

# The Genius of Lauren Bernstein

We all can learn from Lauren Bernstein.

When creating this column I asked myself, "What if every business owner, religious leader, civic volunteer or city council member ran their organizations like Lauren Bernstein runs her summer camp?" The answer was compelling enough for me to write with conviction.

Lauren and her husband Mark own Camp Walden near Lake George in upstate New York. My two children go there for summer camp. A few weeks ago on visiting day I saw the camp in action for the first time—along with a couple dozen other parents from South Florida.

Camp Walden is not the biggest camp, or the prettiest camp; nor does it boast the best student athletes or scholars. But I learned slowly during my day there that Lauren has carefully and methodically crafted a culture that goes beyond fun summers for happy children.

The genius of how she does this

is deceptively simple; she picks the right staff and, more importantly, she picks the right customers.

Hiring the right people or recruiting the right members for a board, or selecting the best leaders for the city council is a topic that gets extensive attention. But, I suggest that Lauren has mastered what few have; she seeks and demands a set of core values from her staff that are absolutely essential and she does not compromise. The primary among these is a passion for inspiring and nurturing young people.

My 10-year-old son is enamored with lacrosse. I know nothing about lacrosse and he doesn't play it down here in Florida; but up

there, you can find him at the lacrosse field with Ashley the lacrosse coach. Ashley is studying medicine at Johns Hopkins and plays on their women's lacrosse team—and has a passion for inspiring and nurturing the young campers like my son who had never picked up a lacrosse stick before camp.

My eight-year-old daughter had never water skied but Justin, a student from South Africa, patiently works



Lauren Bernstein

# Publisher's Letter

with kids at the lake and I watched with amazement when my daughter wake-boarded behind the boat. I'm sure Justin is a gifted water skier, but he too has a passion for inspiring and nurturing young people.

Throughout my visit, I queried staff and counselors about life at camp. Without exception, they exhibited this core value effortlessly. From my experience, you can't train people to be like this—you can only find people like this.

The second part of Lauren's genius is her ability

to select the right customers. This may sound strange to some and can be hard to accomplish if say, you own a restaurant open to the general public. Most businesses and organizations have options about how to spend limited resources to attract new customers or members; so many have much more control than may initially appear.

I overheard a story, told in a humorous manner, that Lauren spends most of her time on the telephone with parents of prospective campers—talking them *out* of coming to Camp Walden. She has developed the skill of identifying and recruiting the parents and children that will blend with harmony into her organization.

Most leaders look for high-performing staff and lots and lots of customers. This is fine, but Lauren's formula for a staff that has the same set of core values as the customers they seek is one to ponder and adapt to one's situation.

That concept; "blend with harmony

into her organization" will now be with me forever.

Lauren touches and improves the lives of everyone she meets. She attracts others to help her do this at her camp. She has the support of many I should mention and I'm sure there were mentors in her life she would acknowledge. But brilliant lessons from others are nothing without the courage and commitment to execute those lessons consistently.

I know most of my readers are not in the business of bringing joy and inspiration to young people like Lauren, but our local school districts would be better if her principles were enthusiastically embraced.

The local chamber of commerce would be better if it more passionately promoted the success of area businesses. City councils would be better if all the members shared a singular vision for the success and prosperity of their community.

Florida is electing a new governor this year. I suggest we recruit Lauren Bernstein.



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