

THE
Complete Guide
to
JCC DAY CAMP



JCC Association
of North America



Acknowledgments

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Introduction



Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement... get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. **Everything is phenomenal;** everything is incredible; never treat life casually.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

JCC day camps: leading past the tipping point

Jewish day camp has reached its tipping point. It should come as no surprise, given that there are at least 50 percent more children in Jewish day camps than in overnight camps, but until recently, day camp has been left out of the conversation.

With more than 135 camps, JCCs represent the largest network of Jewish day camps in North America, serving 65,000 campers and employing 12,000 staff in 2013 alone—reaching more children and young adults than any other single vehicle of Jewish youth engagement.

We have developed this day camp manual as a tool so that JCC Camps can lead the day camp field past the tipping point, building a network of camps that are unique, yet share a commitment to quality and excellence.

Background

More than two decades ago, *Moment* magazine published “Are Jewish Camps Educational Stepchildren?”¹ which served as a rallying cry for Jewish camp. Author Livia Bardin wrote:

“If the Jewish community is as worried as it claims to be about the future of Judaism in America, it should recognize that Jewish camping offers a practical, affordable, successful approach to Judaism for most American children. Jewish camps should emerge from their stepchild role and move to the forefront of Jewish priorities.”

The Foundation for Jewish Camp was created a few years later, followed by the 2001 study on the impact of camp, *Limmud by the Lake*². Camp was identified as one of the three critical components of Jewish identity formation, and Jewish overnight camp rose to the top of the Jewish philanthropic agenda, experiencing an unparalleled transformation and professionalization of the field.

But misconceptions surrounding Jewish day camp remained—that they did not require a similar level of professionalization, sophistication, time, or investment of resources. JCC Association, however, was conducting an exploratory study, “JCC Day Camps as Jewish Educational Experiences”³





to better understand the needs of the field and the role we should be playing to lead change. A 2010 board task force report, “A New Vision for JCC Day Camps,”⁴ laid out a blueprint providing a call to action for JCCs to redefine the place of day camp in their agencies, with a call for JCC Association to lead the way.

The next step was to formally conduct research to assess day camp outcomes. The landmark study, “The Jewish Learning Presence in JCC Day Camps,”⁵ confirmed the opportunities and current challenges in our camps. Most significantly, it validated what the task force report and initial study suggested—that JCC day camps have the potential to be game changers in creating an engaged and vibrant Jewish future.

The 2010 Day Camp study brought more attention to the field and new voices to the conversation. JCC Association’s first continental partner in day camp, The Harold Grinspoon Foundation, stepped

forward to create a joint day camp pilot, and today, nearly 20 camps (with more day camps being added) are engaged in their JCamp180 initiative. Local federations—most significantly UJA/Federation of New York, with 22 Jewish day camps under its auspices, began to explore ways to assist its agencies, adding innovative local initiatives, training and research.

Turning vision into action

The task force report “Creating a New Vision for JCC Day Camps”⁶ laid out a blueprint; the next step was to develop a strategy for implementation. With this in mind, JCC Association identified “Positioning Day Camp” as a top agency initiative in 2012, assembled a board task force to lead the work, and created the JCC Day Camp Initiative. As a movement we have already made significant strides in shifting both the perceptions and the realities of JCC Day Camps.

The day camp initiative has three goals:

1. To position JCC day camps in the Jewish communal conversation

How are we raising public awareness about the impact of Jewish day camp and the importance of JCC day camp as an important step in a child's Jewish journey?

Examples of accomplishments so far: Movement-wide JCC camp branding including a new JCC Camps website, www.jcccamps.org, social media presence, and a day camp video; local and continental articles and advertisements; collaborating with new partners including the Harold Grinspoon Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Camp.

2. To increase JCCs' investment in their day camp

How are we giving JCCs a vision of what healthy day camp investment looks like, supporting them as they move toward excellence, and proving to prospective partners that JCCs take Jewish day camp seriously?

Examples of accomplishments so far: Site visits and consultations for JCC lay and professional leadership to learn about best practices in staffing structures and job descriptions, development of camp committees, strategic planning, and healthy financial investment; new sessions on camping at JCC Biennial conventions, executive leadership seminars, and professional conferences.

3. To strengthen the depth and breadth of impact of each camp

How are we providing leadership, training, and tools to help each camp individually; and how are we connecting the camp professionals to each other to create a collaborative network of camps and professionals?

Examples of accomplishments so far: Initiated new director training seminar; created program initiatives to address priority needs of the field (Israel Up Close, Songleader Boot Camp Project, PJ Library Goes to Day Camp); started four regional hubs for JCC day and overnight camp directors; expanded in-person and virtual professional development opportunities for camp directors and leadership staff, increased site visits and consultations to evaluate camp operations; created the camp knowledge base on JCCA.me.



The imperative for change

Thanks in large part to the Day Camp Initiative, Jewish day camp now has a seat at the table. Although our 2010 report called day camp “the best kept secret on the Jewish communal landscape,” day camp’s potential impact is no longer in question. The challenge now is for JCCs to make the changes that will enable them to capitalize on their potential before they are pushed out of the increasingly competitive landscape. Many of our camps are not reaching their potential in impact or profitability, and JCCs are looking for tools to do it right.

Our most successful camps share two assets:

1. A strong, dedicated camp director with visionary and strategic leadership; and
2. A JCC that makes a serious investment in camp.

Successful camps emerge when JCC leadership commits time and resources into developing a quality Jewish day camp experience. These

exemplary JCC leaders understand the potential impact of day camp on Jewish engagement and the future of the JCC by inspiring, connecting and cultivating the next generation of JCC families.

"The Complete Guide to JCC Day Camp"

Designed for JCC executives and lay leaders, supervisors of camp directors and camp directors themselves, "The Complete Guide to JCC Day Camp" is your playbook for JCC day camp excellence. The most frequently asked questions from JCCs and camps informed the process and content. In addition to evaluating our most vibrant and successful JCC camps, we have drawn upon industry experts, academic research, and leaders in the for-profit and not-for-profit day and overnight camp sectors. We have looked at best practices in experiential Jewish education, child development, social work, camp administration, program design, leadership development, business administration, and marketing.

What does healthy investment look like?



It is not incumbent upon
you to finish the task, but
neither are you free to
absolve yourself from it.

Pirkei Avot 2:16

“The Jewish community is entitled to quality,” says Skip Vichness, past-president of the Foundation for Jewish Camp and owner of several private day and overnight camps. **“As a JCC, if you’re not offering a high-quality day camp, families will look elsewhere, and that mediocrity, deserved or not, will be their perception of your entire JCC. If you want to be known as an agency of excellence, start with day camp.”**

An investment with tremendous returns

JCCs represent the largest network of Jewish day camps, but do they represent the best in Jewish day camping? While models of excellence can be seen across North America, too often, JCCs view their day camps as “cash cows,” using only profitability, rather than a combination of profitability, retention, and quality as the primary measures of success. As a result, when comparing JCC day camps to the larger field of non-profit and private camps, JCCs invest the least in and take the most revenue out of their day camps.

This has a direct impact on success, and research confirms that camps that invest more in professional leadership, staffing and program yield a higher return on investment and see greater impact and profitability. JCC Benchmarking and camp census data suggests that investment in day camp staff salaries (including professional and summer staff) correlates to higher total camp revenue across every JCC peer group. JCC Benchmarking also confirms that the two most important factors used by parents in selecting a day camp are the quality of its program and the quality of its staff. When a JCC doesn’t reinvest a portion of camp revenue back into camp, it eventually leads to a stagnant model that compromises growth and quality.

Why should day camp matter to a JCC?

In addition to the obvious—social and emotional growth and Jewish identity development for campers and staff—day camp provides a JCC with the opportunity to generate substantially more revenue to support the overall sustainability of a JCC.

Additionally, day camp offers several unique opportunities for JCCs:

- Day campers go home each day, taking their camp experience with them, affording access to the entire family for family education and year-round family engagement.
- Day camp offers a low-barrier for entry for families otherwise unengaged in Jewish life, creating a pipeline of new families into the JCC





(because of this, membership should not be a requirement for day camp enrollment).

- Day camp provides a perfect vehicle for transitioning early childhood graduates into a next stage in their JCC relationship (a pipeline that is currently underutilized).
- Camp leads to positive emotional connections for campers, parents, and staff, which translate into a future pool of committed board members, donors, and lifelong members.
- JCCs connect with more teens and young adult staff through day camp than any other program or department, creating opportunities to engage a population underserved by JCCs and largely disconnected from Jewish communal life.
- JCC day camps are open to any member of a community, allowing for the creation of advocates and allies through the involvement of non-Jewish participants.

Key investment indicators

There are six key indicators that signify a JCC is serious about camp. These are not only indicators that we at JCC Association believe to be critical, but they are also the measures used by our partner organizations like the Harold Grinspoon Foundation to indicate if a JCC is a worthwhile partner for investment.

1. JCC executive and lay leadership who understand and value day camp

It's critical to understand that day camp is a core profit center for a JCC, that the word 'business' is not a dirty word, and that it is equally important to value camp for its mission impact. Can the executive staff and board leadership of a JCC speak the language of identity development and community building, and do they also understand the business of camp?

Recently on the day camp listserv, one assistant executive director responded to a day camp director's question with this statement, "Our goal is to keep their parents happy and keep their money... and hopefully strengthen their JCC connection." This perspective perpetuates the "camp as a cash cow" mentality, and does not reflect an understanding of the potential for impact.

Day camp is a very profitable industry, as evidenced by the lucrative private day camp world, but as with any business, profitability is a by-product of success, not the end goal. A JCC that values day camp will invest in professional development for its camp directors to stay current with trends and changes in the field and will designate the time and space to educate the board and professional staff about Jewish camping and the business of camp.

2. Professional year-round camp leadership

Regardless of the size of camp, if you want to be taken seriously, you need a dedicated, year-round professional leading the department (see page 19) who is viewed as an expert, a visionary, an educator, and community leader. As recently as 10 years ago, it was common for teachers or part-time administrators to be in the role of camp leader, or for the position to be one of many hats worn by the director. As the field has advanced and parent expectations have changed, that model of leadership is no longer acceptable in the day camp industry, unless there is a team of

year-round staff managing the fall, winter, and spring responsibilities of the position.

What is the caliber of the camp director?

Where is the position in the hierarchy of the agency? How much of their time is dedicated to camp year-round? These are the first three questions we hear from prospective partners and funding sources when assessing a JCC's commitment to camp. If outsiders are going to make an investment in your camp, they want to know you're just as invested as they are. They are investing in the leadership of the camp, not just the leadership of the JCC.

3. A board and committee structure that prioritizes the needs of camp

A JCC board of directors with little to no involvement in day camp creates a disconnect that perpetuates a lack of support and investment. Amy Sales, director of Brandeis University's Jewish educational research platform JData, says, "For a camp to be a priority in an agency, it needs a voice on the board." Here is a recommended model of success:

- A portion of the JCC board with a particular loyalty or relationship to the day camp (they are an alumnus, a child was on staff or is a camper).
- A camp committee, chaired by a JCC board member, that functions as a subset of the JCC board, acting as a board without fiduciary responsibility. This means there is a level of conversation and input that differentiates it from a parent advisory committee. They are not in the weeds, discussing rainy day programs or camper groupings, but they are discussing higher-level policy and strategy decisions, such as session structure, scholarship protocol, or inclusion policies.
- Leadership of and participation in the camp committee by senior-level JCC board members. This allows for the mentorship of

future and new board members, while providing advocacy at a high level for the camp.

- An annual fall presentation by the camp director and camp committee chairperson, including a review of the summer's camper statistics, financials, and goals for the next camp season.
- The camp committee serving as an entry point to JCC board engagement, with an eye out for next generation agency leadership.
- A thoughtful strategic planning process every 3-5 years, either as part of the agency's larger planning process or as its own camp planning process.
- For off-site camps, a JCC board meeting held annually at the camp facility so board members see camp in action.
- An annual invitation for board members to have an organized camp visit, led by the camp director.
- A camp chairperson who meets regularly with his or her professional partner, the camp director.
- The use of task forces led by committee members to explore specific issues or charges as needed. Strategic planning, medical oversight or an alumni task force are examples of successful JCC camp task forces that provide a pathway for community empowerment and engagement.

4. Technology that supports camp operations

Running a successful camp business requires the systems and infrastructure to support it. Camp administration has industry standards, and this includes a database management system that is designed specifically to meet the needs of camp. Systems that are designed for JCC membership management most often



are not designed with camp as a priority. Too many JCC camps are operating without camp management software, which compromises their ability to operate safely and efficiently. Even when a camp “double enters” data into a JCC system and a separate camp management system, the benefits far outweigh the costs compared to only operating from a non-camp system in terms of effective planning, tracking, retention and customer service.

5. Investment in facility and capital needs

Whether you operate a building-based or an off-site camp, there are core elements of caring for a camp facility that reflect healthy JCC investment.

These include:

- Camp-designated capital reserves and a system of assessing and prioritizing capital needs.
- Summer maintenance staffing to meet the increased demands of camp, with camp as their priority.
- Clean, safe, and working facilities.
- Camp-designated endowment funds and opportunities for giving to camp-specific funds.
- Programming that is special for camp, which often requires specific facility needs or enhancements (for example, a ropes course, a gaga pit or daily access to swimming).



JCC executive directors with successful building-based camps talk about “the whole building becoming camp.” To do this well, they recommend the following:

- Camp should feel different from the JCC during the rest of the year, with camp signage and artwork used throughout the building and in the hallways.
 - Camp should have priority on all spaces as a given, without directors having to fight for it.
 - If spaces are shared, rooms should be transformed into camp. Sometimes this requires creativity and investment into moveable walls, foldable tables, or extra equipment. Preschool rooms that cannot be touched or decorated do not reflect an understanding of the needs of camp.
- of how JCCs are effectively creating a culture of giving for their camp community:
 - Highlighting camp in the JCC’s annual campaign or creating a camp-specific annual campaign.
 - Offering opportunities for parents to contribute on their camp registration form to camper scholarships, a staff enrichment fund (instead of tipping), and/or a program development fund.
 - Creating opportunities to teach campers and staff about giving back, such as building bar/bat mitzvah projects for campers, creating a teen philanthropy program (a great model exists through the Jewish Teen Funders Network), or having an annual staff campaign for camper scholarships.
 - Developing alumni outreach and engagement efforts.

6. Creating a culture of giving for camp

As the Jewish communal landscape shifts and JCCs across North America increase their fundraising efforts, here are several examples

It all starts at the top: the camp director



Hillel said "If I am not
for myself, who will be for
me? And if I am only for
myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?"

Pirkei Avot 1:14

“What is clear is that quality on every level (camper care, staff, facilities...), including the quality and quantity of Jewish content, flows from the foundation of a well-managed camp. Without an experienced director who can articulate a clear vision and implement a quality program, the discussion about the quality and quantity of Jewish content becomes irrelevant.”⁷

– “Jewish Education and JCC Day Camps: Issues and Opportunities”

Starting at the top

According to Andrew Levy, a JCC executive director in Toronto, Ontario, without a strong, professional, trained camp director, their day camp – Centre Camp – could never have reached its current level of impact and profitability. “Our camp director is the most critical piece of our camp’s success,” says Levy.

Countless studies, reports, and management books speak about leadership as the key to organizational success. In the Jewish overnight camp world, this has been supported with data provided by camp director training initiatives such as JCC Association’s Lekhu Lakhem Fellowship and the Foundation for Jewish Camp’s Executive Leadership Institute. These programs validate what Centre Camp’s success shows – that there is a direct correlation between the leadership of the director and the quality of the camp.

More than just a summer role

As Jewish day camp professionalizes as a field, funders are looking to the leadership models of JCC camps to assess credibility. According to major philanthropic leaders in the Jewish world, JCCs with day camp directors who also directly manage other JCC departments (especially when their other responsibilities cut into the camp season) show a lack of real investment in camp. This sends a message that the JCC does not take camp seriously as either a core business or as a catalyst for Jewish identity formation. The perception that this is the norm in the JCC field has been a barrier to garnering support for day camp as a worthwhile investment.

A growing number of JCCs have increased staff time devoted to day camp with positive results both for the success of camp and the success of the JCC as a whole. The entire day camp field, not just that of JCCs, has shifted this way. Day camp has



been the fastest growing business of YMCAs, and in the Whelan study⁸, Mark Pooler, a YMCA day camp director trainer shared his perspective:

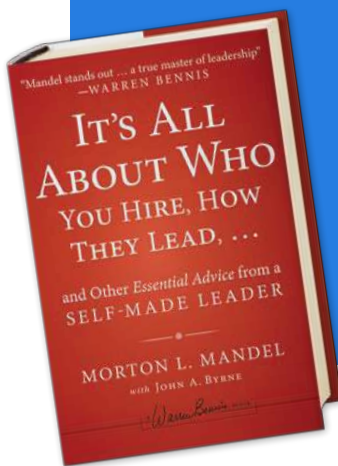
"In order to have a great YMCA day camp you will need to invest in it. The first move that we recommend is having year-round YMCA professional staff in the leadership position at your camp. Gone are the days where your YMCA can view day camp as a seasonal program and your child care director can run the camp in the summer. Child care and day camp are two different programs and should be led by two different YMCA professionals. Having the right 'camp person' in place is the single biggest factor in the success of a great day camp."

Day camp leadership matters

Morton L. Mandel, an honorary chair of JCC Association, has shaped the worlds of both business and philanthropy with his leadership and wisdom. A self-made billionaire, entrepreneur and philanthropist, Mort has influenced generations of Jewish communal professionals and institutions – especially JCCs. In his book, "It's All About Who You Hire, How They Lead...and Other Essential Advice from a Self-Made Leader,"⁹ Mort illustrates the importance of finding, recruiting, and cultivating "A" players for leadership roles, and validates his passion: "To invest in people with the values, ability and passion to change the world."

In "It's All About Who," he gives his five non-negotiable criteria he uses in hiring leaders:

1. Intellectual firepower
2. Values
3. Passion
4. Work ethic
5. Experience





The success of your day camp hinges on the person you hire to lead. This list of core competencies supplements Mort's Top Five list to create the ideal day camp director profile.

Core competencies of a JCC day camp director

- Ability to articulate a vision, generate buy-in, and implement the vision into action
- Ability to form warm relationships with multiple constituencies, including parents, campers, staff, lay leaders and funders
- An understanding of program design focused on social, emotional, and physical growth
- A track record of success as an agent of change
- Jewish literacy and a commitment to building Jewish community
- Experience in developing and managing a budget
- Experience leading and managing staff in a supervisory capacity
- Ability to motivate others and develop a team
- Resourcefulness and strategic thinking
- An understanding of the camp as a larger part of the JCC
- Strong written and verbal communication skills

Responsibilities of a day camp director by season

To illustrate the year-round responsibilities of a camp director, here are examples of where a camp director's time should be focused by season.

