

Success Embers

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Theme: Examining a metaphor for success and its limits, and why we seek it.

Age of campers: 8-11

Time allotted/actual: 40-60 minutes

Location: Any open, outside area that has dim but useable light and is safe to run around.

Props/Materials/Symbols: Any pair of small items (a set of double hoops works very well)

Prep done: Grab the items and meet up with the group. Ensure that the campers SEE that you have two matched items.

Opening/Mood set: Explain that you would like them to find “the” hoop. Ask everyone to go around a corner or close their eyes while you hide the hoops.

Questions/Activities:

1st activity: Do a couple of rounds where both hoops are found, but eventually hide a single one and throw the other one somewhere that it cannot be found. Theoretically the cabin will continue to look for both hoops even though they have already found one of them. When they have looked to their delight, explain that they had succeeded and remind them that you asked them to only find the, singular, hoop.

2nd activity: Explore where the feelings of success came from in the first instances. Talk to them about different levels of success. Case in point: can you have a goal that you do not actually reach, but you are able to see the experience as a success because there have been other things you have gained instead? What difference did it really make to the idea of finding one hoop and finishing the goal technically, but knowing there is more out there that you could also achieve and must give up on it?

Closing: This embers is very situationally dependent. It is best used if you have noticed a particular focus on one dimension of success. Can use “The Station” (below) to help with the sentiment.

Were other people involved? None needed.

Thoughts on pacing? For younger campers, finding the hoop and getting to run around at night are too fun. The key here is to do enough of the game that the metaphor gets across and then transition. Too many rounds, and the mood can quickly shift.

What would you change next time / what did you learn / how would you enhance it? It would be interesting to see what happened if neither hoop was available to find. What would failure mean in that instance and how would they respond to it as a final level of difficulty?

Camper feedback: “That was fun, I want to play the game again with more hoops.”

The Station

Tucked away in our subconscious is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long trip that spans the continent. We are traveling by train. Out the windows, we drink in the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, of children waving at a crossing, of cattle grazing on a distant hillside, of smoke pouring from a power plant, of row upon row of corn and wheat, of flatlands and valleys, of mountains and rolling hillsides, of city skylines and village halls.

But uppermost in our minds is the final destination. On a certain day at a certain hour, we will pull into the station. Bands will be playing and flags waving. Once we get there, so many wonderful dreams will come true and the pieces of our lives will fit together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. How restlessly we pace the aisles, damning the minutes for loitering - waiting, waiting, waiting for the station.

"When we reach the station, that will be it!" we cry. "When I'm 18." "When I buy a new 450SL Mercedes Benz!" "When the next project is done!" "When I pay off the mortgage." "When I get a promotion!" "When this is over, I'll have more time!" "When this crisis is over, I shall live happily ever after!"

Sooner or later, we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of life is the trip. The station is only a dream. It constantly out-distances us.

It isn't the burdens of today that drive men mad. It is the regrets over yesterday and the fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are twin thieves who rob us of today.

So, stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less. Life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough.