

TAKING INVENTORY

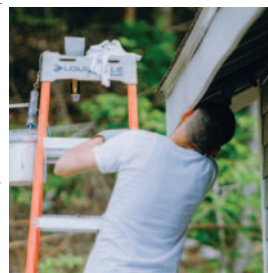
Learning from what just happened
to determine what should happen next



A Gift To Encourage The
Ministry Of Camp Lebanon
From The Family Of
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I was in 6th grade; my dad was a RadioShack manager at the time. Four times a year he had to do inventory. A word which meant getting dragged into counting endless items on pegboard hooks. We counted everything with pen and paper because it was the 80s. Not exactly camp-level fun!

Photo courtesy of Ward of Life Fellowship



I often asked, “Why do we have to do this?” The answer was always a variation of, “To see how much got stolen,” or something about bonuses. ►

Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

I don't know about you, but I can only remember doing a full camp inventory once in my years of ministry. The sixth grader in me rejoices in that lack of accountability, but I am not so sure he should. Taking inventory is an important function of any management team. Double-checking accounting, learning what our best and least sellers are and confirming our product help focus on accountability. Taking inventory both literally and, at times, figuratively, is a foundation for good decisions.

But let's be honest. Camps tend to use more of a "fly by the seat of our pants" approach. Who has time to count and use real numbers? That's a side-effect of being a busy ministry, but does that attitude diminish our effectiveness, or even our ministry?

As the leaves turn red, yellow and brown, what should we stop and count? How do we count our success or lack of it? Most importantly, how do we respond to what we learn?

Let's take a counting tour of camp and figure things out.

Marketing Count: Engagement Effectiveness

When we did the math at Trout Lake, we came to a simple conclusion about marketing: We were terrible at it. We had multiple staff keeping our social media, websites, etc. up to date, and we were still losing the battle. We were not doing enough, and our quality was low. So, we hired it out. Expensive? Yes. Perfect? No, but better than we were able to do in-house. Outsourcing was one of those complicated choices that has paid off. As you ask, "How are we doing?" about your marketing efforts, there are a few specifics you can consider measuring:

Website

- How is our website functioning?
- How many visitors are we getting, and where are they coming from?
- How long are they staying on the site, and which pages seem to be getting the most interest?

Social Media

- When are our different stakeholders most active on social media and on which platforms?
- Is there a best time to post and increase engagements?
- Which groups like what and when?
- Is video more effective (like many experts say)? ►

Are you tracking accidents and injuries on the property? When you track slips and falls, they might encourage you to find a solution that would lead to fewer work-comp claims.



Photo courtesy of Belhany Birches



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship



What does your hospitality team do best, and how can you focus more efforts in that area?

Fund Development Count:

Show Me the Money-givers

Some camps don't have a fundraising strategy or aren't aware of how many donors they have. Let's start there. (And if you're at a loss for what step one should be, consider signing up for CCCA's free fundraising coach.) There is a lot of fundraising information you can dig into, and not all of it may be helpful to you.

There are a few things to take inventory of that might change the way you do things and improve the outcomes.

Communications:

- What's your appeal-email open rate?
- Tracking by day and time, are there better times to send an appeal when your donors are more likely to open it?
- What subject lines got opened the most?
- What gets better click rates, a link or a button?

Donor Activity

- How many monthly donors do you have (and are they following through on monthly giving)? It's important to know if people have pledged to give monthly and have missed a month or more. Sometimes if a donor hasn't given, it could be because they didn't get a receipt, which caused them to lose the rhythm of giving. You may need to help them reboot.
- What are people most likely to give to? Do they respond better to big-picture campaigns or scholarship funds?

Operations/Risk-management Count: Bee-ware

Are you tracking accidents and injuries on the property? When you track slips and falls, they might encourage you to find a solution that would lead to fewer work-comp claims. Maybe a big hill needs a staircase, or a trail requires more or clearer signage. We seem to be improving on areas every year for this reason. It's also interesting when your bee-sting count turns from "seems like a lot" to an actual number. You see, counting isn't always tedious; it can also be helpful. Here are some things to count and consider:

- What were the top five reasons someone visited the nurse last summer?
- Were any of those nurse visits caused by problems that you can address to prevent future issues?
- Walk the property and make a list of safety issues like popping boards and loose steps. These now become your off-season maintenance list.

Foodservice Count: An Apple a Day

Allergies, special needs, paper products vs. dishwashing, organic, green, find cooks, buy local, supply-chain issues, increased food cost, homemade vs. premade, weighing food waste ... the list goes on. Not to mention the quarterly inventory to find out where all the food went! Sometimes I wonder if we count so much in foodservice that we live in a world of status quo and forget to *evaluate* all that counting. When is the last time this department looked hard at the numbers and really adjusted its focus? Let's make sure we know the basics like:

- What is the cost-per-plate for each menu?
- What items repeatedly get wasted on a buffet?
- How much time does it take to turn around the dining room? ►

For our recruitment efforts, do we know what's working and are we tracking our efforts throughout the year?

Hospitality Count: Happy Campers

I have been around camping long enough to remember the days when the object was to be all things to all people. We have shifted our focus. Our new mantra became: Let's focus on what we do best. Immediately, the range of rental groups became drastically restricted. The difficulty was turning away long-standing groups and events, but our result has been a higher overall quality for our best rentals. What does your hospitality team do best, and how can you focus more efforts in that area? First, you need to know what you do best, and you learn that by counting:

- How satisfied are our guests?
- Are we even asking them, and if so, are we asking the right questions?
- What are we doing with the answers we get?
- How quickly are we reviewing what we're learning from guests?

Summer Staffing Count: There's No "I" in Team

I know, we are all sick of the questions about staff shortage and the lack of answers. So, let's look somewhere new. No excuses. Every business in the world is short on staff, but I don't think that's the reason for our inventory problem. The first thing I suggest we look at is ourselves, not the world around us.

Are you running a camp that teaches campers that this is *their* camp? Do you teach campers that part of following Jesus is doing ministry? A camp director friend of mine has been teaching that to campers for years by not only having them clean their cabins but also clean the whole camp, water the flowers around the dining hall and sweep the sidewalks at the beach. Campers of all ages are learning service there. Are we missing that in our camp experience?

For our recruitment efforts, do we know what's working and are we tracking our efforts throughout the year? Let's look at things like:

- How effective is each recruiting effort? Track it (as in, literally count your leads, the interviews that come from it and the hires that result).
- How many staff were previous campers?
- What percentage of your existing staff are returning staff? How has this changed over the years?
- Are you surveying staff at the beginning and end of the summer to see what they're expecting out of their experience and how you measure up?
- What kind of staff alumni follow-up are you doing throughout the year?

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I am sure you'll find a million more ways to have a ministry-wide inventory influence your operations. Ask your team; they likely have other ideas about what would be helpful and illuminating to track. The question is, can you force your organization to stop and count and then respond to those counts? Check out the Camp Forums and let CCCA know what you're measuring and why. This is the kind of information that could help us all as we collectively serve about 6.5 million guests each year. There it is again — counting! ■



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