planning prior to the activity to make the experience successful. Closely connected to that expectation is the desire for schedules to be clearly communicated and updated in a timely manner. Participants want to know more about what's going on at the activity.

Take-Aways: The theme here appears to be more planning is better. Okay, but why does that not happen already? Activity staff need to ask that "why" question of themselves because the reasons likely vary by activity and by individuals. Why does planning not start earlier? Why are we unable or unwilling to involve more people in the planning process to accomplish more and share the burden? Those seem to be worthwhile questions for activity staff to ask themselves.

Turning to more nitty-gritty challenges, perhaps we need to develop better habits in double-checking preparations a day or two prior to an event. When do the cadets need to arrive? Where? Carrying what equipment? Having completed what homework? What if it's raining? Who, specifically is the POC in the host unit? When was the last time we conferred with them? It might be useful for our team at NHQ to tweak the optional checklists that people use in the pre-planning phase and the day prior final check phase.

One final point about planning and communication concerns a theme of secrecy. In our travels, we sometimes hear activity leaders prefer to keep the schedule a secret, perhaps so that cadets are not disappointed if something falls-through. Based on this year's feedback, it sounds like that "costs" too much in confusion about plans and expectations. Activities should make their schedules understood by all and updated in real time.

SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Feeding the Cadets & Staff. No matter how much food you buy, teenaged cadets will still be hungry. In a couple locations cadets were not getting enough to eat. Worse still, when this became apparent, leaders did not call for help. Everyone suffered in silence, until they returned home, when a mom called complaining that her cadet had lost eight pounds. Through surveys this summer, adult staff and cadets at various activities said they wanted more food and higher-quality food.

Take-Aways: At cadet activities, we need three solid meals, of course, but we also should be providing snacks like granola bars and fruits in morning, afternoon, and evening. Plus, we need to have some alternative choices, contingencies for cadets and staff who have limited diets. If an installation suddenly cannot support CAP as much as we expected, local leaders should call NHQ for help. In the

least, money can be found somewhere and catering brought-in to ensure our people are adequately fed.

2. Food Safety. This summer we had an awfully serious case involving a food allergy. The cadet became seriously ill.

Take-Aways: Food allergies are high risks. Accordingly, we need to identify those risks and develop a plan for mitigating them. Who is allergic? What foods must be avoided? Are any of those foods on the menu? Who, specifically will be comparing the members' allergy information with the menu and conferring with kitchen staff to avoid cross-contamination? We'll come back to this point in the New Ideas section later.

3. Bunk Beds. A cadet fell from a bunk bed and seriously injured himself. A similar accident with life-threatening consequences recently occurred at the Little League World Series.

Take-Aways: If sleeping on military installations, it's possible that bunk beds are not constructed to modern safety standards. College campuses tend to offer better bunks that are equipped with safety railings. As a general rule, we should avoid assigning people to the top bunk if it is possible for us to lodge them elsewhere. Why take the risk if it can be avoided? If bunks are unavoidable, we should ask if anyone is already used to sleeping in the top bunk and make bunk assignments accordingly. Also, it's probably safer to use sheets and blankets on a top bunk instead of slippery, nylon sleeping bags.

4. General Facility Sanitation. Survey respondents said that at some locations the lodging, bathroom, and shower facilities were not just uncomfortable but less sanitary than required.

Take-Aways: Nearly all CAP activities are located at facilities CAP does not control. We cannot improve the facility beyond some basic, self-supported housekeeping. However, we can choose to let go of old habits. Instead of constantly returning to a sub-standard facility, we can look around for better options. True this takes work, but sometimes staff feels resigned to returning to the same place year after year. At one NCSA, the hotel had gone downhill fast but

the staff thought they had no options. When they documented the problems with the familiar location that summoned a determination to find a better hotel, even if it would be 20% more expensive. College dorms are typically well-maintained and might be superior to barracks that are seldom used (and therefore not optimally maintained) by a military installation.

AIR FORCE CONNECTIONS

1. "Blue" Experiences in Remote Locations. Thanks to our friends in the Pentagon, we're seeing increased access to Air Force support at cadet activities. Their annual memo asking USAF installations to support cadets is making a difference, according to several activity directors we've spoken with. Still, the memo opens the door for support, but doesn't guarantee results. In some locations, the Air Force flying unit acknowledged the memo but expected CAP volunteers to navigate a bureaucracy of forms and approvals. CAP-USAF is aware of that and is coming to the aid.

