Keeping Them Happy: Job Satisfaction, Personality, and Attitudes toward Disability in Predicting Counselor Job Retention

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Abstract: Employee retention was studied in 48 counselors working at a summer camp for children and adults with disabilities. We hypothesized that attitudes toward persons with disabilities, personality characteristics of counselors, job satisfaction, and previous counselor experience would predict whether counselors would elect to return to work the following summer. Although experienced counselors who had previously worked at the camp were more than twice as likely to commit to returning as new counselors, a regression analysis demonstrated that only job satisfaction at the end of the summer camp predicted commitment to return as reported six months later. Counselor narrative satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the work environment provided suggestions as to how employers might improve job satisfaction.

Participation in recreational and leisure programs often results in both physical and psychological benefits. Physical health changes include increased strength, endurance, muscle and bone mass, and metabolism, as well as maintenance of a healthy heart and body posture (Paffenbarger, Hyde, & Dow, 1991). Investigators have found psychological benefits such as enhanced social skills, self-expression, self-esteem, confidence, determination, efficacy, and responsibility (Grayson, 2001; Marsh, 1999; Sakofs & Schuurman, 1991). In fact, recreation programs have been shown even to enhance school performance, test scores, and creativity (Grayson; Pellegrini, 1997).

Recreational programs can benefit persons of all ages and abilities. For example, children who spend more time playing outdoors have more advanced gross motor skills, balance, coordination, strength, and agility than their less-active peers (Strickland, 2002) and may be at less risk for deviant behaviors (Kirkcaldy, Shepard, & Seifen, 2002). The elderly also profit from recreation and leisure. Numerous studies have shown significant correlations between engagement in recreational activities, both intellectual and physical, and a reduction of risk for dementia, and in particular, Alzheimer’s disease (Leisure, 2002). One such study found that participants who enjoyed a wide range of activities—gardening, walking, reading or crossword puzzles—were four times less likely to have Alzheimer’s than participants whose physical and mental activities were more limited (Recreational, 2001).

Persons with disabilities can also profit from therapeutic environments in recreational programs. Such programs have been shown to empower individuals and reduce their maladaptive behavior in addition to increasing community adjustment and acquisition of new skills (Blinde & McClung, 1997; Rynders, Schleien, & Mustonen, 1990). For example, participants with severe disabilities who enrolled in a recreational camp displayed a substantial increase in the number of activities performed independently and appropriately.
at the end of the camp experience (Rynders et al.).

One of the challenges in providing successful recreational programs for persons with disabilities is the recruitment and retention of competent staff (Larson & Lakin, 1999). Rapid staff turnover can negatively influence program quality, service, and budget, and is correlated with higher costs, higher job stress, lower productivity, staff shortages, and reduced job satisfaction (Kline, 1950; Hatton, et al., 2001; Headly, Glowacki, Holmström, & Wearing, 1985; Larson & Lakin, 1999). The profile of the direct-care staffer that is likely to leave the job is one that is younger, (Caudill & Patrick, 1991; Hatton et al.; Wagnild, 1988), better educated (Larson & Lakin, 1992), and with a shorter tenure (Lakin, Bruininks, Hill, & Hauber, 1982; Razza, 1993). Of course, turnover rate is pluralistically and complexity determined, especially for young adults who are likely to be the counselors at camps. For example, Osborne and Williams (1982), studying turnover at a summer camp for children and adults with mental retardation, found that low salary and lack of interest in mental retardation were the most common reasons that counselors chose not to return. However, changes in life situation such as leaving the geographic area and getting married were also frequently reported.

Lack of interest in mental retardation may reflect both attitudinal and personality characteristics. Generally, more accurate and positive perceptions of persons with disabilities are correlated with increased experience and contact (English, 1977; Bergman & Hanson, 2000; Choi, 2000; Herr, 1975; Sable, 1995). For workers, there is some evidence that as they gain experience with individuals with disabilities, their attitudes become more positive (Kastner, Reppucci, & Pezzoli, 1979), although Alper and Algozzine (1997) found no significant change in camp counselor attitudes after a seven-day camp experience. A brief experience may not be intense enough to alter attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Choi; Homans, 1950).

