

Chapel: Try

It is a privilege and an honor to have this opportunity to share a new perspective with you all. Today is a day I never could have imagined when first joining this amazing community in 2005. Back then, I was in Crogles as a first year camper - and honestly quite overwhelmed by all of the new opportunities. There are so many unique activities camp has to offer, let alone achievements that aren't met with recognition or a title. Today, I am doing something else new- braving my first chapel talk. Yes, we are all still learning and trying new things.

First year campers and counselors, welcome. Your journey is just beginning. Returning friends, welcome back. Those of us who have spent previous summers here are all too aware of how time manages to fly by. Likewise, most of us think the saddest line we hear comes at the end of our summer: "goodbye". However, I am a firm believer "it could have been" is even harder.

My message to you is that this is your chance to try new things. They might go as planned, they might not, but give it your best shot. You will either wind up with an awesome experience or a great story!

So what do you want your summer to be? These past few days, I've probably heard, "What are your goals for the summer?" asked well over a dozen times. And this is a great question, it helps us get to know each other and plan ahead so we can manage our days wisely.

Most of the time, the response is along the lines of "I want to earn my bowman/bar 2/swim level/jester". And this is great! Camp is full of fun and challenging awards to earn. Where else can you learn to waterski and shoot a rifle? Just not at the same time...

All kidding aside, however, it's important to remember that there's more to life than physical awards. No matter how hard you try, you cannot convey the feeling of succeeding at a new skill or bonding with friends on a school essay or resume - believe me, I've tried!

This is why people often measure success through criteria that can be recognized. But this is not what drives us to return, it is our feeling of community that brings us back year after year. Counselors can't earn awards. Sandy has been returning for over 50 summers and I can guarantee you it's not because he wants to go tubing for the 100th time or earn his polar bear. We are all here to learn about ourselves and help each other grow.

This is your summer, and making it a success is about striving for what you want to accomplish. My first summer at camp, I didn't earn a single award that could be announced at banquet. But that doesn't make it any less successful. I learned how to live without my parents or electricity. I began to appreciate nature and understand people without being judged by clothes, cell phones, or standardized test scores. I spent most activity periods in the wood shop, and built a three-layer sail boat, which has proudly been on display in my room since.

We are in a special setting that allows personal growth in ways that are just not possible at home. That's why we come. If nothing here was different or unique there would not be the chance to grow - to find new and great parts of yourself.

Believe me - it's ok to change your goals and to be spontaneous. Honestly, those situations can be the most fun. The trick is to be willing to accept the experience and embrace the outcome - as you expect or not - and know that in the end it will make you a better person.

Martin Luther King Jr. wisely proclaimed, "you don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step". We all know that he led a very difficult, purposeful life - not in an animated musical scene where an ice castle magically appears at the end of that staircase. The point is to find your inner strength and make your own stairs. Then use them to get to a new part of yourself just waiting to be explored.

I may not always be perfect, but I'm always me. Sometimes things won't go as planned. Real life is messy. We'll lose games of capture the flag, we'll have to scratch our rounds in archery, or perhaps one day your car won't start at a very inconvenient time. But these experiences can be what allow us to be spontaneous and have something better that we didn't even know we wanted.

One personal story that illustrates this point actually happened during my Crow's summer in 2009. I was on a camping trip that concluded with a hike. Sounds peaceful doesn't it? Well it was...at first. We all made our way up the mountain and accomplished what we assumed to be the hard part. We took pictures and enjoyed the view, and then went to return down the mountain.

Our counselors decided that this had the potential to be an amazing bonding experience by sending us down in groups of two, with people who we did not usually spend time with. There was enough space between the groups that we could not see those in front or behind us. As we headed down the mountain, we fairly quickly discovered a fork in the road.

We looked to the right and to the left and decided that heading left was the best way. We followed the path for a short while until a counselor came charging down the mountain to catch us. He informed us that we had in fact chosen the wrong path, and asked if anybody else had gone down this way. Of course, we were not sure of the answer – and so decided it would be best to all continue down this way to try and search for others.

About 15 minutes later, we reached what seemed to be an old, abandoned logging road. This is basically a cleared, wide path in the woods. It also started raining...a lot! We went under a tree to stay dry, and as the rain turned into a downpour our counselor came to a realization: this rain was actually the best thing that could have happened!

As the rain puddled, it would run down the mountain – eventually leading to a river. We then followed alongside this river until we came into the local town and were quickly reunited with the rest of the group – anxiously waiting for us to arrive.

This experience taught us that sometimes what seems like a bad thing can be a good thing. I certainly got to know two people much better, but also noticed a metaphor in life – sometimes when it seems like everything's going wrong you just need to change your perspective. You can uncover the secret as the answer may be hiding from you in plain sight.

I'm sure none of us ever could have imagined that this hike would become a life changing event on perspective, and a chapel talk, and college application essay... However, one thing we all can agree on is that camp is a place to take risks and learn about yourself, knowing that we are each other's support system in this special setting.

A wise animated bunny named Judy Hopps taught us, "We all have limitations. We all make mistakes. Which means hey glass half full, we all have a lot in common." Have patience with yourself and others learning new skills and remember it's not a race or a competition. We all learn at different speeds and struggling with something means that we're trying.

You can try a new sport or a new attitude. You can be the person you want to be, the one you admire. You can be a friend and help others grow too. Camp is just starting. The best thing you can do is to try new things. It may not go the way you plan, but there's no better place to learn than Timanous.

When you look around here, you'll see a lot of green and grey shirts. They mean something. You are part of this group, the Timanous family. We are here to help you make the most of this summer and yourself. We've got your back. Sometimes it's obvious, like a safety harness on the climbing wall or a rescue tube down at the swim docks. Sometimes it's subtle, but we will be watching you and cheering you on your way.