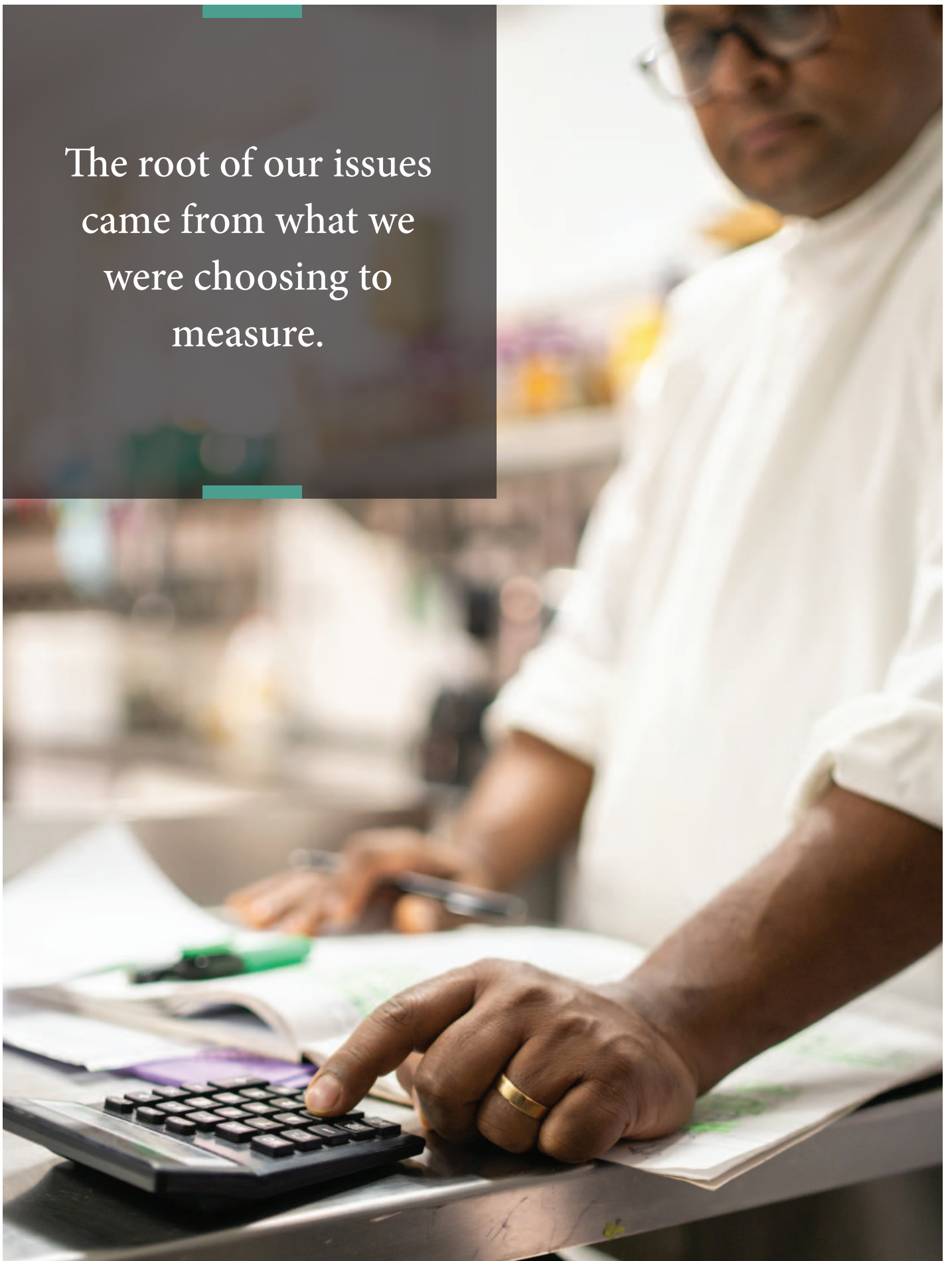


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■ by Evan Liewer

Measuring for Success

If you are not measuring costs and setting goals for your repairs around camp, you are leaving money on the table. We need to look for opportunities to streamline work in our facilities and operations and cut expenses where we can. One example I've seen recently comes from our food-service department, and they've inspired me to analyze how we're spending time and money in other areas at camp.

Something I don't see camps measuring often enough is their cost per plate for their meals. When we began tracking cost per plate, we saved 8% a year on food costs. It started when we realized we had two kitchens that feed almost identical group sizes, group demographics and during the summers had identical schedules. First, we noticed one kitchen was using an additional part-time worker. Why did one kitchen need an extra helper? Then we noticed one kitchen would have one to two extra pizzas left over on pizza night, the other kitchen would have 12 pizzas left over. The root of our issues came from what we were choosing to measure.

As a camp, we have always been big on quality service, making sure every one of our guests has an amazing experience. While this is a big focus, we don't have unlimited budgets and we must keep a constant eye on finances.

We also realized we charged all dining labor to the same account; it wasn't broken down by kitchen. As new hires would join the team, we would accrue additional costs and those wages would get lost in the entire department budget. That was a lightbulb moment for us.

We began measuring the cost per individual plate. We would take the total cost of raw food for a week and then divide by the number of meals for that period. This made it so staff were encouraged to appropriately use leftovers, change ingredients based on price, and make innovative decisions to save costs without cutting quality or service.

We started measuring for a baseline and in the first month learned there was no consistency week by week. Since we hadn't set targets and just did things like they'd always been done, price per plate could vacillate by more than 50 cents a plate, and that adds up. Comparing kitchens and labor dollars, that number jumped higher.

something to build on

I've come to learn that anything we don't measure can get overlooked and become a missed opportunity for stewardship. When setting a goal clearly in operations, I no longer just spend money on what "needs to be done," but I focus where it's wisest to spend the money and make sure I am not wasting any of the dollars that are so in demand. ■



Evan Liewer is the senior director of programs and operations at Forest Home Christian Camps in Southern California. With 50,000 guests a year, Evan is responsible to ensure a quality retreat and that the gospel is preached. Evan graduated from Biola University with a degree in business and Bible. He is a pastor, author and leader. He lives in Redlands, California, with his beautiful wife and three daughters.