FALL



- Develop/review your vision for camp and create a strategy to actualize it
- Read staff and parent evaluations and follow up with any constructive feedback
- Read camper evaluations and note any programmatic or staffing suggestions
- Close down camp
- Follow-up with any summer issues or concerns
- Set goals for next summer, including recruitment targets
- Create camp budget
- Create recruitment plan for the year
- Analyze previous summer's retention for patterns
- Create retention plan for the year, including reunions, camper birthday cards, holiday events and mailings, and monthly touch points to returning campers
- Update applications and forms for campers and staff
- Set program priorities based on feedback
- Develop staffing plan
- Set calendar and goals for camp committee
- Report to the JCC board on the past summer and the next year's goals
- Walk the facility with key summer maintenance/facility staff to review site needs and develop a plan
- Meet with development staff to discuss needs, grant opportunities, capital campaigns, and scholarship funds
- Start application process for Israeli staff
- Reach out to JCC overnight camps to develop partner programs
- Create template for weekly registration tracking
- Hold regular planning meetings with other departments of the JCC to ensure cross-marketing and collaboration maximization

WINTER



- Reach out to returning staff, start hiring
- New staff recruitment including college fairs, websites, Hillel, and use of returning staff
- Staff interviews and contracting
- Camper recruitment including JCC informational meetings, home visits, camp fairs, community events and synagogue presentations
- Open registration (or open in fall, depending on local day camp landscape)
- Begin monthly calls to non-registered campers from the previous summer
- Bid out/renew all vendor contracts
- Book all special program events
- Book any outside specialty vendors or services
- Plan and book all trips, including admission tickets, reservations, and buses
- Bid out/renew all bus contracts and transportation needs
- Review or renew American Camp Association Accreditation (if not yet accredited, review standards annually)
- Order new camp gear for the summer and to use as giveaways at presentations
- Review security and safety procedures with outside consultation
- Weekly registration tracking with regular assessment of recruitment and retention strategies



- Camper recruitment including tours when possible
- Camper retention, including continuation of monthly calls to non-registered eligible returners and monthly touchpoints with campers
- Program planning and curriculum development
- Purchase equipment and supplies
- Start contracts of leadership staff to assist in pre-summer planning
- Summer staff interviewing and hiring
- Staff engagement and onboarding (pairing new staff with returners)
- Develop pre-camp supervisor training schedule and content
- Develop pre-camp staff training schedule and content
- New family interviews and orientations
- Create regular summer schedule of group activities and choices
- Plan special events
- Outreach to the Department of Health
- Walk the facility with key summer maintenance/facility staff to review site needs and develop plan
- Review camper forms and assess camper needs, with individual family meetings when necessary
- Update staff, parent and camper evaluations
- Create master summer calendar including program, special events, communication to families, guests, themes, etc.
- Create a management team structure that takes into account summer staffing realities
- Process all staff paperwork, including payroll forms, contracts, Internet policies, certifications, and driving forms



- Facilitate and lead supervisor training
- Facilitate and lead general staff training
- Be present, visible, and available at camp for campers and staff
- Be responsive to parent needs, with a system in place to return all calls and address issues promptly
- Directly supervise key leadership staff responsible for daily oversight of camp program, operations, staff, and campers
- Provide ongoing staff development, training, and communication throughout the summer
- Keep JCC leadership informed of all important camp issues, needs, and events
- Oversee ongoing camp maintenance and facility needs
- Oversee medical staff and camper health needs
- Be available for any visitors, including prospective families and board members
- Be present and available at all family nights and parent visit programs
- Monitor camp budget
- Identify camp parent prospects for volunteer engagement
- Coordinate with the JCC fiscal department in the preparation of camp staff paychecks



ASHQELON

JERUSALEM

BEERSHEVA

ARAD

DEAD
SEA

ISRAEL

Suzanne Berger
2009

NEGEV

Embracing the "J" in JCC



Educate the child according
to his way, so that even in
his old age, he will not turn
away from it.

Proverbs 22:6

For thousands of campers each summer, JCC day camp is their first experience linking “Jewish” and “fun.” Day camp is often where kids first learn that you can have a connection to being Jewish outside of a synagogue. All of a sudden being Jewish is exciting and special. It’s not their parents guiding them into a Hebrew school classroom; it’s their young and fun counselors showing them how “cool” it is to be cheering in Hebrew or lighting Shabbat candles. Camp is often the stepping stone upon which all other Jewish choices they make as they grow up will be based. As one JCC camp parent told us, “Day school is where my sons developed their Jewish head, but camp is where they developed their Jewish heart.”

