



Introduction by Dick Angelo, president of Forest Springs, Westboro, Wis.

FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE CAMPS AND CONFERENCE CENTERS

This year marks 50 years that my wife, Vivyen, and I have had the privilege of serving at Camp Forest Springs (recently renamed Forest Springs Camp and Conference Center). During the course of that time I have seen plenty of changes in culture, lifestyle, communication, technology, legal issues and human wants.

However, some things have not changed. Those are the things that are foundational to running a great camp or conference center. Whether you've been in the camp world for five months or 50 years, these are the principles we all need to keep in mind and put into practice as we strive to serve campers and lead them closer to Jesus.

InSite magazine asked some respected CCCA members from across the country to tell us the five things every camp staff member should know. Based on the core disciplines CCCA builds training around for conventions and sectionals, we've compiled 55 foundational truths that will serve as a refresher for some, and new insight for others. Here are the essential nuggets of wisdom that they've shared with us. ►





Resource/Fund Development

(Contributors: **Melissa Yonan**, director of alumni relations, and **Ann Higgins**, director of development at Christian Camps and Conferences, Inc.: Camp Brookwoods, Deer Run and Moose River Outpost, Alton, N.H.)

- 1. Keep things moving. Establish policies and specific procedures for the receipt of gifts and proper acknowledgement. Include the process for thanking donors in a timely manner and ensuring that designated gifts are correctly allocated.
- 2. People give to people. Camp alumni and friends *love* camp, however at the end of the long camp day, it's all about people. Fostering relationships is paramount for a healthy development program.
- **3. Engage first-timers.** When donors give for the first time, call them! As part of the thank-you call, ask them about their "camp story" or how they heard about your camp.
- **4. Make giving easy.** Evaluate your website to make sure your giving portal is not only a secure site, but is easy to find and use. Don't lose a donor over one too many clicks!
- **5. Find the right time.** There's a lot to be said about the timing of funding appeals. Year-end is important, but so are times when camp excitement is high, just before camp opens or after it closes.



Programming

(Contributors: **John Zeigenfuse**, program director at River Valley Ranch, Manchester, Md. and **Tait Hoglund**, program director at Trout Lake Camp, Pine River, Minn.)

- Change it up. Change up 20 percent of your programming every year. Don't be afraid to try new things. A programmer's creativity is your greatest asset, so use it!
- 2. Start with the camper in mind. Consider the campers' interests; research and study the people you serve. And once you know them, balance your programming with what they want versus what they need.
- **3.** Fun requires innovation. Fun is hard work for camp staff, but it's the language that every kid understands. If fun is one of the foundations of your camp, then kids will be more receptive to hear the Gospel.
- **4. Keep learning.** To continue to be effective, learn how to manage your time, how to speak to issues campers are facing and how you can encourage your staff regularly. Evaluate what's working in your program and what's not.
- **5. Balance the scale.** Make sure you understand your staff's needs and give them what they lack or what they need. Strike a balance between having fun and working hard. Keep them moving in the same direction.







(Contributors: **Duane Mason**, board member at Mile High Pines Camp, Angelus Oaks, Calif., and **Bob Strodel**, executive director at Christian Camps and Conferences, Inc.: Camp Brookwoods, Deer Run and Moose River Outpost, Alton, N.H.)

- **1.** Make sure the price is right. Compare the increase in price for your camp over the past 10 years to the price increase of amusement parks in your area. Are you on the same pace?
- **2. Work like Jesus.** Many of your vendors may not be Christians, so take the opportunity to demonstrate that Christians are different by paying your bills on time!
- **3.** Budget to win. A budget that is too optimistic will make you look good to the board in November, but it creates stress the next year when you fall short.
- **4. Find out what works.** Knowing how and when to stop an activity is as important as knowing how and when to start one.
- **5. Keep fundraising rolling.** Fundraise for capital and major program improvements, not general operating expenses. Also, create a five-year rolling plan that includes major capital projects and facility upkeep to have a list of projects for fundraising opportunities.



