How to Get a Job in Christian Camping

by Rebecca Cowan Johnson & Robert Frembling

Do you desire a life of intense and meaningful contact with a wide variety of people in close association with the natural environment? Do you want an opportunity to evangelize and disciple that is unparalleled anywhere else in our society? If so, then Christian camping is the place for you!

Make sure you have the right spiritual gifts.

In the area of spiritual gifts, it seems that those most commonly found among camping people are administration, hospitality and faith. Because of the myriad of details one must manage at a camp or conference, administration is key. Hospitality is especially important because the camp or conference setting is the staff’s home, and the clientele are the guests. Faith is needed as there are many uncertainties in camping.

In addition, camping people need to be transparent. This allows others to readily sense their love and concern. Camping people smile easily and often but can also share sorrows. Perseverance, self-discipline and patience are also essential virtues.

Formal education is helpful.

A college degree is not always necessary to secure a job in Christian camping; however, certified training in one of the following areas is helpful: camping, environmental studies, Christian education, business or physical education.

Don't discount experience.

Additionally, never underestimate “tentmaking” skills. Administration and program jobs are not easy to come by, but camps and conferences are always looking for people with hands-on skills. Do you have professional experience in carpentry, accounting, plumbing, cooking, brick laying, housekeeping, computers and so forth? If so, be sure to include that on your résumé.

Follow your heart's desires.

After comparing industry needs with your skills and experience, analyze your personal and professional desires. What kind of lifestyle do you anticipate upon entry into the camping field? Factors such as salary, housing, fringe benefits, length of work week and daily hours need consideration.

You should decide whether you would like to be a generalist in a small camp or conference, or a specialist in a large one. If you are married or anticipate marriage, you'll want to consider what the camp or conference expects of your spouse. Is leadership willing to compensate the spouse for these expectations?

Remember that likes and desires are often given by God, so take them into consideration. Goals should be set and plans committed to the Lord for confirmation, remembering that confirmation often comes through people.

You'll need a basic understanding of positions and responsibilities.

Positions in organized camping fall into various categories, including the following: administration, programming, food service, facility management, business/operations, marketing and fund raising.

Opportunities within these areas vary according to the camp or conference size, location and program. Job descriptions and responsibilities, as well as titles, differ from place to place. It is difficult to provide specific information on job expectations and requirements since...
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In one location, three people may be filling the job description that one person fills in another setting. Similar positions in different camps or conferences may have dissimilar titles connoting different responsibilities.

For this reason, it is necessary, when seeking a position in Christian camping, to ask specific questions about the job description. The job title alone may be misleading.

In general, the camp or conference director is responsible for the overall supervision and operation of the facility. In larger places, there may be a number of people specifically responsible for the budget and finance, recruitment, registration, housing, and public relations.

All of these tasks are accomplished in the small camp by the director (and maybe the administrative assistant). This person should have an understanding of the camp or conference's philosophy and its implementation, and knowledge in administration, finance, food service, construction and maintenance, and programming. Supervisory as well as managerial skills are desirable.

However, anyone seeking a position in the field of camping must realize that, as with most fields, rarely does one begin at the director level.

In camping, multi-tasking is the norm.

The camp or conference construction and maintenance, and food service personnel, besides needing to possess skills and experiences that apply to their areas, need to be familiar with local, state and federal regulations as well as standards stated by camp and conference accrediting organizations. It is also important that these individuals understand the philosophy and ministry of camping.

Plumbing, construction, carpentry, electrical systems, water systems, painting, supplies, soil and gardening are all desirable skills for the construction and maintenance staff.

The food service director or head cook is often responsible for the entire operation of the kitchen, including supervision of staff, ordering, menu planning, assigning work load, preparing food, serving and cleaning up.

Program staff may be involved in the planning and evaluation of camp-sponsored retreats during the year and the important preparation of program, events and schedules for the summer. Knowledge in the areas of the needs, characteristics and capabilities of various age groups, as well as knowledge of the group process and interpersonal communication, is beneficial.

Some provide programs that require individuals with specialized qualifications. Outdoor education, sports and special-interest camps—such as music, drama, weight reduction, senior citizen, wilderness-adventure programs—are a few examples.

There are a number of sources for leads.

There are several ways you can learn about Christian camping positions, including CCCA's "Find a Job" Web page, written job announcements from camps and conferences, and word of mouth.

CCCA's "Find a Job" Web page is a unique computer-based job service that puts interested CCCA Christian camps and conferences in touch with people like you who are seeking positions. If you are interested in learning more about Christian camp or conference opportunities across the nation, this is the best place to start. For more information, see CCCA's Web site at www.ccca.org, or contact the national office (see back page).

At camping conventions, colleges and universities, and denominational offices, you may be able to obtain written job announcements detailing Christian camping employment opportunities. These generally include a description of responsibilities, compensation, a statement of experience and educational requirements, and an explanation of the particular camp or conference's philosophy of ministry. The history of the facility may also be included.

Word of mouth is also a key way to become aware of an open position. It is important to establish contacts in the right places. This can be done through volunteer...
or part-time involvement, or by somehow connecting with various networks. For instance:

**Church Denominations**
Many churches own and operate their own camps or conferences, hiring someone specifically for the purpose of planning and directing them.

**Missions**
Many different missions organizations, both foreign and domestic, need camp or conference staff.

**Public Service Agencies**
Such organizations as the YMCA, Pioneer Clubs, Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Salvation Army often hire people in the camping field (see back page for the contact information for these and other organizations).

