Learning an Elementary Language

Over the course of this past summer, I had to learn a new language. I didn't study abroad or visit a foreign country; I was a camp counselor for eight and nine year old boys. Initially, I expected communication among these elementary boys to be quite simple, but I was very wrong. I figured I was to lead these boys as an authoritative figure and enforce the rules strictly from day one, constantly correcting and disciplining. From day one, I was dealing with tears, fights, homesickness, and other matters that were beyond my expectations. In addition, rules were never a priority for these boys. I had dealt with kids before, but never had I spent every hour of the day with them. Occasionally, I would have to raise my voice to get them back in order, but I soon came to realize that to be their leader, I first had to become their friend. I continued to enforce rules and keep them in line, but I used much more of my time to get to know the kids and learn what their stories really were. Although I never could get very deep into conversation due to the eight-year-old's crazy mind, I was able to connect and begin to grow with these kids. Soon after I began to pour into these guys as a friend, I found that they began to follow my orders out of respect. I believe those eight year olds taught me a valuable lesson as I move forward in my academic and professional career. To truly lead a group of people, I will first need to establish their respect and friendship. Obviously at an overnight summer camp the friendship process was expedited, but in the future it will take time and effort. Communication really can be effective, but only after you've established a friendship.