

# PIVOTING TO PURPOSE

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A path out of the great resignation for camps





We live in a time when record numbers of employees are seizing the opportunity to redefine who they are, what they do and where they work. According to Monster.com, 95% of employees are considering a job change soon, if they haven't already. Further, the Society for Human Resources Management reported 4.5 million workers voluntarily left their jobs in November of 2021, breaking the September record of 4.3 million.



Photo courtesy of Crowders Ridge (2019)

As a result of this “great resignation,” companies and camps alike are struggling to bring in the capabilities and skills needed to continue to provide for their consumers and grow their business. So, know that you are not alone when it comes to feeling the pressure of recruiting and retaining the best talent. ►

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Even for employees who are staying with companies, many are actively disengaged and don't feel connected to the company where they are employed. Gallup, a top workplace research firm, estimates that over \$7 trillion of productivity is being lost in the U.S. due to actively disengaged employees. This is particularly damaging to Christian camps, as a large part of your success is based on the discretionary effort and care your staff exerts every day.

These numbers are staggering, no doubt. Christian camps and conference centers are competing for talent with an entirely different set of companies. For instance, big-box retailers are changing their relationships with employees and poaching talent that might come your way. They're offering better perks and prime locations. They're offering everything from a college education to flexible scheduling and higher pay. So, you might be asking, "How do we compete with all the perks? How do you compete with name brands like Target or Starbucks?" It's difficult for sure, but it's not impossible.

The path to hiring, engaging and retaining the best talent starts with thinking about the best employee you've ever hired. Great staff deliver a level of performance that outmatches the average employee. They possess a seemingly innate service mentality and foster high team morale. By simply walking through the door every day, they bring up the energy level. They create a greater camp experience, and they drive return campers. They're the staff who inspire campers to say, "I want to go back there because my counselor was so good." And most importantly, they're low drama. They don't bring stress to their job or toxicity to your camp culture.

Up until now, you might have been framing the question as, "How do we hire and develop talent now when we can't compete on pay/perks?" Instead ask, "What *do* we have to offer?" You have unique and differentiated assets to bring in talent, but you have to maximize them every day in every touchpoint.

Here are a few practices to help you hire, engage and retain talent that don't require money.

### **Recognize Their Contributions**

Your staff wants to be valued by their managers. When leaders know what motivates their teammates and acknowledge the unique superpowers or skills that staff members bring, staff receive validation and feel seen. Good leaders find ways to maximize affirmations every day. How are you recognizing individuals for what they're doing and how they are helping make your camp better?

Many of us often think about recruiting as the task we do before we hire people, but in this environment, where talent has choices, you are recruiting or re-recruiting your people every day. Engagement is a day-to-day ground game. Every conversation you have is either increasing or decreasing the engagement in your employees. And as a leader, you have to be thoughtful about the ways you're showing up every day and whether you are maximizing every touchpoint with them.

When you decide to be a manager of people, it's no longer about you. It's about the guests you serve, and the people who wake up every day to be a part of your mission and a part of your purpose. You need to know them *really* well — you need to see them every day. You need to understand what motivates them and why they come to work. That alone might allow you to get better talent and keep them a little bit longer summer after summer, year after year. ►

# Good leaders find ways to maximize affirmations every day.

### **Offer Potential for Advancement**

At camp, you can offer the potential for advancement in unique ways. I saw an interesting job posting once, outlining the career path a staff member could take at a company. The ad said something like, “Here are seven jobs that we are hiring for, and here’s how each of these jobs progresses to the next.” If a candidate had senior-level skills, he or she would be qualified for the senior-level job. If he or she was looking to build skills starting at a lower level, the company outlined the places they could grow into or toward over time. In essence, you were being hired into a job but, more importantly, into a clear career path.

That’s an interesting way to package jobs. No matter what job your candidates take, they should be able to see the other jobs they could work toward or skills they could pick up. The potential for advancement is important — advancement within your camp or advancement because of the experience he or she gains. For instance, how can you frame tasks as experiences that are relevant to the outside world? How could you write all the “resume bullets” that are available to an employee if they work at camp for the summer? If you view advancement both as a movement up a chain of command and as a collection of experiences that can serve an employee in the future, the opportunities for advancement are nearly limitless.

### **Develop a Culture of Care**

The emerging workforce cares about who they’re working beside. They want to be surrounded by caring teammates whom they can relate to and whom they enjoy being around. To build a community of caring teammates, it is important to have a set of clear values that guide hiring. You see, it is at the value level where we find commonality, community and belonging. If we share the same values, we will likely care about similar things and work in similar ways.

When you focus on hiring, focus on the value fit first. Focus on whether or not you see them sharing the values of your camp, being inspired by your purpose, and/or driven toward wanting to make the next generation of kids stronger and better Christians. If they fit the culture, ask, “Can I find a place for you?” I think you will be surprised at where you are in terms of your talent if you remember, “I may not be able to find all the roles I need to fill with exactly the skill set I need. But, I can find all the people I need to fulfill the mission of my camp.” Look for shared values, culture fit and someone who’s humble and hungry, and prioritize training the new hire to be ready for the role. ►

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Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon [2019]



Photo courtesy of Mount Hermon [2021]





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## Allow Flexible Schedules

This can be difficult at camp, but not impossible. The emerging generations are much more careful about how they use their time and highly value flexible schedules. They want to know that even within the confines of a camp, there's flexibility and opportunities for them to use their time in different ways. How can you give them flexibility, even though they may only be with you for the summer? Or, how do you schedule in flexibility for your year-round staff who regularly put in long days serving guests?

Maybe you find ways to offer two-hour breaks scheduled by your staff during busy seasons. Aim to think creatively about letting them schedule time off and finding ways to cover for them or adapt responsibilities. It puts a little bit more stress on leaders, but leadership is about importing stress, exporting civility. Don't put the stress on them to hold onto these schedules that don't work for them. Stress should be on us in finding creative ways to schedule. How do we use our community to have and build some flexibility in staffing?

## Infuse Purpose in Everything

Purpose matters in the products we buy and in the jobs that we take. Let's not confuse "purpose" with "mission." Purpose answers why the world is better with you in it whereas mission is what we do every day to live our purpose.

The stronger the sense of purpose is within a company or a camp, the better the organization becomes. Productivity, employee retention, employee satisfaction, innovation and solving unmet needs, customer loyalty and shareholder value all go up. In PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited's recent study of large corporations, 97% of C-suite level executives, leaders of entities or owners of businesses believe it's important to strengthen their organization's commitment to purpose because they have seen the value in it. They have seen talent choose less money and smaller jobs to be a part of something that really matters.

How do you make sure that purpose touches every single part of your camp, every single moment your campers have on property and every staff experience? There are four fundamental questions you should try to answer to focus on the purpose of your camp or conference center:

1. Why is the world better with your camp or conference center in it?
2. What does your camp or conference center believe or value?
3. What is your camp or conference center uniquely good at?
4. How do you want your camp or conference center to work or interact?

Whether it's big companies, fast-growing startups or Christian camps and conference centers, leaders don't often take the time to answer these questions. Or when they do, the answers aren't at the level of detail that would allow teams to make a different set of decisions day-to-day. Take some time to answer these questions, revisit the practices we covered, and you'll have a clear path to hiring, engaging and retaining talent. ■



*André Martin, Ph.D., has held senior leadership, advisory and board roles dedicated to employee engagement and culture in some of the biggest consumer brands, including Target, Nike, Google, Mars Incorporated and Disney. His teams empowered Target's 350,000 employees to help build a more purpose-driven culture. At Nike, he helped activate a consumer-focused digital transformation by delivering a more value-driven, leader-led culture. He also helped build a principle-led culture at Mars, resulting in five consecutive Gallup Great Workplace Awards. André's mission has always been to help make companies as engaging as the consumer brands they create.*