

# THE TOP IDEAS

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Money- and time-saving resources, tools, tips and ideas for excelling in every role







One of the key benefits of being part of a professional association like CCCA is the opportunity to share knowledge with and learn from other members. In this issue, we're bringing together some of the top ideas from CCCA members in various roles across Christian camps and conference centers. Discover go-to tools or resources that can simplify your job and pick up time- or money-saving hacks and tips to excel in your role. ▶

Photo courtesy of Mount Hermon

**Executive Directors**

*(Contributions from Lance Howerton at Crossings Ministries, Nate Parks at Berea Ministries, Linda Paulk at Sky Ranch, Scott Shaw at Wind River Ranch, Gabe Valencia at Mile High Pines and Christiaan Snedeker at Lake Geneva Ministries)*

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Leadr for one-on-one meetings
- Microsoft Teams
- Your board
- Power BI (from Microsoft)
- Doodle for meeting scheduling
- *InSite* magazine

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Plan your week on Sunday. This can help you set clear priorities and manage your time more effectively.
- Standardize your jobs and roles.
- Allow staff to see and be held accountable for their budget. They're constantly guessing what they have to spend if they don't see it.
- Remove vehicles not used year-round from your insurance when not being used (if your insurance company allows this).
- Share large equipment or other resources with nearby camps.
- Ask, "Is that the best price you can do?" (This works well when we share the importance of what we do.)
- Form a task force of detail-oriented, cost-conscious people to conduct an annual review and ask questions like, "Why is this expense necessary?"
- Delegation saves time, which saves money.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- You don't have to have all the answers, nor will you.
- Don't make decisions in a vacuum.
- You need to bring the vision to life for people; some people can't see it otherwise.
- Live in accountability and help employees see the need for it across the community.
- Learn to listen.
- Ask for help.
- Take time to celebrate (rather than just moving on to what's next).
- Be flexible, creative and innovative.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Be a learner. Read books and blogs, listen to podcasts and talk to others in your field.
- Your job is to help those you lead succeed. This means providing them with the necessary resources, support and guidance to excel in their roles.
- Be involved at the section level of CCCA by getting to know your section leadership and attending the sectional conference.
- Spend time with campers and guests.
- Stay up to date on state and federal regulations.
- Commit to praying daily for your peers, subordinates and superiors.
- Avoid reinventing the wheel. Ask a lot of questions and find others who have already succeeded.
- Find a mentor or coach (not necessarily someone in Christian camping) who you trust to provide wise counsel and objective feedback.
- Model the behaviors you wish to see.
- Focus on fundamentals — budgeting, planning, reporting, boards and functional areas.
- Look at marketing strategies from other industries and see how you can adapt them for your ministry. ▶

# You don't have to have all the answers, nor will you.



Allow staff to see and be held accountable for their budget. They're constantly guessing what they have to spend if they don't see it.



Photo courtesy of Upper Peninsula Bible Camp

**Foodservice**

*(Contributions from Ellie Anders at Wind River Ranch and Rachel King at River Valley Ranch)*

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Networking with local farmers markets and vendors helps me find great, locally-sourced products.
- Good hires. The best way this happens is when we have an intern placed in foodservice for a year. I get a lot of time to train them, and they can plug into the head chef role during summer camp.
- Thriving Goods newsletter for foodservice pros
- *Food Fanatics* magazine from US Foods

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Recruit from culinary programs to find staff who want to be in the kitchen.
- Use a recipe-costing tool to help save time and money.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- Learn what tasks are important and require attention and what tasks don't need to be your focus.
- Learn basic business and budgeting principles, especially if you're required to adhere to a budget.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Look for inspiration everywhere. Some of my best improvements or menu ideas have come from talking to kids, watching TV, eating at restaurants, scrolling through social media and visiting new places.
- Serve alongside the people you are leading; it will communicate value to them and help you find opportunities for improvement.
- Bring your personal touch. I love expressing myself through my work, so I've created menu items inspired by my hometown, my grandmother's and mother-in-law's recipes, flavors that I love and places I've been to.
- Find the meaning of your work and share it often with your staff. The mantra for our kitchen is, "Feed the stomach; feed the soul." We provide good food for the campers' stomachs so they can engage with the programs and have their souls fed.
- Consider CCCA's Thriving Goods program, which helps you save significant money for your ministry.

