Spring Snapshot
2018
Thoughts From Thought Leaders

Before I started working with my 12-year-old cousin Moshe on his journey to bar mitzvah, we didn’t really have a personal relationship. Moshe’s parents suggested we focus on what it means to take the first steps into maturity. His mom and I decided on a hike for our first official encounter. I arrived fully prepared with a scavenger hunt that would make the hike an epic experience.

…and it bombed. Moshe would hardly get out of the car. He wanted nothing to do with the hike. I drew on every trick in my “working with kids toolkit.” Overwhelmed by a tidal wave of panic, embarrassment, and frustration, I almost gave up until Moshe’s mother took out a football and suggested we toss it around. Moshe softened immediately, while my own anxiety rocketed. The first and last time I tossed a football was when I was 8 years old. I couldn’t possibly teach this kid the finer points in life while he was laughing at my butterfingers!

“Position your feet like mine and hold the ball like this,” Moshe calmly instructed. In a flash the entire dynamic changed. Gone was the upset boy resisting the hike, and in his place stood a personable, confident junior football coach.

In my eagerness to plan a hike, I broke one of the most sacred rules of mentoring: confusing my own interests for Moshe’s. Mentorship has its roots in Jewish tradition. In the Ethics of the Fathers we are taught: “Make for yourself a mentor.” Notice the verb choice. “Make” for yourself is different than “find” or “receive,” which takes the focus off the mentee once matched and casts the spotlight on the mentor. To the contrary, our job as mentors is to steward a journey of self-discovery. The mentee is center stage, and our job is to unlock their range of talents, abilities, and dispositions.

Our tradition explains: “Teach a child according to her way, even when she grows old she will not stray.” When Moshe and I spend time together we start with him as coach. As he shows me how to throw a football and toss a frisbee, we discuss his perspective on teamwork and sportsmanship, the perseverance and humility required to grow as an athlete, and the value of self-care. Moshe is a gifted teacher – patient, clear, and creative. He also shares incredible insights on how he applies the values he cultivates on the field to his relationships with his brothers, parents, and friends, and his responsibility to take care of others in the world.

Mentoring comes in many shapes and sizes – between big and little brothers and sisters, counselors and campers, teachers and students. Moshe reminds me that the secret to proper alignment is to step down from the position of sage on the stage and over to guide side-by-side.

Dr. Zach Lasker
Director,
Camp Bob Waldorf

Do you have any extra tickets to donate to our matches?

Our matches love attending sporting events, concerts, and the theatre. Help them create lifelong memories. In-kind donations are tax deductible.

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The Power of Positive Thinking

Vlad became a Big Brother eight months ago. Since then, he has had a huge impact on his Little Brother, Abraham, who lost his father to cancer. Vlad has this story to share about positive thinking.

I try to carry a positive attitude wherever I go, no matter the circumstances. Recently, I was afforded an opportunity to share the direct power of a good attitude with my Little Brother, Abraham.

Through the generosity of a donor, we were given two tickets to a Lakers game. We arrived at the game, and, as excited as Abraham was to watch the Lakers, he was a little disappointed that our seats were in the nosebleed section.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get the chance to see a game from the front row,” he said.

My optimism instantly kicked in and I told him that he should never doubt his future. I explained that he should always stay positive because life is full of surprises. I went so far as to suggest that sometimes people don’t show up to games and sell good tickets for cheap or even give them away for free, as kindness begets kindness. Regardless, I promised him that one day we would have front row seats. It was a short pep talk, but Abraham was in high spirits.

We sat high above the court, Abraham reaching for his binoculars. Before he could test them out, a man stopped in front of us and asked if we were father and son. I laughed and jokingly said that I’m too young. He asked if we were brothers, to which I again jokingly replied, “Of course.” He then offered us two free tickets in lower section seats, as his friends hadn’t shown up for the game. Abraham’s face was frozen in shock.

We made our way down to our new seats. The usher greeted us warmly and mentioned that she had recommended us to the man! I asked her why us since there were plenty of people in our section, and she answered that it was because, on arrival, I smiled at her and wished her a good game.

We didn’t realize how close we would be sitting to the court until we reached our seats. We were only a few rows from where the Lakers have their team huddle. I turned to Abraham and said, “You just have to stay positive and believe that anything is possible.”

I was compelled to share this story because, on our way home, Abraham said that he believes “a positive attitude is like magic.” I had never thought of it like that. He could not believe that what I said earlier could come true. I told him that I don’t think a positive attitude is magic, but I do think it’s a potentiator of possibilities. And then he asked for me to define the word potentiate! I feel fortunate to be matched with such an inquisitive Little Brother.
Camp Cultivates Agents of Social Change

When you think of camp you probably don’t imagine kids spending time with senior citizens, packing lunch for people in need, or playing games with children at a shelter. At Camp Bob Waldorf, we are proud to offer our campers plenty of time to swim and play sports, climb the high ropes course, and express their artistic talents on canvases and stages, but we also want them to be caring and empathetic individuals who are empowered to become community leaders. Fortunately, it isn’t an either/or choice.