Also, whether attitudes toward disabilities become more positive as a result of greater work experience with persons with disabilities may be influenced by other characteristics such as sex; existing level of experience with individuals with disabilities; job satisfaction; and personality (Fleming, 1979; Sessions, 1979; Tachibana & Watanabe, 2002; Voeltz, 1980). A wide range of studies has found that females hold more positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities than do males (Chesler, 1965; Cowen, Underberg, & Verillo, 1958; Donaldson & Martinson, 1977; McQuillin, Freitag, & Harris, 1990; Stoval & Sedlacek, 1983; Titley & Viney, 1969). However, other research has failed to find significant sex differences in attitudes toward persons with disabilities (Ringlaben & Price, 1981; Sigler & Lazar, 1976; Stephens & Bruan, 1980).

Similarly, although there has been substantial research on experience and attitudes related to persons with disabilities, results have not been straightforward. Some studies have found that experience is positively correlated with attitudes (Geskie, 1985; Fichten, Amsel, Bourdon, & Creti, 1988; Fonosch & Schwab, 1981; McQuay, 1978), whereas others have reported a negative relation (Dillon, 1979; Harasymiw & Horne, 1975; Mandell & Strain, 1978). Of course, the nature of the experience can vary widely, and some of the inconsistency in findings could be the result of this variation. Positive interactions and experiences may yield an increase in positive attitudes and negative interactions may yield an increase in negative attitudes (Amir, 1969).

Attitudes may directly influence decisions to continue employment in a disability-related job. In addition, they may operate indirectly through job satisfaction. Although research linking attitudes with job satisfaction is limited, a study by Garske (2000) examined the relation between job satisfaction of rehabilitation counselors and their attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Counselors generally reported high job satisfaction and positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Counselors generally reported high job satisfaction and positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities, and the correlation between the two was positive.

Another possible link with attitudes toward persons with disabilities may be personality traits. Personality predisposes individuals to form particular kinds of attitudes. For example, substantial research has linked the trait of authoritarianism and attitudes about a variety of stigmatized groups, including disabilities (Heaven & St. Quintin, 2003; Katz, Hass, & Bailey, 1988; Lippa & Arad, 1999; Schumann, 2002). In general, persons high in authoritarianism tend to value authority and manifest this valuation by using it or submitting to it.
They are likely to have prejudiced attitudes toward minority groups (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988; Duckitt, 1993; Schlachter & Duckitt, 2002), including individuals with disabilities (Noonan, Barry, & Davis, 1970).

Authoritarianism can be linked to a more comprehensive view of personality such as the five-factor model measured by the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The personality domains of the NEO-FFI include Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Neuroticism measures general mental stability/instability and includes items about anxiety, hostility, depression, and vulnerability. Extraversion encompasses warmth, gregariousness, and positive emotions. Openness consists of fantasy, aesthetics, and the valuing of ideas, whereas Agreeableness consists of trust, altruism, compliance, and tendermindedness. Conscientiousness includes items relating to competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, and self-discipline.

Authoritarian individuals are likely to be low in Openness and high in Conscientiousness (Butler, 2000; Goldberg & Rosolack, 1991; Riemann, Grubich, Hempel, Mergel, & Richter, 1993; Trappnell, 1994; Truskosky & Vaux, 1997), with Openness being the strongest correlate (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). Leeson and Heaven (1999), however, found no significant correlation between Openness and tolerance toward stigmatized racial minorities.

Some evidence exists for a link between greater Neuroticism and negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities (McQuiklin, et al., 1990; Siller, 1963, 1984). However, Zaleski, Eysenck, and Eysenck (1995) reported a weak effect in the opposite direction for attitudes toward individuals who are considered to be a burden to society, e.g., mentally ill, chronically ill, dependent elderly.

Finally, regardless of personality and attitudes, job turnover is linked to job satisfaction. Examining direct-care staff employees working at residential facilities for persons with disabilities, turnover rates were negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Kay, 1994; Rublee, 1986) and with specific components of job satisfaction, such as salary (Lakin, 1988; Larson & Lakin, 1999; Mitchell & Braddock, 1994) and management practices (Cohen-Mansfield, 1997; Hughes & Flowers, 1987).

In sum, then, staff turnover is a challenge in programs involving persons with disabilities, and the ability to predict who will stay and who will leave a job is low. The current study attempted to predict turnover of counselors in a summer camp for children and adults with disabilities. We hypothesized that counselors who had more positive attitudes, more experience in working with campers with mental retardation in the current environment, and who had greater job satisfaction by the end of camp would all be more likely to return to camp the following summer. Moreover, we anticipated that personality variables might also predict return rate with Openness likely having the strongest effect.

