# CASE COMPETITION: CAMP CRISIS CHALLENGE

"CAMP KIKO"

Written by Sarah Kurtz McKinnon
kurtz@thesummercampsociety.com

**EXERCISE SUMMARY**
This simulation exercise allows camp leaders to practice their decision-making when faced with a crisis situation.

**TIME NEEDED**
~2.5-3.5 hours recommended for full exercise, depending on number of participants and which elements you choose to include

**MATERIALS**
One pack of 4x6" or larger index cards
Stopwatch
Pens

**INSTRUCTIONS**
Divide participants into teams of approximately four people (or allow them to divide themselves; whatever your preference. Have teams sit together at tables or in clusters. Distribute a few pens and index cards to each group.

Explain to them that this is a simulation exercise and that they will pretend to be, as a team, director(s) of "Camp Kiko". Give them an opportunity to get to know each other before beginning and share their experiences, strengths, and learning objectives. You may decide as the facilitator to be the main "judge" or you may invite a panel of "judges" to participate, such as executives at your camp, a board member or a parent.

To begin, read the following "background information" to the group:

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

**Background**

*It's the middle of July, and you've had a pretty good summer so far as the new director at Camp Kiko, an overnight camp in Maine that serves around 200 campers per week. It's a pretty traditional camp with outdoor activities, songs, games, dances, and no cell phones. Your predecessor, Derek Crews, left the place in great shape—strong enrollment, a positive staff culture, and a bunch of new cabins fully funded by a successful capital campaign. You were hired in April after the Boston Celtics invited Crews to become their general manager. He couldn't resist the opportunity to lead his hometown team, accepting the offer with only a little hesitation. In fact, you came into the position by Crews's recommendation—you had enjoyed many years together when you worked as seasonal staff at Kiko, and Crews knew that you're someone he could trust with his precious camp. Your first few months were fairly routine, and then the summer began.*

*Staff training was fairly uneventful, but you are still playing catchup getting to know all of the staff as well as the campers and their families. Almost everything that you could control has gone well, but you've had a few troubles already that you've had to uncomfortably call your boss about.*

*During your first week of camp, the walk-in fridge broke down, resulting in a loss of $500 worth of food and the emergency capital purchase of a new fridge ($15,000), essentially nullifying the profits you brought in that year. Later on in that same first week, the driver of a camp van backed into a tree, resulting in serious bumper damage and serious tree damage. In the second week, a physical fight broke out between two campers, and you decided to send them home—a controversial decision because they were beloved, long-time campers—but one you felt like you had to make. Not two hours later, a camper with food allergy tried some unknown candy, resulting two epi pens and an ambulance call (he's physically OK, but your new health officer is a little traumatized and you had to issue a refund to his angry parents, even though you were deep down inside mad at the kid for eating the candy in the first place). In the third week of camp, there was a close-call missing camper emergency. After several tense minutes of searching the lake and not being able to find a camper, you realized all current campers were accounted for—your waterfront director was using an old roster...and searching for someone who was only here in week one.*

*You know deep down that none of these debacles were exactly your fault, but they all feel like they somehow tie back to you and a failure in leadership. Certainly, Crews did not have these sorts of problems when he was running the camp. Although you know that you can do this job, you are already exhausted—and it's a month in. On top of that, you are still getting to know the staff (They seem so young!!), so it is hard to know who you can trust—and*

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

*with what. In fact, you get the feeling that they want to trust you, but they're still figuring out if they can. You can tell that they're talking about you and watching your every move, mostly because they care.*

Pause and ask the group if they have any questions. Feel free to make up any answers or tell the group that the answer to their question is irrelevant, if it is. Only take a few questions.

Then read the following passage, which will brief the teams on the situation. Warn the group that you will only read the passage once. You may want to advise them to take notes. You can decide if you take questions or not, and, if you do, you may want to limit the number of questions you take.

**Ranger Island Trip**

*Now we are on week four, and it is time for the traditional teen day trip to Ranger Island. Each summer, kids ages 14-15 can sign up to go on this day trip, which lasts all day on Tuesdays. The excursion to Ranger Island, a 10 square-mile island about 1 hour's drive plus a 30-minute ferry ride from camp, is a popular rite of passage for teen campers. Two senior counselors (Ella—who also is your driver—and Brooke) and one 17-year-old junior counselor, (Cheese, whose given name is Andrew), loaded up 16 kids into your mini-bus and left before breakfast in order to catch the 9 a.m. ferry to the island, where cars aren't allowed.*

