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## **ACA Conference Reflections**

### **Opening Keynote**

With Tina Payne Bryson

Tina Payne Bryson had the opportunity at giving the opening keynote lecture at the 2014 ACA National Conference. Bryson is the coauthor of the book, *The Whole-Brain Child*. She is a school counselor and the child development director for Lantern Camps. Tina earned her PhD from the University of Southern California, where her research explored attachment science, childrearing theory, and the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology. Tina started her lecture by introducing herself and her three boys, via presentation. She stated that as her boys were growing up she started sending them to camp. At first she started out as a nervous mother dropping her boys off at camp, but over the years she started to notice the positive changes that occurred within her boys, and Tina now is a huge advocate for summer camps.

Tina started to realize, through research, that camp builds the brain of all campers. Tina said, "What happens during camp years, forms the adult brain." Her first point was that there is a progression within campers. Although counselors may not be able to see it, parents definitely notice a change in their kids. Tina mentioned that change occurs during struggles. Struggles are the prime time to mold camper's minds. She talked about connecting with the left and right side of the brain during struggles and how to identify with campers.

As a counselor myself this information is very vital. To think that parents are entrusting me with the abilities to mold their children's minds is crazy to think about. The past few years as a camp counselor I've come to realize it's not about me and all the fun activities I get to participate in, it's about the campers. I'm there at camp to provide an everlasting positive experience for these campers. This coming summer I will take Tina's advice into consideration as I am in the position to mold campers' minds.

### **Breakout #1**

Make More Magic: Fifty More Tricks of the Trade Learned from Coast to Coast  
With Laura Kriegel and Jack Schott

Our first breakout session was a bit of a let down. The Title to the session was, *Make More Magic: Fifty More Tricks of the Trade Learned from Coast to Coast*. The two "prompters," Laura and Jack, in charge of the sessions were recent college graduates, no more than 2 or 3 years older than us. Upon graduation they decided to take a trip around the country and visit every single summer camp they could get their "feet on the ground." Which I think their number was around 90 plus summer camps visited in a 9 to 12 month period.

From this experience Laura and Jack had compiled a list of areas they had observed that stood out among camps, good or bad. This list consisted of 5 things. Practical Solutions, Dining Halls, Program Areas, Activities, and Facilities. Practical solutions involved anything from special wakeup calls, to innovative ways to deal with homesick campers. They couldn't stop talking about how they loved the idea of outdoor dining at multiple camps they visited. The many program areas and activities, with tons of ideas for program directors to implement new games. And finally facilities, and how they had witnessed innovative ideas on how to get from point A to point B within camp, ex. Slides.

The overall presentation and material was very interesting, but I feel like I didn't learn anything. To me this session was all about Laura and Jack and their journey around the country to witness multiple different camps.

## **Keynote # 2**

With Adam Grant

Adam Grant is professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. Adam is the author of his book; Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success. In his book he talks about: Givers, Takers, and Matchers. And how these three roles play out vitally in the life of camp. Adam's definition of the three styles are as portrayed. "People who operate like takers are usually trying to get as much as possible from others, giving as little back in return as they can. Givers, on the other end of the spectrum, are people who enjoy helping others and frequently do it with no strings attached. And most of us fall right in the middle of that spectrum as matchers. A matcher is somebody who tries to keep an even balance of give and take. In other words, it's quid pro quo — if I do you a favor, I expect an equal favor in return. And if you do me a favor, I might feel like I was in debt until I settled the score."

Adam mentioned that from his camp experiences he believes the ideal camp counselor should be a Giver. The counselors who used their opportunity to make the camp experience a wonderful and everlasting experience for campers and not for themselves, the counselors that weren't looking for anything in return, these are your essential camp counselor. Thinking back on what Adam said, this is true, as a camp director you strive to look for Givers in the counselor community, because you know that these counselors will make everlasting impressions with campers.

## **Breakout #2**

Positive Psychology In Action: Mining Strengths in Campers and Staff  
With Chris Thurber

This Breakout session was a lot more educational than the last. Positive Psychology in Action: Mining Strengths in Campers and Staff. Led by Chris Thurber. Chris is a certified clinical psychologist. He earned his BA from Harvard and his PhD from UCLA. Chris cofounded ExpertOnlinetTraining.com, which is now the most respected educational resource for youth development professionals. He now

currently resides in Exeter, New Hampshire, where he serves as a school psychologist at Phillips Exeter Academy, a private boarding high school.

In Chris's lecture he talked about the strengths and virtues that come from experiencing authentic happiness, which comes from positive emotions about the past and the future, and savoring these emotions. Chris suggested that there are 6 virtues that are attained through strengths of character: Wisdom & Knowledge, Courage, Love & Humanity, Justice, Temperance, Spirituality, and Transcendence. Chris also mentioned that there were 24 characters of strength. The few that caught my attention were Curiosity/Interest in the world, with curiosity the brain is allowed to wander and imagine anything it wants. Also Self control, with self-control I am able to push myself when needed and also hold back when needed.

Chris preformed a social experiment with his audience, which had to do with savoring. He handed out chocolate truffles to the audience. We were told to examine the wrapper, openly discuss with neighbors what we examined about the wrapper and the conclusions we made about the packaging of the truffle. Then in complete silence, we were to close out eyes, open the chocolate, place the truffle on our tongue, in our mouth and hold it there for 1 whole minute without eating it. Chris wanted us to savor the experience, what did we feel about the truffle, what was its texture, what was its flavor, and so on? Through this experiment Chris wanted us to take the time to enjoy some that we usually would hurry through.

### **Keynote #3**

With Rue Mapp

Rue Mapp is the founder of the social website Outdoor Afro. Outdoor Afro is, "a social community that reconnects African- Americans with natural spaces and one another through recreational activities such as camping, hiking, biking, birding, fishing, gardening, skiing — and more!" Rue Mapp grew up with a big family on a farm in northern California. She stated that she was always outside working on the farm with her siblings and this is what started her love of the outdoors.

Rue's reason for creating Outdoor Afro was to connect more African American people to nature and camping. She realized that nature was a powerful teaching tool, and she wanted to share it with her community. Through the process of Outdoor Afro becoming a social media tool. Rue started taking polls to see whom her primary audience was. Rue found that the audience she was primary reaching were 35 – 44 year old black women. Essentially she Rue saw this as an opportunity to reach black mothers who could transcend this outdoor taste to their children. Through her online audience Rue has been able to orchestrate many outdoor experiences with youth in many cities and states. Rue hopes that as Outdoor Afro grows she will continue to reach African Americans world-wide and that in return they would spread the outdoor enthusiasm as well.

My take away from this lecture is that as a Caucasian male I am fortunate to have been introduced to outdoor recreation at an early age. But there are those who unfortunately were not. Regardless of skin color, I hope to bring joy to all clientele, youth camps, any organization I work with when it comes to creating a lasting outdoor experience.