Networking with local farmers markets and vendors helps me find great, locally-sourced products.



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship

# Offer incentives for returning staff as well as referral bonuses. It reduces the number of new hires you need to find yourself.

## HR/Recruitment

*(Contributions from Mark McClenaghan at Covenant Hills, Chad Castor at Hume Lake, Suzanne Folke at Sandy Cove and Joe Ciccarello at CAMP-of-the-WOODS)*

### Top tool or resource that makes your job easier

- The Power of Camp recruitment tool kit, graphics, blog posts, videos and more
- CCCA's Recruiting Center
- Join the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) for tips on compliance and best practices.

### Top money- or time-saving hacks

- Offer incentives for returning staff as well as referral bonuses. It reduces the number of new hires you need to find yourself.
- ChatGPT can assist in writing job descriptions, brainstorming marketing strategies, proofreading communications, drafting company policies and researching compliance laws.

### What I wish I knew when I started this role

- It's ok to adjust the schedule to accommodate summer staff who can't commit to a full eight weeks by offering half-summer options.
- You can obtain certificates from eCornell in HR Essentials and HR Management.

### Top tips for someone else in this role

- Strategically reach out to past campers who are now of age to work at your camp.
- Consider international hires and work with an agency that can help facilitate interviews, manage travel, J1 visas, etc. Not only can you fill in staffing gaps, but you also create unique opportunities for cross-cultural experiences for your U.S.-based team and campers.
- Be aware of where your former staff attend college so you can meet up with them when you're in the area. Ask them to help spread the word or work a table on campus.
- Incentivize former staff to recruit on your behalf at their college (especially if your budget is limited and you can't travel to multiple colleges). You can offer them free merch or a \$50 Amazon gift card.
- Exit interviews are essential and can help you improve the staff experience year over year. ▶



**Hospitality**

*(Contributions from Becca Simmering at Menno Haven Camp and Retreat Center, Marley Butler at Camp Allendale and Kali Hespe at Cascades Camp & Conference Center)*

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Canva helps me create decent-looking material to send out, and we get it for free as a nonprofit.
- I take digital notes to access them from my computer or phone when in different areas around camp.

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- HomeBase helps me block off time and schedule facilitators for our large activities with retreat guests. Before implementing this change, I wasted a lot of time texting and calling people; this cut down on that time.
- CampBrain allows me to create templates and schedule emails we send out before a group's arrival (including a 4-week, 2-week and 1-week out email with pertinent information).
- Email templates are a game changer! I use them for pre-arrival emails to collect event details in a timely fashion, but also for deposit and final payment receipts, basic lodging descriptions and as a skeleton for booking details needed.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- I could've used a manual with policies and contingencies for booking guest groups.
- Don't be afraid to reach out to other camps! We are a niche ministry, and connecting with people who share a similar role at other camps helps preserve sanity and can bring about great ideas to better your camp. (CCCA's RoundTables are an easy way to connect with peers from different ministries.)

- Lean into your team. Take the time to listen to people from every department, ask how your role has functioned in tandem with them in the past and what they would like to see change.
- This is something that I'm glad I *was* shown when I started — cleaning times. As the person in charge of the calendar, it's important for me to know how much time it takes for us to turn around any given guest space. Knowing that information helps me max out our calendar without burning out our staff.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Relationships matter. Take time to connect with vendors, guests, service providers and your coworkers.
- Ask questions to gather information and find solutions.
- Do all the training, watch the videos and get to know your software.
- Engage with the retreat guests at a meal, stop by the pool, chat with someone and give high fives as you come and go on your golf cart.
- Update group files in your software. If anything comes up during their stay that they did not communicate to us ahead of time, I update their reservation to reflect those things so it's easy to have that information when they want to book again.
- Survey guests and review findings with your team to improve the guest experience.
- Hire a secret shopper to call and try to book a guest group, walk your property, etc., and give you their impressions. ▶

# Survey guests and review findings with your team to improve the guest experience.

Engage with the retreat guests at a meal, stop by the pool, chat with someone and give high fives as you come and go on your golf cart.