*The plan is to pack a picnic lunch, go for a hike around the island, and spend some time exploring the boardwalk where there are souvenir shops and ice cream parlors. The large group will get to the island around 10:30 a.m. and go on the hike together. Then, they'll go to the picnic pavilion by the docks and enjoy the lunch. After that, kids can get in groups of 4 and hang out along the boardwalk. One senior counselor is posted at one end of the boardwalk, and one at another. Cheese will walk up and down the boardwalk, popping into shops and checking on the campers. At 2:30 p.m., the group will meet back at the pavilion to get ready to catch the 3:00 p.m. ferry back to the mainland. The ferries leave from each side (island and mainland) on the odd hours (i.e. 3 p.m., 5 p.m., 7 p.m. with the last ferries leaving at 9 p.m.), and the ferry trip always takes ½ hour.*

*At 2:50 p.m., you get a call from Ella. She's calm but you can tell she is a little nervous. She says that most of the group has been at the pavilion for 20 minutes, but one group of four campers has not returned. She dispatched Cheese about 15 minutes ago to go sweep the boardwalk (where there are about 20 shops), but he just texted her and he hasn't found the campers. The other kids are waiting with her and Brooke at the pavilion. She wants to know what she should do—their scheduled ferry leaves in 10 minutes, and*

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

*there's not another one until 5 p.m., meaning the group would not come back to camp until well after your 5:15 p.m. dinner.*

*In the middle of the phone call, Brooke interrupts Ella. Ella says "hold on", and you can hear some mumbling in the background. Ella then says that Brooke wants to talk with you and passes Brooke the phone. Brooke explains that while Ella was on the phone, she was talking to some of the campers, who were getting increasingly worried that they were going to miss their scheduled ferry back to the mainland.*

*One of these campers told Brooke that she had heard one of the 4 missing kids talking on the bus ride to Ranger Island. The particular camper bragged that she had brought some marijuana edibles to camp and was planning eating them on the trip. Brooke said she didn't know what to do with this information, especially considering that the girl who told her this camper is known for drama and gossip, and is notably untrustworthy. You ask Brooke for the names of the four missing kids, but you don't know any of them personally—you just know they are 2 boys and 2 girls, and they're returning campers who have never had disciplinary issues. Now the ferry is leaving in 8 minutes and you need to figure out what to do.*

Tell the teams that it is now their task to develop an 8-minute plan. They have 5 minutes to figure out what to do because if they decide to take the ferry, they will need 3 minutes to board before departure. Tell each group that they need to write down bullet points of their plan on their index card and select a reporter verbally report to the judges.

Then, allow each team to report out by reading exactly what was written on their index cards. Judges can decide if they want to "cross-examine" each team by asking a follow up question or two. The reporters may answer these cross-examination questions with any plans they discussed or, if they did not discuss, must say "did not discuss." They may not improvise answers to be fair to the other teams. You can also decide if you would like to place a time limit on the reporters the reporting to keep the exercise moving. Judges may want to take notes

*Key criteria to look for in plans (not looking for "right" or "wrong" answers; just looking for solid thought processes):*

- ❒ Did they make a decision to do with the campers waiting at the pavilion? Will they wait on the island or will they board the ferry? Are the campers supervised and safe? Is there a plan for their dinner?
- ❒ Are Brooke, Ella and Cheese positioned strategically?
- ❒ Have they informed any other individuals either inside or outside of the organization? Why or why not?

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

- ❒ Did they inform any staff remaining on the island or with campers of next communication steps? (Follow-up)
- ❒ Have they stayed calm and focused on the immediate action steps—have they kept the future in mind but not become distracted by it?
- ❒ Have they avoided jumping to unnecessary conclusions?
- ❒ Is their plan appropriate for the 8-minute scope?

*Bonus things to look for:*

- ❒ Do they have a plan for running "regular" camp while they as the camp leader deal with the field trip issue?
- ❒ Did they send anyone to check the 5 p.m. ferry to make sure the campers had not already boarded?
- ❒ Has a documentation protocol been instituted?
- ❒ Have the missing campers' files been pulled and read? Have recent photographs of the missing campers been secured?

After all teams have reported, collect index cards. Tell the group that you have received an update and it is the same for all teams regardless of what choices they made during their 8-minute plan. Read the update aloud:

**An Update**

*It's been 1 hour, and you haven't found the kids.*

Tell the teams that it is now their task to figure out what to do working with the choices that they had made in their short-term plan (e.g. where the campers are, where staff members are, who has been informed, etc.). Tell the groups they have 15 minutes to come up with what they are going to do for the next two hours until the 7 p.m. ferry. Repeat the recording and reporting process described above.

**Key criteria to look for in plans:**

- ❒ Are the remaining campers who went on the field trip supervised, safe and fed? Has a communication plan been developed with these campers?
- ❒ Have the missing campers' parents been informed? Why or why not?
- ❒ Have outside resources been utilized? If so, which resources and why?
- ❒ Has law enforcement been contacted? Why or why not?
- ❒ Has there been a communication plan developed for the other Camp Kiko staff members?
- ❒ Is there a plan in place to keep camp running smoothly for those not involved in the situation?
- ❒ What decisions have been made around the rumor of drug use? Has anyone been told of this rumor (parents, law enforcement, etc.)? Why or why not?