It's the quality—not the quantity—that matters most

Art is Jewish? Nature’s Jewish? Sports are Jewish? For young children, this realization will forever change their relationship with being Jewish, making it a relevant part of their lives and their interests. But these connections are only made if there is thought and planning put into creating them.

The “J” can present challenges for camp leadership, both real and perceived, but it’s this challenge that provides the richest opportunities. In the struggle between universalism and particularism, JCC camps can be reluctant to jump into the conversation with two feet. The “J” is a differentiator, and when implemented thoughtfully, JCC camps around the country claim this is a selling point for them rather than an obstacle. We hear this from JCC camps all across the spectrum—all Jewish, barely Jewish, half-Jewish—the demographics of the campers seem almost irrelevant to the success of creating a Jewish environment. It is the JCC’s uniquely welcoming and diverse pluralistic community that can teach kids to value and respect differences; that differences should be celebrated, not feared; and that there’s no one “right” way to be Jewish. When we shy away from this central mission-based purpose of JCC camps, we miss the opportunity to fulfill Abraham Joshua Heschel’s vision of “teaching children a Judaism to remake the world.”

Camp directors, JCC directors and staff members widely assume that parents are resistant to Jewish content. However, the results of JCC Association’s 2010 Day Camp Study strongly suggest otherwise. Hardly any parents (2 percent) felt that their children’s camp experience at camp was “too Jewish,” while nearly 20 percent thought it was “not Jewish enough.” When



we do hear parents express concern about Jewish programming, their initial comments may be that they don't like it, but when we drill down, most often it's that the Jewish content is badly delivered, shallow, boring or "Jewish lite." When the Jewish content is a poorly-organized frontal Shabbat program or a designated "Jewish" hour that feels like school, camps will hear critical feedback. Parents want quality and they want engagement with meaning. Therefore, the conversation on Jewish content should be about deeper and more meaningful rather than just "more."

It comes from the top

As our 2010 Day Camp Study¹⁰ confirms, the "J" only happens effectively when it's coming from the camp director and staff. As with anything in camp, when the leadership is invested, it feels important and central, and when the leadership is not steering the conversation, it never fully permeates

the community, and it can feel outsourced, disjointed, or absent.

A camp director's own knowledge and experience has a direct impact on a camp's ability to create a rich and meaningful Jewish experience. Statistically, camps with higher levels of Jewish programming are those where the Jewish educational level of the director is higher, and where the camp staff includes dedicated Jewish educators and/or Israeli shlichim (emissaries).

In fact, the four most significant measures correlating to Jewish programming quality are:

- The Jewish educational level of the camp director
- The percent of Jewish staff
- The number of Jewish educators (including shlichim) on staff
- The use of JCC Association resources, such as TAG: Jewish Values through JCC Camping®¹¹

Jewish camp for non-Jews?

JCC day camps will often shy away from meaningful Jewish content out of a fear of excluding their non-Jewish campers and staff. JCC camps exist to serve their Jewish mission and the involvement of non-Jews does not change that. It is important to remember that parents of non-Jewish campers have consciously chosen to send their children to a Jewish camp. They understand that their child's growth is fostered by engaging with others, their opinions, and their life experiences. Thoughtful and well-executed Jewish content reflects on a depth of content camp-wide. Oftentimes it is specifically the added benefit of values-based programming that these parents find appealing.

If anything, we hear from parents that if a camp tries to hide or "water down" its Jewish content, they take that as an indicator of the depth and quality of the rest of camp. The camp comes off as "trying to be all things to all people," rather than being authentic and transparent, which parents appreciate and will lean toward. Non-Jewish campers and their families understand that Jewish programming will be part of their camp experience and they know that encountering different opinions, beliefs and practices promotes critical thinking and reflection. As a result, goals for non-Jewish campers would include promoting their spiritual growth through reflection on their own faith's traditions, as well as their becoming ambassadors for the Jewish people in their communities. JCCs and their camps are known for creating welcoming and open environments and when this atmosphere is carried into the camp's approach to Jewish programming, non-Jewish campers and parents enjoy and appreciate the Jewish environment and content of their JCC day camp.

The JCC Movement's Statement of Principles in action

Every JCC is unique, reflecting the values and culture of the community it serves. As a continental JCC movement, our Statement of Principles expresses our shared beliefs that bind us together.

These next few pages demonstrate ways to build a meaningful Jewish camp experience based on these principles.



PRINCIPLE

Creating a **Jewish identity** is a unique and individual life-long process.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Create entry points to Judaism through all camp activities, nurturing connections for campers where they're at and through their interests.
- Ensure that in addition to community-wide Jewish programming, there is time devoted to small group activities and reflection.
- Build a Camp365 program that links campers back to the JCC year-round to foster connections beyond the summer.