Marketing & Communications

(Contributor, Jon Bissett, executive director at River Valley Ranch, Manchester, Md.)

- **1. Define your brand.** What are the "brand promises" that you guarantee will be delivered to each guest at your camp? Once you define them, be sure all marketing elements reinforce that brand.
- **2. Measure your effectiveness.** If you don't survey your guests, you are flying blind. Each program should have a well-designed survey that asks for honest feedback on all elements of the camp experience.
- **3. Get social.** The real question isn't how many likes you have, but how engaged is your audience? We have also found advertising on Facebook (through ads or promoted posts) is the most cost-effective way to reach your target audience.
- **4. Create urgency.** By having multiple price increases through the winter/spring, you create excellent marketing opportunities. Consider giving your best discount to current campers who register within days of finishing this year's camp experience.
- 5. Your program is your best marketing. With word of mouth referrals approaching 70 percent for some camps, a well-planned, engaging program will net more registrations than any other marketing tool.





Site Facilities & Technology

(Contributors: **Gabe Valencia**, executive director at Mile High Pines, Angelus Oaks, Calif., and **Dave Lee**, principal architect at Fletemeyer & Lee Associates)

- **1.** Look ahead. Have a defined and agreed upon vision for the future. Set a goal of your desired outcome before allowing various obstacles and constraints kill the dream.
- **2. Use it wisely.** Be good stewards of what resources you've been given. When possible, repair before replacing.
- **3. Think big picture and long term.** Successful planning anticipates future needs. Imagine the paradigm shifts that your camp or conference center might experience, and anticipate growth and programs beyond what your current offerings are.
- **4. Shop smart.** Whenever you're preparing to make a large purchase, shop the best deals, get at least three bids and ask vendors if they'd consider donating all or part of the materials and/or services.
- **5.** If you build it, they will notice. Try to build, replace, modify or create something new annually. It shows guests that their dollars are being managed well because the funds come back to your site for improvement.



Food Service and Hospitality

(Contributors: **Matt Huffman**, food service manager at Laity Lodge Family Camp, Leakey, Texas, and **Brent Thomsen**, director of guest services at Nebraska Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Ashland, Neb.)

- 1. Be aware of food safety. Nothing is worse than sick campers. Keep daily temperature logs for your coolers and freezers, date and label all food products that are not in their original packaging and be diligent about handling food allergies.
- 2. Food allergies matter. Embrace guests with food allergies like Christ would, even though it may cause inconveniences for you. Provide them with the things they need to make their experience just as enjoyable as anyone without any food allergies.

(For more on food allergies, check out page 43.)

- Be efficient and effective. Do yourself a favor and buy a tomato slicer (or whatever time-saving tool you need). You'll get consistent slices and have more time for a meaningful conversation or experience with that cook.
- **4. Be consistent.** If wiping the rim of a platter is important enough during the first week of camp, make sure you're still doing it the last week of camp. Show your cooks that each guest deserves the same service.
- **5.** Hospitality makes for happy campers. Always try to make your guests feel welcome. Be sure you and your team are smiling, introduce yourselves to guests, and consider wearing name tags so you can be approached by name.





Leadership: Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Planning

(Contributors: **Michael Perry**, president of Spring Hill Camps, Evart, Mich., and **Norm Hoyt**, director of educational ministries at Forest Springs, Westboro, Wisc.)

- **1. Define your purpose.** What purpose do we fulfill, what difference do we make in the world? If we ceased to exist, what hole would be left? These answers should help you develop your purpose or mission statement.
- **2. Stay focused.** No matter how important you think your ministry is, God is always more interested in your relationship with Him than your service for Him. Maintain your walk with God before you maintain anything else.
- **3. Learn to balance.** You will not last long without deliberately creating a healthy personal rhythm of engagement in your ministry and regular times or retreat and rest.
- **4. Cast your vision.** Looking into the future, whom do we want to be? What are the kinds of things we'd want others to say about us? These answers create a shared vision of your future.
- **5. Be you (unique).** What are the defining characteristics that make us stand out from other similar organizations? Answer these questions to articulate your brand promise or philosophy of ministry.