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

- ❒ Are logistical decisions effective considering the distance to Ranger Island and the ferry schedule?

**Bonus criteria to look for:**

- ❒ Has a media plan been developed?

***Then, An Update***

*At 7:15 p.m., approximately 2 hours after they were recognized as missing, the campers were found by a camp staff member on a bench about 1 mile away from the pavilion, on the hiking trail the group was on earlier that day. The staffer who found the campers texted you and says that they campers "are all in one piece but look as high as kites."*

Now give the group 20 minutes to detail out their plan for the remainder of the evening until camp's "lights out" at 10:30 p.m. They have 1 hour 45 minutes until the next ferry departs the island. Repeat the recording and reporting process described above.

**Key criteria to look for in plans:**

- ❒ What should happen immediately with the campers once they were found? How should they be interacted with and treated? What else are the immediate steps that need to happen when the campers are found?
- ❒ Is a plan developed for who needs to be told that the campers were found, and what do they need to be told? How are they contacted?
- ❒ Is there a communication plan for others in the camp community, such as other campers and counselors?
- ❒ Will all the campers on the field trip (including missing campers) be where they need to be for the night (at camp, at home, etc.) no later than bedtime?
- ❒ Has appropriate documentation continued throughout the situation?
- ❒ How are the suspicions of marijuana use handled?

**Bonus criteria to look for:**

- ❒ Is there a specific communication plan for the campers who were also on the field trip? What about the missing campers' camp friends?
- ❒ Brooke, Ella and Cheese had a stressful day. How have they been supported?

**Long-Term Planning**

If time permits, ask the teams to work on the following question for 10 minutes and follow the same reporting procedure to the group: *What*

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

*policies, procedures or practices might you consider changing at Camp Kiko for the rest of the summer season? For next season?*

**SUGGESTED DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS**

**Part 1: WHAT**

- ❒ One-word response (go around in the circle): What is one word to describe how you are feeling after completing the crisis challenge?
- ❒ When did you feel that your team was a high-performing team during the challenge? What worked?
- ❒ What was the most difficult aspect of the crisis challenge for you and/or for your team?

**Part 2: SO WHAT?**

- ❒ If this crisis happened at our camp, would we be prepared? What would be the most difficult part for us?
- ❒ What are things that happened during the simulation that we WOULD want to happen if faced with a crisis at our camp?
- ❒ What are things that happened during the simulation that we WOULD NOT want to happen if faced with a crisis at our camp?

**Part 3: NOW WHAT?**

- ❒ What skills do we need to practice or resources do we need to find to make sure we are prepared in this type of event?
- ❒ How would we take care of ourselves in the face of a crisis and the aftermath to make sure that we are strong camp leaders at those points in time and into the future?
- ❒ When a crisis occurs at our camp, how can we best support our camp director or the individual in charge of managing the crisis? How do we want to interact with our staff members and/or campers who are involved with the crisis?

**ADAPTATIONS**

If you would like, you can adapt this background and narrative to match your camp more closely or even exactly. You can also do this with staff at any level. If working with less experienced staff, the worksheets on the following pages can be printed and distributed to each team as the crisis develops. These worksheets will help guide them through each step of the crisis.

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

**You Be The Director: Camp Kiko Crisis Challenge**

*Phase 1: Your Immediate Plan*

1. Where are the possible places the missing campers could be?

2. What are your resources in this situation?

3. What are your top priorities in this situation?

4. Do you send anyone from the group on the originally-planned ferry back to the mainland? If so, whom? How did you make this decision?

5. Who else do you inform about this situation in the next 8 minutes?

6. What are other considerations you need to make, if any?

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

**You Be The Director: Camp Kiko Crisis Challenge**

*Phase 2: Still Missing*

1. Who have you informed of the situation so far? What information have you told them?

2. Where are the people on your team, currently? Has anyone left camp or left the island? If so, where are they?

3. Now that the campers have been missing for an additional 30 minutes, is there anyone else you need to inform? What do you tell them?

4. What have you done about the suspicion the camper shared about marijuana, if anything?

5. What are the accounted-for campers doing currently? How are their needs being attended to?

6. What will you do if the media finds out about this situation? What will you tell them?

7. What are the possible outcomes to this situation at this point in time?

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved

**You Be The Director: Camp Kiko Crisis Challenge**

*Phase 3: Campers Are Found*

1. How do you or the camp staff interact with the campers once they receive custody of the campers?

2. What do you tell the campers' parents, if anything?

3. Who needs to know about the resolution to this situation, if anyone? What do they need to know?

4. What are the other details for your plan for the rest of the evening?

Copyright © 2019 The Summer Camp Society. All Rights Reserved