

SO, YOU WANT TO GET A PROMOTION

Five skills to help you excel and ascend



There are a lot of reasons for wanting to take the next step in your camping career. It may be that you want more responsibility or to provide more for your family. You may see a promotion as an affirmation that you are doing a job well. My favorite reason is what I call non-anxious dissatisfaction — you see something that could be better, and you want to be in a position to make it happen.



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

Whatever the reason, here are five skills that can help you move up. I guarantee that if you do any three of these well, you will be ready for the next step in your career within eighteen months, or sooner if you do all five. ►

1. Prioritize Outcomes Over Effort

Most camps have struggled in recent years to find enough great staff. Do you know who doesn't care? Camp parents. They don't care why our riding staff or gymnastics counselors are less skilled than promised. Parents care that their child gets what the camp brochure or website promised.

The good news is that a great solution probably requires creativity, and your job is more fun when you get to be creative. While you can keep doing the things that have always resulted in positive outcomes (attending staff fairs, returning emails quickly, etc.), you can look for opportunities to create something new.

For example, one associate director in our area made a creative dent in the hiring challenge by creating age-targeted emails and texts for former campers who never returned as staff. He figured out which campers of each age group were now college-aged and started reaching out. The result helped with staffing and renewed great connections with past camp families. I'd be amazed if that didn't get the attention of the camp director.

The further you progress in any organization, the more you will have to own the outcome. The people making decisions about promotions are looking to see if you are ready for that.

2. Use Optimism as a Force Multiplier

Every job has challenges, and challenges are overcome by problem-solving. What does this have to do with optimism? Because we prefer to work with people who fix things, we gravitate toward people who talk a little less about the problems and a little more about the solutions. That's optimism.

Here's the secret: The more problems you have solved in the past, the easier it is to be optimistic about solving the ones you are facing now. So, experience helps, which is part of what makes you ready for a promotion. The good news is that you can accelerate this process by borrowing from other people's experiences and doing three things:

- Watch how other people in your camp solve their problems.
- Invite neighboring camp directors to lunch and ask how they solved specific problems, then ask why it was successful (or perhaps unsuccessful). Just because they tried it doesn't mean it works.
- Read books about managing people, because all problems are people problems. ▶



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Photo courtesy of Pine Cove Camps



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Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

3. Be Efficient

If Psalm 24 is correct, and “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness,” then our roles are about stewarding resources. If you are efficient when things are great, you’ll survive when things are tough.

John D. Rockefeller discovered this sort of efficient frugality in the little things. Upon learning that the machine that sealed his five-gallon oil containers used 40 drops of solder, he asked that the number be reduced to 38. When his company reported that a few containers leaked with 38, he upped the number to 39 drops. Rockefeller said that the single drop saved him \$2,500 in the first year, and when his production increased, the savings became several hundred thousand dollars.

We see this every summer as we address food waste and the balance between fixing and replacing broken equipment, but some of the biggest savings can be found in year-round expenses. About 10 years ago, we challenged each person on our professional team to find \$8,000 in annual savings. The caveat was that it could not increase the workload or decrease quality. We spread the first year’s savings out as a shared bonus when everyone completed the task.

Luke 16:10, “One who is faithful in very little is also faithful in much ...,” is a big principle that sometimes applies to very small things.

4. Learn the Big Picture

It is easiest to frame priorities in reference to the last position we held or the group we are tasked to manage. Assistant directors often frame camp in reference to senior counselor experiences, and senior counselors frame camp in reference to junior counselors. This is fine because it makes you a specialized expert, but that is where your ability will stop.

The more senior the camp position and the more decision-making power a person has, the more important it is to look at the final customers — camp families. That’s what camp directors do, and they want to see that you can do that, too. When you consider the big picture and how it affects camp families, you see beyond your role and responsibilities and understand more of the *why* behind the *what* of your ministry.

As a special note to directors, if you aren’t asking your promising staff to answer a few parent complaints, resolve a maintenance issue, listen in on an insurance meeting, take some responsibility for the food quality (and food budget), etc., then you’re not giving them a chance to grow. ►



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5. See Compensation as a Hint

Let's make an assumption. Since your supervisor has done what you are hoping to do (reached the next level of responsibility), start with the belief that they know at least some of the things that will make you more valuable to the camp. I know this is not always the case, but if they demonstrate the skills above, then it's a better-than-average chance that they do. So, with that assumption, it's worth figuring out what your supervisor thinks is important.

One way of doing that is to look at the things that cause them to give a bonus. Bonuses show the behaviors that camp leadership values so much that they are willing to invest in you to make them happen.

But what if your camp doesn't offer bonuses? In that case, I would have a meeting and ask what outcomes your supervisor or camp director would choose to provide a bonus for if they could. If you're really bold, you might offer to take a 15% pay cut to have a 30% bonus opportunity. That has the added benefit of proving that you value outcome over effort. That's a win-win.

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The last thing that needs to be said is probably the first thing to be considered. Do you want a promotion because it's the next thing to do or because this industry is where you can have the most impact on what you see God doing in the world? Is camping ministry a place where your unique mix of learned skills, natural abilities and spiritual gifts can most powerfully meet the needs of the world?

Another way to ask this is, "Can you recognize the presence of God in reference to your work?" Is this a place where His love is more real or less real to you? If the answer is more, then taking the next step in your career path may be the way that God has planned to make the gospel more alive in your life and your camp. ■



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