**Individual Camps and Conferences**
Probably the best contact is with a camp or conference itself. Contact is made directly with the owner, director or a member of the board of directors. Information available on CCCAs Web site will prove helpful (see back page).

**Government/Tax-Supported Camps and Conferences**
Though not Christian in nature, you can gain helpful camping experience through involvement in government/tax-supported camps and conferences. Local community recreation agencies often schedule summer camps—and most commonly, day camps—in their programming. Additionally, some states offer special Youth Conservation Corps camp-type experiences, hiring trained personnel. For more information, contact your local city hall or the state department of parks, recreation, outdoor recreation, forestry and/or land management.

**Getting your foot in the door may depend on how well you present yourself on paper.**
The tools to use to apply to a camp or conference are cover letter, résumé and job application. The cover letter is used in conjunction with the résumé in the preliminary contact. The purpose is to highlight specific areas of interest in your background that uniquely qualify you for the position. This could also be used to point out a common acquaintance or situation that would put your application on a more personal basis with the people reviewing the applicants.

The résumé is a systematized presentation (in a page or two) of the applicant’s education and experience. It should be as broad in scope as possible, as well as very specific about responsibilities of each position, length of service and reasons for job change.

You should list all paid and volunteer work done since entering high school. If you are a college graduate or older, only list work done for the past 10 years. Each job situation should be listed with a beginning and termination date, a short description explaining specific responsibilities and the reasons for leaving that position. This process should also include positions of leadership, such as student body offices, Sunday school teaching, team captain in sports and so forth.

With a list of education and experience in camping compiled, you should share this list with parents and friends to see if they can help identify any overlooked areas.

The material gathered in an application is basically the same as in a résumé. The résumé is designed to convey the information you want to stress, and the application highlights areas to facilitate the hiring process.

If a camp or conference is interviewing a large number of people for a position, the application is a more useful tool because parallel information about applicants is more apparent. The résumé and application are used to sort the preliminary applicants. These will determine who will be invited to participate in a personal interview.

You shouldn’t include letters of recommendation in the application itself. This tends to invalidate the credibility of the recommendation. Instead, provide names and addresses where references can be contacted. It is helpful to supply names of well-known people, if they are in a position to honestly evaluate your abilities.

**Prepare thoroughly for your interview.**
Once you have been invited to interview, do your homework. First of all, find out about the camp or conference and its sponsoring organization, if there is one. Analyze the philosophy of ministry, statement of faith, history, profile of clientele, and type of program and facilities.

Next, provide résumés for each member of the interview panel prior to your interview. This eliminates wasted time on mechanical questions such as those concerning related experiences.

Finally, you should be certain, prior to the interview, that you can answer the following questions in an organized and thoughtful way:

1. What is your philosophy of Christian camping?
2. What is your philosophy of leadership or administration?
3. What do you perceive to be your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Why do you want to work in Christian camping?

In addition, you should also be able to give a personal Christian testimony.

During the interview, the camp or conference will strive to learn more about you, while giving information about its specific needs. Your goal is to present a complete and positive picture of yourself. It is also a time to find the answers to any questions that will assist in making a decision about whether or not to accept the position.

This important exchange of information is facilitated by sticking to the subject at hand. You should not sidetrack or evade questions.
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However, volunteer information that you consider to be important, even though it is not specifically solicited by interviewers.

You should be prepared to ask questions of the interview panel. When a question is unclear, you should not hesitate to ask for clarification and should take time to carefully consider the response. A good way to do this is to state, “Let me think about that for a moment.”

You should be relaxed but not forward. You should strive to be friendly but shouldn’t address the interviewer on a first-name basis unless requested to do so. Dress neatly, and if the interview is at the camp or conference, casual attire may be appropriate.

It is a good idea to practice answers to the philosophy questions while someone listens and watches. This will reveal any distracting mannerisms of speech or action. After the interview, send a thank-you note to the appropriate people, whether or not the interview is successful.

The ultimate goal for you and the camp or conference is to maximize potential. For you, this will be to find a position that will allow the usage and development of your skills, gifts and talents. For the camp or conference, this will be to fulfill its mission through dedicated and qualified personnel.

The following is more specific information concerning camping leads.

CCCC’s Web site, www.cccc.org, includes a complete list of its camp and conference members, helpful information about each and hyperlinked Web sites where available. The site lists business and local CCCA leadership contacts as well.

The “Find a Job” Web page at www.cccc.org is a computer-based job service that can quickly connect decision makers in personnel departments with you. If something interests you, follow the directions given to contact the camp or conference. Be sure to check back from time to time, as old postings are erased and new ones are added on a regular basis.

To get your name and qualifications in front of employment decision makers, consider posting your résumé online. If you’re looking for a seasonal position, register your particular skills and desired area of involvement free of charge at www.cccc.org. Interested camps and conference centers will contact you by e-mail. Please note that listings are cleared annually at the end of the summer season.

If you’re looking for a permanent full- or part-time position, you can enroll in CCCA’s Staff Link (Career) for a designated time segment and fee. For an additional charge, you may upload your personal résumé to the database where it can be accessed by members seeking full-time staff. Also, you may upload a picture of you and/or your family.

To keep on top of the Christian camping field, we strongly encourage you to subscribe to InSite magazine. You can do so online at www.cccc.org or by calling the national office of CCCA at (719) 260-9400.