

Often parents ask us, " How do you do it? Our son/daughter has become a different person, pleasant to have around, confident, centered." In the Ohana Newsletter, Spring 2000, we launched a series on the reasons for our success with a kick-off article by Barnes Boffey, Director of Lanakila, who detailed the philosophical bedrock of our work with children. In the Ohana, Fall 2000 we featured anecdotal stories of this philosophy in action in "Counseling That Works!" In this issue, Barnes explains how we help our counselors and campers to choose the kind of person they want to be, in situations at camp, school, or home.

## **KEEPING THE ALOHA SPIRIT ALIVE Part II: Instructions for creating fine people**

**by Barnes Boffey**

In one of those little "Aha!" moments this winter, it was finally clear to me why children and adults continue to return to The Aloha Camps summer after summer. It is not that we have a unique activity program or that our facilities are grand. It is not even so much because of what we *do* at camp; it is because when we are at camp, *we really like who we are*. For many, camp represents the time each year when we are most closely aligned with our ideal selves.

Some would say, "Oh, yes, you mean we get more self-esteem at camp." True, perhaps, but self-esteem is not something you get; it is something you create from the inside out. Self-esteem is the act of *esteeming ourselves* for our behavior in the world. We look at how we handle situations and we say, "I really respect myself for the way I dealt with that situation," or " I really like who I am when I act like this."

Viewing self-esteem as a verb, not as a noun, is an important distinction we make when we consider internal motivation psychology rather than external motivation psychology as the model for building community. In the external motivation model, we would expect that cabin cleanup, sailing, chapel, athletics, or building a bonfire would be events that create strength and self-esteem. But, through the eyes of internal motivation, *we understand that it is not what we do, but who we are as we do it, that creates self-esteem*, pride, love and self-respect. It's not cleaning the cabin that is important; it's the person we are as we do it.

Within The Aloha Foundation, we are continually working to develop a community that focuses on internal behavior rather than external events as the basis for "creating fine people." In training our counselors using Dr. William Glasser's model of choice theory, we begin with the idea that human beings are born with basic psychological/spiritual "instructions." These instructions are experienced as internal feelings and sensations that urge us to act in concert with our spiritual selves. They are the building blocks of morality and the foundation of character. To help "create fine people," we must understand these instructions and create the conditions in which children and adults have the greatest chance of learning the skill and joy of being their ideal selves.

As human beings, internal biological instructions to eat, sleep and maintain a certain level of liquid in our bodies are built into our physiology. If we follow these instructions by eating good foods, sleeping a reasonable amount, and varying our liquid intake to match our activities, we feel healthy

and in balance. But if we don't follow them -- eating the wrong foods, not sleeping enough, or drinking too much or too little liquid -- we experience an "internal signal" of hunger, nausea, fatigue or thirst which lets us know we are out of balance. *We do not choose these signals; they are a physiological consequence of not following our internal instructions.*

*We also have internal psychological/spiritual instructions*, and we also experience painful signals if they are not followed. Within our "Success Counseling" model, we posit that these basic internal instructions are to Be Loving, to Be Powerful, to Be Playful and to Be Free.

In an *external* motivation model, these instructions would be expressed as "needs" for love, power, fun, and freedom. Viewed this way, these qualities become something *we need to get or have*, like commodities. External motivation drives people to search outside themselves to "have more freedom," or "get more love" in their lives, or "have more fun," or "search for power and recognition."

"My wife doesn't give me enough freedom."

"I'm feeling lonely; I need people to love me more!"

"That's not fun -- I need to have more fun things to do in my life."

"If I just had a better job, that would make me feel more important and powerful."

Each of these external motivation statements about the problems of being happy and fulfilled mirrors a belief that the outside world should give us the things we need to make us happy. We get angry, depressed, and resentful when it does not. People who are externally motivated spend a great deal of time looking for exactly the right people, places, and things so that they will finally feel fulfilled.

By viewing love, power, fun, and freedom as instructions "to be," we spend less time looking outward and more time looking inward at who we are and how we can be the people our instructions urge us to be. When we are able to follow our *internal* instructions, even in difficult situations, we begin to *esteem ourselves* and sense a new freedom and power in our lives. This is the basis of that subtle and often indefinable difference parents find in their children when they come home from a summer at camp. It is their growing awareness that they have the power to be terrific people even in non-terrific situations.