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship





Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

### Boards/Governance

*(Contributions from Nate Parks at Berea Ministries and Ed McDowell at Warm Beach Ministries/Thriving Boards)*

#### Top tool or resource that makes your job easier

- The Thriving Boards webinars, RoundTables and Cohort
- Free downloadable tools on the Thriving Boards resource page (which can be found at [www.ccca.org/go/boards\\_resources](http://www.ccca.org/go/boards_resources))

#### Top money- or time-saving hacks

- Develop an annual board calendar that reflects priorities and time needed.
- The executive director and board chair should mutually agree upon the agenda a minimum of 30 days before the board meeting and refine and finalize the agenda two weeks out.

#### What I wish I knew when I started this role

- Context is critical to making every decision.
- The board is a spiritual community called by God to steward/govern a piece of His kingdom here on Earth.
- Board meetings should focus 70% of the time on the organization's future and only 30% on the current issues.

#### Top tips for someone else in this role

- Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.
- Ask good questions.
- Prioritize prayer and discernment.
- When the executive director provides a monthly report summarized with dashboards, they should use simple dashboards to summarize a large amount of information.
- Board minutes should be shared within seven days of the board meeting.
- Create a good onboarding strategy to ensure new board members are well integrated into your board culture.
- The agenda should lay out the priorities for the board meeting, and every agenda item should have one of three purposes: information, discussion or decision.

**Marketing/Communications**

(Contributions from Bryant Malone at WinShape Camps and Donnie Rosie at Miracle Mountain Ranch)

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Mailchimp is easy to use, has a great design and offers fair pricing.
- YouTube
- Networking
- iPhone camera

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Canva is free for nonprofits and makes quality design easy. It saves time and money — the double whammy!
- Fiverr, where you can find talent to fill holes in your team for graphics, editing, presentations, posters, etc.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- Website analytics are a powerful tool. You can learn so much about what's working by understanding where your traffic comes from and what users spend the most time doing on your site.
- Find someone who has been successful and learn what you can.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Email is far from dead and might be your best marketing tool. Build your marketing around regular emails that are informative and include “value add” content for parents to keep them engaged year-round.
- Good photography drives all digital mediums. Pay a high-quality photographer to capture a day or two; it will give you an incredible resource for your website, social media and emails all year.
- Website traffic is the best lead measure for marketing success. Usually, registration growth can almost always be foretold by website traffic. If the data doesn't correlate, you have another issue (website layout, pricing issue, audience target, etc.).
- Know who you want to reach.
- Build a database.
- Offer a great product.
- Tell a good story through your social media channels. Show up consistently and share authentic photos and videos that reflect your brand's personality. Stay true to your message, consistently post and engage with your audience. Over time, this steady effort will build more robust, meaningful connections with your followers. ▶

Email is far from dead and might be your best marketing tool.



Keep innovating and having fun. It can be tempting to get stuck in the efficient way you've developed; push yourself to continue to expand the box.



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship

**Program**

(Contributions from Megan Bellows at Mission Springs, Al Weinberg at Carolina Creek, Marcus McCormick at Camp Caudle, Brett Boes at Grace Adventures and Thomas Callen at Longview Camps and Retreats)

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Barna and Pew research
- Brainstorming and collaborating with others
- Utilize exit interviews with summer staff to help generate some questions or issues you want to address through programming next year.
- ChatGPT to help formulate discussion questions or icebreaker ideas
- Canva Dream Lab
- Google Drive and calendars (and learning how to use them well)
- One staff member who is the master scheduler, regardless of the event
- YouTube to learn and DIY
- Duct tape

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Calendly, Doodle or Microsoft Bookings to schedule interviews
- Designing stage pieces and theme decor that can be repurposed
- A magic closet that is organized but contains lots of random program items and supplies for last-minute games or ideas
- Grab-and-go teambuilding bags built for regular activities
- Googling coupon codes before buying anything
- Equipping more than one person to do a job well
- Establishing wholesale or dealer accounts with vendors
- Equipping people well on the front end with training so it pays off in the long run