Take-Aways. Start the encampment planning cycle in January (for summer season) or June (for winter season). If you operate on a non-USAF facility, request the nearest installation to provide bus support and a day-long field trip to the hangar, engine shop, tower, etc. If that's not possible, request USAF aircraft to fly to the nearest local airport and do orientation flights from there, or fly-overs or static displays. Your CAP-USAF Liaison Region will assist.

2. Tent City as New Paradigm. The biggest success story for Air Force support this year belongs to the New York Air Guard's attack wing in Syracuse. Like most Air Force installations, this Guard wing doesn't have a lot of empty beds for cadets. But they do have a civil engineering squadron. The Air Guard erected deployment-grade tent city, outfitted with air conditioning and electricity. This enabled the cadets to live on the Guard installation and have an immersive, Blue experience. While many states lack an active duty Air Force installation, every state has an Air Guard facility. Perhaps the NY Guard has given us a new paradigm for encampment.

NEW IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

What do you think? Sound off to cadets@capnhq.gov

1. Establish Adult-to-Cadet Ratios. Want to serve 100 cadets at encampment? In theory, only two CPP-approved adult leaders are required. In practice, experienced leaders know that many more adults are needed. This summer, several locations said they were probably understaffed, but it's difficult to determine to what degree an activity is properly staffed without our having a standard reference.

Adult-to-youth ratios are often regulated by state governments. The largest professional association in the industry, the American

Camp Association, sets adult to youth ratios as well. Given CAP's commitment to meet or exceed the standard of care in youth-serving organizations, it's probably time for us to do likewise. For sake of conversation, the table on page 4 shows a potential ratio matrix. These ratios are slightly less restrictive than other youth programs because the cadet cadre are akin to "counselors in training" who augment the adult supervisors.

2. Normalize Team Decisions for Cadet Protection Issues. To reduce the likelihood of a poor decision, involve more leaders in the process. In contrast, the practice of vesting decision-making authority in a single individual is risky because individuals may have

blind spots, conflicts of interest, and less information upon which to base a decision. CAP knows this already. In CAP, we require licensed, mission-qualified pilots to confer with a flight release office before taking-off. We require major purchases to be routed through a finance committee. A team approach to youth protection decision-making is becoming the norm. Congress recently enacted laws concerning youth protection in the Olympic sports. Now, if someone allegedly violates Team USA safety practices, a committee looks into the concern, determines its findings, and determines the sanctions. In the CAP cadet community, CPP issues would benefit from our moving away from a single decider (the commander paradigm) and instead charging a small committee with responsibility for fact-finding and sanctions.

3. Use Professional Caterers. Food safety and kitchen sanitation are technical subjects. Cooks, servers, and support staff complete technical training on sanitary practices. When CAP attempts to prepare its own meals at activities, how certain are we that our volunteers know those standards and are equipped with the resources needed to comply with them? It’s conceivable that we are sometimes non-compliant with local regulations. When CAP activities attempt to prepare their own meals, it’s usually done because military or college food services are not available, and because we want to keep costs down.

However, CAP activity tuition is well below US market rates, so our skimping on food budgets is unnecessary, especially when we consider that CEAP is available for low-income cadets.

Overnight Camp (6 days)	\$ 1,032
Day Camp (5 days)	380
CAP Encampment	225

Source: American Camp Association, 2021

Next time we have an overnight activity and no clear way to feed our people, we ought to make catering our standard solution. Yes, it’ll increase tuition, but if it’s necessary, it’s necessary. Even if encampment tuition rises \$150, it’d still be a bargain.

4. Wing Commanders Use the Maj Gen Phelka Checklist. This year, Maj Gen Phelka asked all wing commanders to touch base with their encampment commanders and activity directors. Is the activity positioned for success? Have they all needed resources? Are they encountering road blocks and need wing commander assistance? General Phelka’s memo included a checklist to guide a brief discussion with the activity leaders. We ought to make such conversations standard practice. About 2 weeks prior to a major event, if wing commanders phoned the activity director to touch base, we might steer clear of problems and have better activities.

ADULT TO CADET RATIOS - Potential matrix offered for purposes of discussion

Activity Type	Unit Meetings & Local Daytime Events	Daytime Outing or Full-Day Events	Overnight Activity Overall Staffing	High Adventure or Challenge Activity Max. Supervisory Scope
Audience				
General Cadet Audience (ages 12+)	Overall ratio of 1:30 Add 1 adult for every 15 additional cadets	Overall ratio of 1:24 Add 1 adult for every 12 additional cadets	1:10	1:8
Older Cadet Audience (ages 16+)			1:12	1:10
Two-deep practices remain required in all situations				