“Love your neighbor as you love yourself” is a mandate reminding us that our ability to care for others is dependent on our commitment to use our unique gifts to better the world. Our winter break Social Justice Camp gives teen campers, ages 13 to 17, the opportunity to explore a range of social issues faced by our neighbors around Los Angeles – hunger, homelessness, abuse, addiction, aging – through community service and advocacy. In the process, they cultivate skills and dispositions in active listening, empathy, community organizing, and creative problem solving. A highlight of the experience is time spent volunteering in communities around Los Angeles. Through hands-on work, campers interact directly with people in need, meet with organizational leaders, and are encouraged to think critically about a variety of ways to make an impact.

In his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner asserts that, “The misfortunes of good people are not a problem to the people who suffer and to their families. They are a problem of everyone who wants to believe in a just and fair and livable world.” Some of our campers are blessed by stability at home and are confronting these injustices for the first time, while other campers are victims of these issues and feel a personal sense of empowerment. Regardless, all campers grow to understand the responsibility they each carry to repair a fractured world.

Social Justice Camp ends with a powerful exercise in philanthropy. The teens hear from adult funders who share their perspectives on giving. The teens then get to decide how to allocate funds to the organizations they found most impactful.

Teen Philanthropy

After thoughtful discussions and group presentations, social justice campers allocated $4,500 to the following organizations:

- Alexandria House
- Beit T’Shuvah
- Israel Levin Center
- Karsh Center Food Pantry
- KEEN LA
- LA Family Housing
- Los Angeles Jewish Home
- Social Justice Learning Institute
Neta’s Story

Neta has been a camper for three years. She has attended summer camp, weekend retreats, Kibbutz Explorations, and Kibbutz Tzedek. This summer, she is excited to participate in the Witherbee Wilderness trip.

Attending Social Justice Camp made me realize that I really want to help people as I continue to grow up. It’s amazing to know that you’ve helped someone eat for a month or get medical attention they would otherwise not receive.

During Social Justice Camp, I volunteered at two locations: SOVA and the Karsh Center. SOVA provides free, nutritious groceries to over 9,000 people a month. The people who receive the donations are all ages, ethnicities, and religions. The Karsh Center has many different programs that provide help to those who don’t have money to access therapy or basic needs like food and medicine.

I really enjoyed volunteering at the Karsh Center. This experience opened my eyes to how many people are in need. I saw the good in humanity through this nonprofit organization. It made me want to volunteer more often and help more people.

Back at camp, we had to decide where our donations should go. Although I enjoyed volunteering at the Karsh Center, I felt the Alexandria House deserved our donations. I volunteered with the Alexandria House last year and I knew that they didn’t receive government funding like the other nonprofit organizations we were considering. The Alexandria House is a transitional home for women and children in the process of moving from emergency shelter to economic stability and permanent housing. They change lives by helping homeless mothers get back on their feet. It was a hard decision, but I truly felt this nonprofit could most benefit from our donations.

After my volunteer experiences, I am thrilled to start volunteering for a new JBBBSLA program called Teen Talk. As a Teen Talk advisor, I will offer support to teens in crisis who are dealing with issues like stress, depression, academic pressures, social anxiety, and bullying. I am also planning to volunteer in a soup kitchen and at an animal shelter. Without Social Justice Camp, I would have never had the opportunity to leave my community and find out how much I love being a volunteer. ♦
Introducing Teen Talk

What is Teen Talk?
Teen Talk is an iPhone app where teens can seek social and emotional advice anonymously from trained teen advisors.

Why was Teen Talk developed?
Teen Talk is a response to research that shows that teens naturally seek advice from their peers and prefer to communicate electronically. Teen Talk offers teens a safe, confidential place to get support from teens who have mental health training.

At JBBBSLA, we empower teens to become mentors to their peers. As each cohort of teens graduates from the teen advisor training program, they will go forth into their communities at home and in school to promote social and emotional health.

Who are our Partners?
JBBBSLA created Teen Talk in partnership with Teen Line and Textpert. Teen Line, a leader in teen mental health, has operated a teen crisis hotline out of Cedars Sinai Hospital since 1980 and has a well-established 65-hour teen advisor training program. Teen Line trains teens to develop the skills necessary to be empathetic listeners capable of giving sound advice. Textpert, a top technology developer, built the unique and innovative app.

What does the app look like?

Teen Talk is available to download in the Apple App Store for teens ages 13-18.
Volunteers Needed for Welcome Wagon

Help us greet camp families on the first day of each session!

June 14 • June 27 • July 10 • July 21 • August 1

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Amalia at amalia@campbobwaldorf.org.

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