

Simple

By Mike Carr

Yet

Efficient

Eight tips for streamlining camp operations

Consider putting a fridge near the salad bar to limit the number of trips to the kitchen.



There is value in sharing expertise. It helps save time, resources, money, and maybe even sweat.

In the camp industry we enjoy a collaborative spirit and do what we can to create an enjoyable experience for guests and staff members. For those directors looking to streamline camp operations, take a look below at some helpful suggestions. Some of these tips are easier to implement than others, but all of them come from camp directors who have worked in the industry for many years.



Limit the number of trips to the kitchen. The salad bar takes a lot of upkeep. With each serving, there are spills that need to be cleaned and food items that need to be refilled. Walking back and forth from the kitchen to the salad bar takes time, especially if more than one trip is required. Most salad bars have multiple selections, like lettuce, assorted chopped vegetables, croutons, cheeses, and several types of salad dressing, so keeping the bar stocked can take quite an effort. Consider putting a refrigerator near the salad bar to save valuable time so staff workers can be free to help with other necessary tasks.



Plan to use the veggies on the salad bar. Adjusting menus to utilize already-purchased food is a terrific way to minimize waste. For example, serve a veggie scramble for breakfast or a stir fry for lunch on the final day of camp to use all of the leftover salad bar items.



Take time to communicate. Ensuring that campers' needs are clear and understood is essential. Have staff members call each group two to four weeks prior to arrival to go over last-minute details. Each group has unique needs, and this sometimes takes special planning. Discuss the following:

- Final headcount
- Any accessibility needs for guests
- Use of meeting spaces (which buildings and when)
- Any presentation or other equipment the group would like the site to provide
- Swim times (during pool season)
- Menu selections for each meal
- Special dietary restrictions or requests
- Any special occasions (i.e., campers with birthdays, etc.)



Embrace technology. Use technology to streamline the way information is collected, consolidated, and presented. Programs like GoCanvas provide mobile apps and forms for data collection and sharing, as well as to allow staff members to compile information into easily presentable documents for everything from safety trainings and incident reports to financial documents and routine inspections. This creates consistency, which leaves little room for misinterpretation.

It is also invaluable to have an online system set up so staff members can see pertinent information for upcoming camp reservations. This means—with a few clicks—having access to the group leader's email, phone number, name, dates, and times without needing a traditional paper calendar, Rolodex, spreadsheet, or Yellow Pages. Another benefit of being online is information is at everyone's fingertips and stays current.

Putting a toaster in the dining hall labeled for gluten-free bread only and placing a microwave near the coffee bar are small conveniences for guests that also save staff members time.



TIP 5

Make marketing easy. Marketing and promoting camp are essential to fill all the beds. Creating a simple plan with overall dates and a timeline of when to promote and how to promote with clear calls to action will take the pressure off trying to fill camps at the last minute. Take advantage of low-cost or free social-media promotion by posting engaging photos and linking to registration information. Here are some social-media recommendations:

- Before campers leave, remind them to tag your camp in any social-media posts.
- Ask campers to share posts and invite their friends and family back next year.
- Create a free Facebook Event, share it to your page, and continue to promote it until registration closes.

TIP 6

Enhance food service. Most camp owners and operators know that guests want healthy and tasty food, yet too often camps serve the same food year after year. Updating meals to meet current dietary trends is a wonderful way to stand out and make guests happy.

- For keto and paleo guests, consider adding fat bombs, which are easy-to-make high-energy protein snacks, and other high-protein options, like bacon-wrapped veggies.
- For vegans and vegetarians, break out of the tofu habit and start adding new recipes with beans and leafy greens, which offer assorted flavors and alternative protein sources.
- For gluten-free campers, offer Monte Cristos on gluten-free bread or rice bowls with chicken and vegetables. Try adding gluten-free graham crackers to make more dessert options or campfire s'mores.
- Put a toaster in the dining hall labeled for gluten-free bread only. While you're at it, place a microwave near the coffee bar that is accessible to guests, so they can warm their own food and drinks. This is convenient and saves staff members from having to warm food for guests.
- Consider adding a table in the dining hall filled with food options for guests with special food requirements. Label everything and even post ingredients so guests can read what is being served. Consider posting people's names next to an item; for example, "Bob's gluten-free vegetarian sandwich."

TIP 7

Take a walk with fresh eyes. Most people become accustomed to clutter in a corner, or cleaning supplies sitting in plain view. Once a year, walk through camp with someone who has not been there before and ask for honest opinions on what is seen and experienced with "fresh eyes." Ask the person to find 10 things that need to be fixed or enhanced. Then do your best to make those changes.

Ask the "fresh eyes" guest to consider looking for the following:

- Is there enough privacy in shared bathrooms, or do more curtains need to be installed?
- Is there ample deck seating that is comfortable and appealing?
- How are the recreation fields? Do the lawns have divots? Do the nets need patching?
- Do volleyball courts with sand need more sand added annually?
- How is the condition of paint, trim, flooring, doors, bathrooms, interiors, and exteriors?
- Are the beds comfortable?



Demonstrate customer appreciation. Consumers have plenty of options, including which camp to attend. Letting guests know you appreciate them helps ensure customer loyalty. Here are a few ways to reach out to campers:

- Send the group contact a personalized note a week after the visit, thanking that person for choosing the camp.
- Add guests to a holiday-card list and send via email or snail mail, expressing your hope to see them again next year.
- Consider hosting a spring or fall customer-appreciation picnic to get people together and to remind them about the next camp season. **CB**

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