Method

Participants

Participants were 30 female and 18 male counselors at a summer camp for children and adults with disabilities. All participants were students enrolled in high school, college or graduate school, and were 15 to 25 years old (M = 19.60). Overall, 18 participants were experienced, meaning they had been previously employed at this camp for at least a year, whereas 30 participants were new to the camp.

Procedure

Data for this study were part of a larger project (Lawrence, 2003) and were gathered using self-report questionnaires, administered during three time periods. Time 1 questionnaires were completed at camp during orientation week before campers arrived. Time 2 questionnaires were administered during the last week of camp, eight weeks later. Time 3 questionnaires were mailed to participants six months after time 2.

Measures

Subjective Well-being, Camp-related. Subjective Well-being, Camp-related (SWB-Camp) was measured on a seven-point Likert scale and asked participants how they felt about their work at camp, with responses ranging from delighted (1) to terrible (7), with a neutral response of 4 (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Higher scores indicated a lower level of well-
being. Participants completed the SWB-Camp question at both time 1 and time 2.

**Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons.** The Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (SADP, Antonak, 1988) consisted of 24 items, each using a six-point Likert scale, ranging from -3, signifying “I disagree very much,” to +3, signifying “I agree very much.” There was no neutral point on the scale. Half the items were worded so that an agree response represented a favorable attitude, whereas the other half were worded so that disagreement with the statement represented a positive attitude. The raw data were recoded onto a 1 – 6 scale, with possible scores ranging from 24 to 144, and higher scores indicating more positive attitudes. The SADP was administered at time 1 and time 2.

**NEO Five-Factor Inventory.** The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI, Costa & McCrae, 1992) measured five major domains of personality: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Each domain on the NEO-FFI has 12 items, for a total of 60 items. Participants rated themselves on each of the items/statements on a 1 – 5 point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The possible score range for each domain was from 12 to 60. The NEO-FFI was administered at time 1 and time 2.

**Return-to-camp responses.** Immediately after the end of camp (time 2), counselors were asked to estimate their likelihood of returning to camp the following summer. The question was on a scale of “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). Also, at time 2, participants listed reasons that they would and would not like to work at camp the following summer. Responses were free-form and participants could provide up to five reasons for each option. Number of reasons provided for each option constituted two variables: # Return Reasons and # No Return Reasons. For each score, the possible range was from zero to five.

At time 3, counselors had to indicate a definite commitment regarding their employment for the following summer; ‘yes’ and ‘no’ were the only response options.

**Results**

**Personality and SWB-Camp**

Mean scores on the NEO-FFI and SWB-Camp for time 1 and time 2 are displayed in Table 1. Because correlations between time 1 and time 2 NEO-FFI scores were high for all factors, ranging from .715 to .797, and not significantly different from each other in paired t-tests, mean scores were used in all subsequent analyses. The counselors’ NEO-FFI mean scores on the five personality factors fell between the 47th – 68th percentiles for college-

<p>| TABLE 1 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <strong>Counselor Means and Standard Deviations (SD) and College-Age Percentile Scores on the Mean NEO-FFI, SWB-Camp-1 and SWB-Camp-2</strong> |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mean (SD)</strong></th>
<th><strong>N = 48</strong></th>
<th><strong>Percentile</strong></th>
<th><strong>Time 1/Time 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Correlation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEO-N</td>
<td>23.12 (6.71)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>.715**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEO-E</td>
<td>32.92 (6.06)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.797**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEO-O</td>
<td>30.01 (5.99)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>.785**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEO-A</td>
<td>31.74 (5.84)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>.790**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEO-C</td>
<td>31.61 (5.69)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.775**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWB-Camp-1</td>
<td>1.98 (0.98)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.420**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWB-Camp-2</td>
<td>2.33 (1.30)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** (NEO-N, NEO-E, NEO-O, NEO-A, NEO-C) Mean NEO Five-Factor Inventory Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness personality factors, respectively. The above scores reflect the mean of time 1 and time 2. The NEO factors each have a possible score of 12–60; (SWB-Camp-1) Subjective Well-being—Camp-related time 1; and (SWB-Camp-2) Subjective Well-being—Camp-related time 2. Both SWB measures have possible scores of 1–7, with one representing better well-being.

**p < 0.01, two-tailed.**

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aged persons. Counselor ratings of SWBDCamp were quite positive at both administrations and not significantly different from each other in a paired t-test.