PRINCIPLE

Respecting and supporting **diverse Jewish opinions, beliefs, and practices** are essential for strong and enduring Jewish communities.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Create programming that involves learning about different Jewish communities around the world, such as art projects from Ethiopia or cooking foods from Israel.
- Provide panel discussions for older campers and staff that illustrate varying opinions on contemporary issues of Jewish life.
- Invite campers to share their families' Shabbat traditions as part of your camp's Shabbat celebration.
- Create programs about understanding different perspectives, listening skills, and respect.

PRINCIPLE

Interaction between diverse groups of Jews is critical for the well-being and future of the Jewish people.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Bring Israeli shlichim to your camp, and give them a time to program around the differentiated Jewish population of Israel.
- Organize a joint program with or field trip to visit another Jewish camp.
- Create programs to teach about stereotypes and open-mindedness.
- Invite educators and Rabbis from different denominations to come lead programming and staff learning sessions.

PRINCIPLE

Jewish living and learning sit at the heart of the JCC.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Build a fixed time into the camp schedule for Jewish programming.
- Create a system of merit badges, earned by exemplifying and embodying Jewish values.
- Use TAG resources to help specialists bring Jewish values into their activities throughout the day.
- Evaluate how you create Jewish time and space by using signage, symbols, and art. Staff can participate in this process during training and be in charge of maintaining and enhancing it throughout the summer.

PRINCIPLE

Israel is an eternal birthright of the Jewish people, linking us to our past and to Jews around the world today.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Develop a pen pal program with a camp or youth group in your partnership community in Israel.
- Create an Israel curriculum for your camp that infuses all areas of programming with Israel related themes and topics.
- Teach a Hebrew *milat hayom*—word of the day.
- Invite staff members or local college students who have been to Israel to talk about their experience or display their photos in a designated space.
- Give Israeli group names or names of famous Israeli heroes to each unit.

PRINCIPLE

Strong Jewish communities benefit, and benefit from, their larger communities.

Bringing it to life in camp

- Organize ongoing and meaningful service projects for campers with social service agencies near camp.
- Build mutually-beneficial partnerships with local businesses.
- Create a buddy system or start a pen pal program with a local home for seniors or a center for at-risk youth.
- Participate in local community events, especially if your camp is located in a different community than the JCC.



Connection to Israel

Israel engagement is recognized as a key factor in building Jewish identity, and fostering personal connections between your community members and Israelis is the best way to do this in camp. Having Israeli *shlichim* (emissaries) on staff is one of the most important ways JCC camps communicate this value. Hand-picked by the Jewish Agency for Israel from various streams of Israeli society, *shlichim* help bridge the gap between North American Jews and Israel, and increase Jewish awareness and pride within your camp community. Either as counselors or specialists, *shlichim* educate both campers and staff about Israel's culture, history, and people. Housed by committed local families, these young and enthusiastic Israelis can serve as ambassadors outside of camp hours to help engage and strengthen the community's relationship with Israel as a whole.

Values integration

When we say "Judaism is infused in everything we do at camp," what does that actually mean, and how does it happen? Values can provide a tangible way for us to integrate learning, and the following chart provides a tool to do this. You can use this template to evaluate and plan for a more intentional integration of Jewish values in your camp program.

Once your camp's values are established, they can be incorporated into camp in a number of ways. JCC Association resources like TAG provide ready-to-use activities and stories connecting issues of daily living through a Jewish lens.

Values integration tool

Here are some examples of values and how they are reflected throughout camp. Complete this chart for any value that is important to your camp community.

Value	Environment	Program	Policy	Staff/ Training
<i>Hachnassat Orchim</i> Welcoming Guests	Signs are put up ahead of time letting campers and staff know when a special guest will be visiting When you drive into camp or walk into central camp areas, there's a "welcome to camp" presence Signage is clear and friendly, not mean or negative ("don't walk here" or "running not allowed")	Every Monday starts with small group games and icebreakers to help new campers feel comfortable New staff are paired with returning staff prior to camp A spring orientation for parents involves counselor-run games for kids A joint program with another community group (camp, home for the aging) where each camper has a guest "buddy"	Protocol exists for when guests arrive at camp (a staff member/guest liaison who greets them, a welcome packet with relevant information, etc.) Campers and staff sing a welcome song when guests are at morning flag	A designated staff member's responsibilities include managing guests (calling to check-in beforehand, preparing their materials/space, greeting them, etc.) A session in staff orientation/staff handbook includes protocol concerning guests Training includes a session for non-Jewish staff to ask questions about Judaism and what it means to work in a Jewish camp Hebrew words are explained and taught Training on group dynamics helps counselors learn how to integrate new campers from week to week