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- If a camper is struggling, open communication with a parent will set you and the family up for success. The first call a parent receives should not be the call that tells them their camper is being sent home.
- Keep it simple and clear. You don't necessarily need to be clever or elaborate with a theme.
- It's important to feed into your program staff so they remain fueled spiritually to get through the season.
- Pay attention to the rule of three. The first time through, just hold on and learn. The second time, make your adjustments. The third time, own the program or experience.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Actively pursue healthy rhythms and habits in your role.
- When planning a theme, start with what biblical truth you want campers to walk away with after camp. Coming up with the name for the theme should be the last step in the process.
- Integrate the theme into areas beyond Bible teaching to give it stickiness. Provide a take-home piece that reinforces what campers have learned.
- Listen to campers and discover what their needs are. Knowing this will help inform your ministry next summer.
- Leave time for campers to process what they're learning — don't overfill the week.
- Take real-time notes during program implementation. You won't remember as much as you think you will. Schedule a review meeting with relevant team members, and write down patterns, ideas and action steps for next time. You may even want to draft a revised schedule for the same event next year with your ideas. How you wrap up a program is just as important as how you prepare for it.
- Keep innovating and having fun. It can be tempting to get stuck in the efficient way you've developed; push yourself to continue to expand the box. ▶



**Legal/Risk Management**

(Contributions from Evan Liewer at Forest Home Christian Camps, Paul Sherrill at Young Life and Thomas Russell at the National Cybersecurity Center)

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Legal update webinars from Jon Ruybalid and CCCA
- CamperProtect training from MinistrySafe
- Hacking competitions can help audit your online security.
- Use an enterprise risk management (ERM) framework (see the article *Evaluating Risk: Preparing for the unexpected* in the May/June 2021 issue of *InSite* magazine).

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Use software or services like Barracuda Networks to filter email content and prevent phishing scams.
- A cyber insurance policy can cover liabilities that arise from a data breach, like restoring computers or data, notifying customers whose information was compromised and more.
- Cybersecurity training should be provided to everyone who touches a computer within your organization.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- It's impossible to make your camp or conference center 100% safe, but you should do everything possible to make it safer.
- Protecting online content and data is as vital as protecting property. Ensure there are backups and that strong passwords are used across the organization.
- Anyone who drives a golf cart or other vehicle on your property should receive operational training and sign a user agreement acknowledging the rules they agree to follow.
- Mitigation (fire, flood, etc.) is worth the time and money to help prepare your property to withstand natural disasters.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Share a safety tip at every team meeting so there are fresh reminders regularly.
- Retrain throughout the season — especially your summer staff.
- Document training dates and who participated. ▶

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Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship



## Resource/Fund Development

(Contributions from Nancy Nelson at Warm Beach Camp and Conference Center, Ann Higgins at Christian Camps and Conferences, Inc. and Kayla Magnuson at Grace Adventures Ministries)

### Top tool or resource that makes your job easier

- Good task-management software helps you stay organized when you're working on newsletters, appeal letters, event planning and sending receipts and board updates simultaneously. It also allows for a collaborative way to share information and documentation with your team without digging through hundreds of emails. Explore platforms like Basecamp, Trello and ClickUp.
- Bring something that reminds them of camp when meeting with a donor. I bring a couple of freshly baked cinnamon rolls to thank them and update them on what's happening at camp. Since starting this years ago, I've never had trouble getting an appointment with a donor! Any small, inexpensive gift will do, like several cookies baked at camp or a couple of notecards with pictures of camp scenes for them to use, etc.
- A dedicated donor management system helps us organize and connect donor information and communicate more directly and effectively with them. If that's not an option, make sure to have a reliable database with all your donors that is kept up to date.
- Mailchimp for sending e-newsletters and campaign updates
- The AFP (Association of Fundraising Professionals) for classes, articles and a forum to get information on vendors and best practices

### Top money- or time-saving hacks

- Canva is great for making quick postcards to send as thank-you notes. They'll even print them for you.
- Send digital newsletters and appeal letters, specifically for new donor acquisition, instead of printed documents. This has saved us significant money in printing and postage.

## What I wish I knew when I started this role

- The six most important words in development are: THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! Gratitude provides the bonding between the giver and the receiver.
- Ask God to provide a mentor to get you to the next level.
- Learn to unlace your own heart and be vulnerable. This gives the donor permission to unlace their heart, creating a sacred space between the two of you where the Spirit can work. Consider reading the books *Unlacing the Heart* by Henry B. Freeman and *How to Know a Person* by David Brooks.
- Maintain documentation right after meeting with or calling donors. If you wait, you forget important details about your meeting.
- Go into every call or meeting expecting a good outcome. That doesn't necessarily mean a significant gift; it may mean you've strengthened the relationship and learned more about someone who cares deeply about your organization. Either of those is great!
- Learn how to listen well and ask good questions about what motivates the donor to give to your camp and conference center.
- Segment, segment, segment. You cannot expect the best return if you send the same communication to major donors, entry-level donors, lapsed donors and program participants. A shotgun approach may take less time, but by curating specific strategies and messages for each category, you can more effectively tell the story in a way that meets that donor at their point of interest and engagement.