**Attitudes**

Attitudes were also stable over time as reflected in a Spearman \( r \) of .693 between SADP scores at time 1 and time 2. The scores ranged from 96 to 139 for the experienced counselors and from 78 to 138 for the new counselors. The mean SADP scores are displayed in Table 2. The female counselors (\( M = 116.32, SD = 14.67 \)) had somewhat more positive attitudes than the male counselors (\( M = 110.56, SD = 11.99 \)); positive attitudes increased slightly from time 1 (\( M = 113.24, SD = 12.78 \)) to time 2 (\( M = 115.04, SD = 15.89 \)); and experienced counselors (\( M = 121.36, SD = 10.11 \)) reported more positive attitudes than new counselors (\( M = 109.33, SD = 12.97 \)). However, a Time (2) x Sex (2) x Camp Experience (2) analysis of variance with repeated measures confirmed that only camp experience resulted in a significant difference (\( F(1, 41) = 12.45, p < .01 \)).

Because the variability in SADP scores was greater at time 2 than at time 1, particularly for new counselors, we also examined individual change scores. We hypothesized that new counselors might experience larger shifts in attitudes, both positive and negative, than experienced counselors whose attitudes might have stabilized based on their earlier experiences. However, this hypothesis was not confirmed as new counselors did not report significantly more change than did experienced counselors (\( t(43) = 1.34, p = .186 \)).

Previous research relating attitudes and personality led us to calculate correlations between NEO-FFI and SADP scores at both time 1 and time 2. Results are presented in Table 3. Of the possible ten correlations between the personality factors and the SADP measures, only three were significant: Agreeableness was positively correlated with SADP at both time points, and Openness was significantly correlated with SADP scores at time 2, but not time 1. We confirmed the relation between Agreeableness and attitudes in two stepwise regressions in which the predictor variables were the five NEO factors and the criterion variables were SADP-1 and SADP-2. Only Agreeableness was a significant predictor for both time 1 and time 2 attitudes (Time 1: \( F(1, 43) = 13.05, p < .005, R^2 = .233, \beta = .483, p < .005 \); Time 2: \( F(1, 43) = 20.45, p < .001, R^2 = .322, \beta = .568, p < .001 \)).

**Predicting Return to Camp**

Predicting return to camp the following summer was a principal focus of this study.

At time 2, the counselors rated their likelihood of returning to camp the next summer on a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 being the most likely to return. At time 3, counselors were asked to give a definite answer, ‘yes’ or ‘no’, as to whether they would be returning the following summer. Responses of the counselors are displayed by level of experience in Table 4. Frequency of responses for all 48 counselors at time 2 are included, as well as the time 2 scores for only those counselors who also responded at time 3.

Number of participants declined from 48 to 25 at time 3, but respondents at time 3 did not...
significantly differ from non-responders on the five personality domains, nor on SWB-Camp-2. However, those counselors who did not respond at time 3 had significantly more positive SADP-2 scores ($t(43) = 2.17, p < .05$) than those who did respond. The correlation between the counselors’ time 2 estimate of their likelihood of returning to camp the following summer, and their actual commitment to return at time 3 was high and positive ($r(25) = .519, p = .01$). Of the 25 counselors who responded at time 3, 10 indicated that they were committed to returning the following summer: 33% of experienced counselors reported a commitment to return, in contrast to only 16% of the new counselors.

Overall, the time 2 Likert rating was a good predictor of the time 3 commitment with 90% of the respondents who reported a ‘4’ or ‘5’ at time 2 indicating at time 3 that they would be returning the next summer.

Also assessed at time 2 were reasons that the counselors would (# of Return Reasons) and would not (# of No Return Reasons) want to return the following summer. Reasons that participants wanted to return the following

### TABLE 3
Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients between the NEO-FFI Personality Factors, Subjective Well-being–Camp-2, SADP1, and SADP2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) NEO-N</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.332*</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>-.510**</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>.315*</td>
<td>-.187</td>
<td>-.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) NEO-E</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.502**</td>
<td>.303*</td>
<td>-.303*</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) NEO-O</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>-.223</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.309*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) NEO-A</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.434*</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.392**</td>
<td>.483**</td>
<td>.568**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) NEO-C</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.102</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) SWB-Camp-2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) SADP-1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.693**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) SADP-2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** (NEO-N, NEO-E, NEO-O, NEO-A, NEO-C) NEO Five-Factor Inventory Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness personality factors, respectively; (SWB-Camp-2) Subjective Well-being—Camp-related time 2; (SADP-1) Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons total time 1; and (SADP-2) Scale of Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons total time 2.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

