

# THE GOLD STANDARD

Leadership — Workshop 2 and Episode 2



How do we brand camp as the best first job, as a pathway to leadership that will help camp staff succeed in any job, in any field? In the leadership episodes of the Christian Camping Incubator, the fellows sought to reimagine what leadership in Christian camping looks like. What does the industry need to do to move toward a place where it is known as the gold standard for leadership and discipleship?

Photo courtesy of Camp Phillip (2021)



The yellow and blue teams come together in these discussions to imagine what that might look like and what it would take to get there. ▶



Working at camp is a quick study in leadership. You're thrown into a temporary community of full-time staff and summer staff, all from different backgrounds and, often, from very different perspectives and experience levels. Then, together, you serve a diverse group of campers all with their own challenges.

Being placed into these leadership roles allows camp staff to learn more about themselves — through leading groups, working as a part of a team, creatively solving problems on the fly and changing course as the need arises.

Working at camp is a place to take risks, to fail, try again and find success. These qualities are sought after in most work environments today, but some camps struggle to capitalize on this. Part of this involves changing the way camp professionals view camp employment.

“Camp may not be seen as a serious thing. ... There is serious work being done at camp,” notes Incubator Fellow Lisa Olson. “How do we shift the language to increase the perceived value?”

To first shift our own view of working at camp, the industry needs to look at the words it uses when talking about camp employment. The camping industry has its own lingo, but it doesn't always make sense to organizations and businesses outside of the camp bubble.

Camp leaders and staff have an opportunity to make connections by using terminology that is relevant to the business community. This change would help communicate the value of leadership skills learned at camp. How do we work toward this shift in the way camp leaders think about these things and communicate with other businesses and organizations?

While the hard skills learned at camp — tying into a belay rope or leading a cave trip — may not always be useful in future careers, the soft skills learned from these activities, like attention to detail and being prepared, are invaluable. Camps develop leaders with skills that are necessary in any industry.

“We're training leaders for life,” Incubator Fellow Steve Prudhomme says. Camps help college-age kids and young adults discover who they are and what they believe, to mature emotionally and spiritually, and develop character that makes for a good leader.

The benefits of this kind of soul care and growth may not always be apparent to another employer, but the mark that it leaves on the person will help them in any employment opportunity. How does Christian camping grow this focus on soul care, help staff practice this and share their experience with future employers? When a staff member can leave camp with documentation of their growth, they can share that with any future employer. ▶

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Photo courtesy of Sky Ranch [2021]



Photo courtesy of Grace Adventures [2021]

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Photo courtesy of Sky Ranch (2021)



### Connecting across generations

“This generation is seeking jobs they truly believe in,” says Incubator Fellow Cary Hendricks. “As much as we can, we need to communicate that this is indeed work they can believe in,” he continues. “We need to trust and empower them, giving them a safe place to have impact and a safe place to fail as they learn.”

Camps are a perfect place to connect and grow future leaders, but as the generations change, developing new ways to reach out to them is important. The founders of many camps were of the “Boomer” generation, so the mission and vision reflect their values, but not necessarily those of Gen Z.

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Again, language is a key. Changing the mission and vision isn’t necessary, but choosing language that resonates with current generations could be a way to bridge that gap and find ways to meet their needs. As camps consider these questions, it is important for leaders to remember that while each generation changes, God’s Word does not. This provides an opportunity to connect to the generational culture while staying true to the unchanging Word of God.

### Other areas for growth

“It takes a long time to learn the complexity of skills that leaders need,” says Incubator Fellow Rob Ribbe. He sees a need for “longer term, deeper development programs — an extended formational process that combines heart work and skill work.”

Growing leaders is a relational process with opportunities for mentoring and accountability built in. Historically, camps have focused on passing on skills and dispensing information and haven’t put as much time and thought into the relational piece among staff. As a weeklong, summerlong or yearlong gap experience, camps can take the time to work more in-depth on the soft skills of leadership with campers and staff.

Camp leaders work at camps because they have a passion for connecting people with God in an outdoor setting. Running the business is something they have taken on because of their love for camp.

Yet, as Incubator Fellow Nate Parks says, “The diversity in terms of what is needed as an executive or a [staff member] in camping is pretty broad.”

How can camps develop leaders with the business skills that are required? While focusing on the critical soft skills that are so attractive to employers today, what should camp leadership include in training and mentoring from a business perspective? This broader focus will help prepare the next generation of leaders who have been invested in at camp.

For camps that have middle management leaders, how can senior-level staff prepare them? What do emerging leaders need to know to be successful? Incubator Fellow Dan Steele shares how their team at RVR invests in high-potential leaders at the middle-management level.

“It helps not only raise up good leaders, but also helps those of us who are getting older to pass the baton, too,” he says. “I think that’s something that’s missing in a lot of organizations.”

### Moving forward

As the culture around us is changing, Christian camps are also faced with the need to decide which of these changes need to cross over into camp culture to remain relevant. Incubator Fellow Dudley Grady, Jr. encourages camp leaders to “keep a commitment to un-learning and learning.”

This posture propels leaders to pursue growth and adapt to the emerging needs of campers, guests and staff. Camp is a great place to work through these issues because it is so relational. How can camps acknowledge and capitalize on this strength of pursuing continuous growth?

Camps have a great opportunity to find ways to communicate the potential for growth and development to their prospective staff and the world and take their place as the gold standard of leadership. ■