The instruction to "Be Loving" is an urge to connect, to belong, to feel compassion for others, and to forgive. Being loving is easy in situations where those around you are doing what you want and giving you the attention and love you desire. But being loving is more difficult if someone is mad at you, or lets you down, or treats you poorly, or does not do what you want them to do. In an *external* motivation model, we blame the people who are doing these things and see them as the cause of our pain.

The *internal* motivation model says *that our pain is created because we are having difficulty being loving when others are acting this way*. Our pain comes from the inside, not the outside. To regain balance, we must learn to be more compassionate and caring, both functions of our internal instruction to be loving. Finding peace and balance will grow with our ability to be

loving, regardless of the behavior of others. To wait for others to change so that we can love them will be a source of endless frustration and disappointing relationships.

For example, after a tent cleanup hassle, we may ask a camper, “Do you want to be mad at Anthony or do you want to figure out a way that you can feel calmer and less angry?” We are inviting the camper to consider the alternative of changing his/her way of perceiving the situation. Of course it is easier if others change when we request that they do, but our ultimate freedom comes in being able to find our balance regardless of another person’s action. We always encourage children to collaborate in working out their difficulties with each other, but the process is enhanced by the invitation to each child to follow his/her instructions to be loving, even when other people are not.

“Being Powerful” means standing in your own circle of strength, having a voice, staying strong in difficult situations, being worthy, having self respect and having impact on the world. It is easy to feel powerful if everyone is listening to you and giving you what you want. It is harder when you are struggling with membership in a group or with others who may not value you as much as you think you deserve. In the external model, we might say, “That person makes me feel worthless,” or “How can I feel good? We lost the game because I struck out.” At camp, we invite the camper to create his/her perception by asking, “Would you like to spend your time feeling good about what you did well or bad about what you didn’t do so well?” Being powerful means telling the truth when you are worried others may criticize, it means taking a step off the zip wire platform even though you are scared, and it means sticking with a difficult project until you are really proud of your work.

“Being Playful” is the ability to have fun regardless of the things or activities that surround you. Little children can have fun with a stick and a juice can. They create their play; they don’t wait for it to happen. Too often as we get older, we wait for external circumstances to create pleasure. The internally motivated playfulness comes from viewing each situation with curiosity, whimsy, and an openness to new perceptions. Hiking is fun for some people and for others it is not. It is not the hiking that is fun or not fun; it is the attitude with which we hike that creates the pleasure.

Finally, “Being Free” is our ability to maintain a sense of autonomy and choice. People following their internal instruction to be free are able to see choices, to “see the glass half full,” and to think about “freedom to” and “freedom in.” People who are trapped in the external are always worried about “freedom from” and ask themselves, “How is this *making me* feel?” People who are being free are more likely to ask, “How *do I feel* about this situation?” and even more importantly, “How *do I want to feel* about this situation?”

If we don’t follow our psychological/spiritual instructions, we feel internal signals -- loneliness, powerlessness, boredom, or feeling trapped -- that inform us of that fact. When people who understand their internal instructions feel lonely, for example, *they do not wait for others to love them. They look for others to love.* They call a friend, they pat the dog, or they give a gift. As they take these actions, *they begin again to be loving, and the loneliness disappears.* When they feel bored, *they don’t wait for something to entertain them, they create their fun by beginning to be playful in the situation at hand.*

With this awareness in mind, we see situations in a new light and we process what happens to children in a new way. Cabin clean up can be about learning to do a job well, or about caring enough to help a friend who is struggling simply because you want to be a good friend. It can be about deciding how you want to feel when you don't accomplish what you hoped to. We can help a camper see each event as an opportunity to follow his/her internal instructions, and know that how we handle ourselves is more important than what happens to us. Losing a game, having a tent mate with a different personality, or telling the truth when you're afraid of being called stupid can become the most important events of the summer.

When we as children and adults learn to be loving, powerful, playful, and free in our relationships at camp, we increase our abilities to esteem ourselves in new ways and with a new intensity. The joy of this process draws us all back year after year. *We like who we are when we are at camp*, and there is nothing quite as joyous as being the person you want to be....even when it's difficult.