### TABLE 4
Frequency Distribution of Return Responses for Time 2 and Time 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score on Return Variablea</th>
<th>New (n = 25)</th>
<th>Experienced (n = 18)</th>
<th>New (n = 12)</th>
<th>Experienced (n = 13)</th>
<th>New (n = 12)</th>
<th>Experienced (n = 13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** a The scores range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) with the statement of whether the counselor will be returning to camp next summer at the time 2 measurement. b Includes all subjects in the study that completed the Return Response question at time 2. c Includes only subjects that responded at both time 2 and time 3 to the Return Response. d Counselors that responded at time 3 responded definitively to whether they would be return to camp next summer. A score of 1 represents “No” and 5 represents “Yes.”
summer and their frequencies were: like working with the campers (33), like staff (32), was a good learning experience (18), love camp (16), like helping people (15), like the working environment (12), like making new friends (11), like the challenge and responsibility (9), it was fun (8), and felt like I grew as a person (5). The most frequently listed reasons that counselors did not want to return the following summer and their frequencies were: stress/exhaustion (24), problems with management (16), poor pay (14), problems with staff (13), changing plans (13), miss home/lack of contact with outside world (9), and the rules/regulations (7). The # of Return and # of No Return Reasons were significantly correlated with the time 2 return response, $r(43) = .522$ and $r(43) = .462$, both $p < .001$, respectively, indicating that participants who predicted that they were more likely to return to camp listed more reasons that they wanted to return and fewer reasons that they did not want to return. These frequencies, however, did not predict time 3 return responses. No significant differences in # of Return or # of No Return Reasons were obtained in t-tests between the counselors who did and did not commit to returning six months later at time 3.

Of the remaining variables hypothesized to be predictive of return likelihood—the five NEO Factors, SWB-Camp-2, and SADP-2—only SWB-Camp-2 was significantly correlated with the return response at time 2, $r(43) = .646$, $p < .001$. Nonetheless, for time 2 return prediction, the personality variables of Openness and Agreeableness, along with SWB-Camp-2, SADP-2 and the # of Return and # of No Return Reasons, were used as predictor variables in a stepwise regression to test our hypotheses based on previous research. The analysis showed that SWB-Camp-2 ($\beta = -.430$, $p < .005$) had the greatest influence on the time 2 return response ($R^2 = .439$); # of No Return Reasons also significantly predicted time 2 return response ($\beta = -.380$, $p < .01$) ($R^2 = .149$), as did # of Return Reasons ($\beta = .345$, $p < .05$) ($R^2 = .104$). The total variance explained by the model was 69.2%, $F(1, 21) = 7.05$, $p < .05$. Those counselors with more positive SWB-Camp-2 scores, more reasons wanting to return and fewer reasons for not wanting to return were more likely to respond at time 2 that they would be returning to camp the next summer.

None of the nine predictor variables (SWB-Camp-2, SADP-2, the # of Return and No Return Reasons, and five NEO personality factors) were significantly correlated with the time 3 return response, so we replicated the time 2 model, with the addition of the time 2 return responses in a binary logistic regression. The only variables that remained in the equation were SWB-Camp-2 and the return response from time 2. The model with these two variables significantly accounted for 38% of the variance of the time 3 return responses (Cox & Snell; $R^2 = .384$). Counselors with higher SWB-Camp-2 who responded that they were more likely to return at time 2, were more likely to commit to returning at time 3.

Discussion

Based on previous research by other investigators, we hypothesized that attitudes, experience, and job satisfaction would predict retention of camp counselors from one summer to the next. However, only job satisfaction, measured as subjective well-being with regard to camp, significantly predicted the decision to return to camp, measured both at the end of the camp experience and approximately six months later. In addition to job satisfaction, the counselor-reported likelihood of returning at the end of camp predicted the decision to return the following summer six months after camp ended.

