

Brantford – the Key Leader Experience



On Friday the twenty-first of October, four members of the A.Y. Jackson Key Club arrived in Brantford, Ontario to behold gravel paths and open roads – at Circle Square Ranch, where the Key Leader program *happened*.



How does one turn a roomful of unfamiliar teenagers into a viscous, socializing group? After a considerable group has gathered, everyone was given a list of questions and made to get other people's answers. Sheets exchanged hands while their owners either wracked their brains for answers or clicked their pens and prepared to scribble. All the while, new arrivals dissolved into the fray. A lot of the question-answering eventually gave way to excited conversation, but

perhaps that was the intention!

After a sumptuous lasagna dinner, the campers were split up into neighbourhoods of around six, each of which was headed by a student facilitator. There, they worked on creating a unique team identity – to be presented in the form of an illustrated banner displaying the agreed-upon neighbourhood name. Outstanding originality was showcased – is it common knowledge that the German word for *potato* is *Kartoffel*?

It was among the campers, after the first one or two presentations.

The camp participants were then presented with the revolutionary – to many, even in modern times – idea of Service Leadership. The concept was first introduced by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970s essay, *The Servant as Leader*. As opposed to the traditional leadership model, in which everyone serves to elevate the leader, the Servant Leadership model calls for the leader to serve and elevate his followers, employees and others. The five Key Leader principles were also introduced, including Personal Integrity, Personal Growth, Respect, Building Community and Pursuit of Excellence.

After that came bedtime and curfew, set by all those hopeful adults.

Saturday morning, campers put up their decorated mailboxes for receiving Key Leader Grams, which are positive, encouraging messages from one camp attendee to another, meant to build up their readers.



Back-to-back presentations followed, on Personal integrity and Personal growth. In a thought-provoking demonstration, the campers experienced firsthand what it felt like to be forced to choose between, then stripped of, one's personal values. The module that followed taught the skills of an effective listener and communicator. For a taste of the lecture, consider the value of this statement: *Listening is not waiting for your turn to talk.*

After lunch, the campers engaged in discovering and classifying their personality as one of the four types: Analyzer, Innovator, Implementer or Collaborator. In a group with other of the same personality-type, they planned a mock service project to demonstrate their specialties.

Despite the frigid weather, most camp attendees then duelled their limits on the High Ropes course. Imagine climbing nets, stepping onto tippy footrests on freely-swinging ropes and walking a wire at the height of a



house – which is exactly what some campers did!

The topics explored after dinner that night were Respect and Building Community. The campers worked together to define *self-respect*, and figured out in neighbourhoods how a community of vastly-different individuals could work together to accomplish a common goal.



Celebration! How can a camp be without a crackling fire? Songs and laughter roared from the gathered crowd after the dark of night had settled as far as anyone could see. Soon, the strong, lifting music fell and story-telling began. Legend has it that at some high school, a drowned girl still haunts a filled basement pool. Another legend has that a bear was turned tiny by a witch, and soon reciprocated the favor.

Never let it be said that teenagers are too proud to listen to bedtime stories.

Sunday. The camp attendees touched on the last of the Key Leader values, Pursuit of Excellence, and set SMART goals for the near future. Then it was time for good-byes.

Good-byes, and reading Key Leader grams.

Even on their separate buses and cars, the future leaders were already reconnecting through social media.

– A. G.

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