Spiritual Development

(Contributor: **Angela Aadahl**, former camp director at Laity Lodge Youth Camp, Leakey, Texas)

- 1. Look at your bench. Spiritual development is a team sport (Proverbs 27:17). One way to stir up your spiritual life is to give some people on the bench a chance to get in the game.
- You find what you look for. Spiritual development sometimes becomes something we're "supposed" to do. But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).
- **3.** It's NOT about you. It's about God revealing Himself to the world, through us (Galatians 2:20). So, maybe it's not just quiet times in your favorite chair, but also on your feet serving, sharing a meal, or befriending a stranger.
- **4. Start with the middle in mind.** In our spiritual lives the end is when Christ returns (Philippians 1:6). Don't think about how you're going to arrive, think about how you're getting there.
- **5.** It's about love. The goal of your spiritual development is not just to grow in your knowledge, but to let your knowledge of God grow your capacity to love Him and others (2 Peter 1:3).



Camp Culture

(Contributor: **James Rock**, camp director at Trout Lake Camps, Pine River, Minn.)

- 1. Working at camp is a lifestyle. It's not a job, which is why the best camp directors find ways to incorporate their families into that lifestyle. Make sure your family has something to do together when your summer is spent at camp.
- 2. See eye to eye with your spouse. If you want to work in Christian camping, your spouse must agree to those terms in order to make it work. There's a price your spouse must be willing to pay.
- **3. Learn everything.** By any means necessary, a camp director must be willing to learn every aspect of how camp works. After a couple years, you can outsource the things you're not an expert at.
- **4. Change little at first.** Ask a lot of questions and learn the staff and culture before you make big changes. Be a listener. Then you're in a place to make the best changes for the camp.
- 5. Make time for God. A good camp director, or any camp staff member for that matter, will only be effective if he or she is spending quality time with God every day. ►



Board/Governance

(Contributor: **Ed McDowell**, executive director at Warm Beach Christian Camp, Stanwood, Wash.)

- 1. **Resolve conflict**. Healthy boards have shared understanding and communicated protocol for conflict resolution. Board work involves conflict because we're working with people. It's important for a board to say, "This is how we deal with conflict."
- 2. One board, one voice. The camp director should only be accountable to one board with one voice. To make this clear, a camp director cannot be listening to multiple individual voices and treat each one as if it were his/her supervisor.
- **3.** Set clear expectations. From the recruitment phase through the actual work of being a board member, there needs to be clear expectations of what the board is asking and expecting of its members.
- **4. Stay healthy.** The board is responsible for its own health and vitality, and the best boards have taken this seriously. While executive leadership is key, a ministry will not grow beyond the capacity of the board.
- **5.** Do work that matters. Ask: If we could only make two decisions in the next 12 months that would substantially help the camp be stronger, what would those decisions be and why?

(Read more from Ed McDowell on board health on page 62.)





Human Resources

(Contributor: **Janet Meyer**, executive director at ACU Leadership Camps, Abilene, Texas)

- **1. Plan your process.** Establish a clear process including a timeline. Make sure you update your process to meet the requirements of any new federal, state, or local regulations.
- 2. Follow your plan. Honor your own step-bystep process, including your deadlines. Communicate any necessary changes or delays with your stakeholders (year-round staff, board members, applicants, etc).
- **3.** Do your homework. It's tempting to skip steps when you're pressing into deadlines and still need to fill staff positions. Don't do it! Check references, interview well, and honor the process you've created. Consistency is an important aspect of your HR process.
- 4. Train them well. It's not just about teaching them to do their jobs. Make sure new staff understand and become a part of the desired culture of your camp. Tell stories and ask returning staff to share testimonies that highlight key aspects of your camp's focus.
- 5. Take the high road. Address conflicts with the compassion and confidence that comes from being a disciple of Jesus. Sometimes doing the hard thing, even to the point of letting someone go, is the right thing for your camp, your team, and that staff member.