Two other measures of job satisfaction—# of Return Reasons and # of No Return Reasons to camp—predicted the counselors’ report of likelihood of return at time 2, together predicting approximately 25% of the variance. Neither measure, however, continued to predict return commitment at time 3. Nonetheless, these data provide a richer picture of sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The four most frequently reported disatisfactions—stress/exhaustion; problems with management; poor pay; and problems with staff—are all domains that are potentially modifiable by employers. Thus, supervisors of direct-care service providers can use the results of this study to eliminate or substantially reduce these problems, increase job satisfaction
and perhaps, reduce the turnover rate in current employees.

The relation between job satisfaction and retention replicates findings by other investigators (Headly et al., 1985). In fact, there is some evidence that a downward cascade of events occurs. For example, staff members who report higher levels of stress are less likely to interact with clients in various ways such as personal care tasks or positive social assistance (Hatton & Emerson, 1993; Hatton et al., 2001; Kay, 1994; Razza, 1993). This lower level of engagement may ultimately lead to greater job dissatisfaction and higher levels of attrition. Conversely, staff members with high satisfaction may engage more fully, leading to even greater job satisfaction and higher probability of retention.

Failure to find significant effects of either attitudes or personality on the decision to return may have been related to the nature of the job, including its temporary nature and the relative youth and life situations of the counselors. All participants were in the 15-25 years age range, a time of life when rapid life changes are typical. Graduation from either high school or college can precipitate the search for a full-time year-round job that would exclude returning to a summer job at fairly low wages. Thus, turnover may be more of a situational decision and less of a reflection of the person making the choice.

Another explanation for the insignificant relation between attitudes and return commitment is the SADP itself. It was developed in 1982, and extraordinary changes with regard to disability have probably rendered some of the items outdated. For example, almost three decades after the passage of P. L. 94-142 it is unlikely that many respondents would agree with the statement that "Children with disabilities should not be provided with a free public education." Also, it is important to note that some of the items on the SADP about housing, zoning ordinances, and personal rights are on subjects that the counselors did not learn about or experience first-hand and therefore the intervention was weak with regard to change in attitudes on those items.

We did find that experienced counselors had significantly more positive attitude scores than the new counselors at both time 1 and time 2, even though there was no change in attitudes in either group during the eight-week camp experience. This difference is likely the result of several factors. First, self-selection by counselors over time may result in only the individuals with the most positive attitudes returning. Second, it may be that experiences gained at camp did not result in an immediate change of attitudes, but that attitudes change over a greater span of time. Experiences at camp may provide a foundation for new attitudes to develop. This would explain the difference in attitude scores between new and experienced counselors at times 1 and 2 of this study, while accounting for the lack of change in attitudes during the course of the study.

Our results with regard to attitudes are consistent with some past research. Many investigators have found that increased experience and contact with individuals with disabilities is correlated with more positive perceptions of disability (Bergman & Hanson, 2000; Choi, 2000; English, 1977; Herr, 1975; Sable, 1995). Specifically, Kastner et al. (1979) found that as workers gain experience with individuals with disabilities their attitudes become more positive. Evidence that this process takes time comes from a study by Alper and Algazzine (1997) who found no significant change in camp counselor attitudes after a seven-day camp experience. It is unclear how long an experience is necessary for attitude change to occur, because even the eight-week camp in the current study did not facilitate change.

Despite their more positive attitudes, experienced counselors were not significantly more likely to commit to returning the next summer than were new counselors in the regression analysis. However, the failure to find a significant effect was undoubtedly influenced by the small sample sizes, with 6-month return data available for only 25 counselors or 52% of the original sample. It is noteworthy that more than twice the percentage of experienced counselors (33%) than new counselors (16%) committed to returning to camp the following summer.

None of the five factors of the NEO-FFI predicted counselor return. This failure to find an effect is consistent with past research (Barron & Donohue, 1951; Cuadra & Reed, 1957). It is possible that within the rather homogeneous sample of counselors, not enough variability in personality scores occurred for an effect to be detected. Although...
the range of scores for each factor was wide, 15-46, it was far from the possible range of 12 to 60. Thus, future research that investigates a link between personality and worker retention should attempt to use a more heterogeneous sample. Nonetheless, for employers interested in retaining employees in environments that serve individuals with disabilities, personality may not be a variable of interest.

In sum, counselor job satisfaction at the end of a summer camp predicted both concurrent responses about returning to work the following summer and a commitment to return assessed in a six-month follow-up. Narrative reasons for wanting and not wanting to return indicated that employers may be able to improve return rates by improving the work environment with regard to job responsibilities, salary, management policies, and worker relations. Future research should examine each of these components directly.

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