### Top tips for someone else in this role

- Realize that development is all about relationships.
- Discover the importance of prayer in development work. Put together a group of intercessors who can pray for the needs of the camp.
- Make a list of your top 50 to 100 donors and schedule a time to call them to introduce yourself and get acquainted.
- Use the CCCA Resource Library to find articles on development topics.
- Attend webinars offered through CCCA or Mission Increase.
- Communicate the impact. Don't just share about equipment that was purchased or buildings that were constructed because of a gift. Share stories of how those things are being used to impact kids, adults and families. ▶



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

Make a list of your top 50 to 100 donors and schedule a time to call them to introduce yourself and get acquainted.



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship



Photo courtesy of Word of Life Fellowship





**Site/Facilities**

(Contributions from Tim Matz at Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camps, Jason Wilcox at Sky Ranch Christian Camps and Tim Weaver at Conquest Camp)

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Asana (which is especially helpful for creating reminders for recurring or annual tasks)
- Google Docs/Sheets for tracking work orders
- The book *Getting Things Done* by David Allen
- Microsoft 365 tools, specifically Loop, SharePoint, Lists and Power Automate

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- Scannable QR code in guest rooms and spaces that allow guests or staff to submit items for work orders (via a Google form that can notify your maintenance team when submitted)
- Maintenance request forms available around the property (especially if camp staff are discouraged from using their phone)
- Tap into volunteer groups such as SOWERS, Hard Hats for Christ or RVers for Christ.
- Use Microsoft Power Automate to send templated emails and Teams notifications.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- Volunteers are a key part of our maintenance team to help with larger projects that can't be done with just our camp's staff.
- Some corporations encourage their staff to volunteer for 501c3 organizations, so look for those potential partnerships in your area and get connected.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Do daily/weekly inspections to create work orders, then categorize them as safety, program/functionality or aesthetic issues.
- Be prepared and organized for workdays when volunteers are coming on-site. Have tasks, tools and other things ready to make your volunteers comfortable and happy when working with you.
- Make sure your volunteers are thanked regularly. Introduce them to staff and donors. Highlight their work.
- Listen and have a heart to understand others so you can be open to a deeper understanding of things.
- Compliance, regulations and standards are essential to camp ministry, but you must not forget people in the process. ▶

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**Business Operations/Fiscal Management**

(Contributions from Russ Schultz at New Life Ranch and Stacie Saenz at Eagle Adventure Camps)

**Top tool or resource that makes your job easier**

- Google Workspace: leverage the tools, especially since it's free for nonprofits.
- Volunteers. People *want* to serve, so make it easy and enjoyable for them to do so.
- Expensify software for credit card receipts

**Top money- or time-saving hacks**

- [www.techbargains.com](http://www.techbargains.com)
- Excel macro recorder (take an Excel course of any kind to improve your skills)
- Have great staff with lots of diverse skills and let them create.

**What I wish I knew when I started this role**

- God is in the people business, so get busy learning to serve, work with, lead, encourage, develop and inspire people.
- Lencioni's six critical questions: Why do we exist? How do we act? What do we do? How will we succeed? What is most important right now? Who must do what?
- Don't try to have all the answers.
- Identify all the areas where you need to comply with rules and regulations and do an audit of any noncompliant areas immediately.
- Use cost accounting, with programs as revenue centers.

**Top tips for someone else in this role**

- Understand your business model and how your ministry is sustainable.
- Understand your big cost centers (staff, facilities, maintenance, food, insurance, utilities, etc.).
- Learn who your key constituents are (campers, retreat guests, donors).
- Be consistent with monthly closes and monthly reports to your leadership as fast as you can, even if it's not perfect. ■

Identify all the areas where you need to comply with rules and regulations and do an audit of any noncompliant areas immediately.