<i>Tikkun Olam</i> Repairing the World	A recycling program where campers are involved in implementation Composting food waste and using the compost in the camp garden	Meaningful community service projects for every age Celebrating/ highlighting campers and staff doing community service outside of camp (in newsletters or on the website)	Reducing the use of paper plates and styrofoam Using recycled paper for brochures and other printed materials	Staff community service project in the spring Creating a staff green team to "champion" recycling and composting
<i>Kavod</i> Honor and Respect	Each group of campers helps clean an area of camp at the end of each day/week	Awards are given regularly that recognize campers who have shown <i>kavod</i> to other campers and staff through their actions	All campers sign a code of conduct All parents sign a parent code	Peer recognition system for staff to recognize each other's work at regular staff meetings Teaching staff how to be strong role models and how to help kids build positive and supportive relationships Go over staff tools to confront bullying
<i>Kehillah</i> Community	<i>How is community reflected in your camp environment?</i>	<i>What programs teach the value of community?</i>	<i>How do your camp policies reinforce that community is an important value?</i>	<i>How do you model the importance of this value for your staff?</i>
<i>B'tzelem Elohim</i> In the Image of God				
Add more of your camp's values				

Note: In order for the message to be clear, it is important to link these expressions of values back to their original sources (i.e. a permanent sign above the recycling bin that shows a quote including the words "tikkun olam.")

Jewish values from aleph to tav

The first step in creating a meaningful Jewish environment in camp is knowing who you are and what's important to you as an institution. Establishing a set of camp core values gives you the frame to build around, and helps you design content and curriculum in an intentional way, with everyone working in the same direction with a shared purpose.

Here are some great values and concepts to incorporate into your camp.

English	Transliteration	Hebrew
Respect	<i>Kavod</i>	כְּבוֹד
Peace in the home	<i>Shalom bayit</i>	שְׁלוֹם בֵּית
In God's image	<i>B'tzelem Elohim</i>	בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
Community	<i>Kehillah</i>	קְהִילָה
Guarding one's tongue	<i>Shmirat halashon</i>	שְׁמִירַת הַלָּשׁוֹן
Love your neighbor as yourself	<i>V'ahavta l'reicha kamocha</i>	וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ
Sabbath	<i>Shabbat</i>	שַׁבָּת
Righteousness	<i>Tzedakah</i>	צְדָקָה
Welcoming guests	<i>Hachnassat orchim</i>	הַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים
Repairing the world	<i>Tikkun olam</i>	תִּקּוּן עוֹלָם
Personal growth	<i>Tzmichah ishit</i>	צְמִיחָה אִישִׁית
Guardians/Keepers of the earth	<i>Shomrei ha-adamah</i>	שֹׁמְרֵי אֲדָמָה
The land of Israel	<i>Eretz Yisrael</i>	אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל
Hebrew	<i>Ivrit</i>	עִבְרִית
Intention	<i>Kavanah</i>	כוּוּנָה
Spirituality	<i>Ruchaniyut</i>	רוּחָנִיּוּת
The Jewish People	<i>K'lal Yisrael</i>	כָּלֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל
Jewish learning	<i>Talmud Torah</i>	תַּלְמוּד תּוֹרָה
Spirit	<i>Ruach</i>	רוּחַ
Celebration, Joy	<i>Simchah</i>	שִׂמְחָה
Kindness	<i>Chesed</i>	חֶסֶד
Guarding the body	<i>Shmirat haguf</i>	שְׁמִירַת הַגּוּף
Role Model	<i>Dugma</i>	דּוּגְמָא
Leadership	<i>Manhigut</i>	מְנִהִיגוּת
Hospitality (literally, a cheerful face)	<i>Sever panim yafot</i>	סֵבֵר פָּנִים יְפוֹת



How to embrace the "J" in camp

- Provide a basic “Judaism 101” session for camp staff as an overview of what’s Jewish about camp, and as an opportunity for them to ask questions. (Offer it as one of several Jewish learning electives during one hour of staff training to engage staff with varying levels of knowledge and interests.)
- Create a set of core values for camp that are shared and taught during staff training, including designating time for specialists to incorporate these values. Make sure they are visible around camp through signage and art.
- Have educators on staff or available during training to help staff think about ways to integrate values and Jewish learning.
- Don’t compartmentalize the “J” to one specific day or time only.
- Make sure Jewish programming is part of someone’s job description, and enlist staff to be part of a Jewish programming committee to spearhead Jewish content throughout the summer.
- Break down your Shabbat program and put together a camp staff committee to work with you during the year on re-inventing it, empowering staff to be Jewish role models, and creating opportunities for campers to be leading if they’re not already.
- Utilize the educational resources at JCC Association, including the TAG curriculum and specialized trainings and initiatives.
- Create personal connections with Israel by hiring Israeli camp staff and housing them with JCC families.
- Use music as a way to build *ruach* (spirit) and community. Integrate Jewish, Hebrew and secular songs.
- If Jewish literacy is not an area of confidence for a director, provide access to learning opportunities.
- Provide educational opportunities for summer staff, such as guest speakers at staff meetings talking about studying abroad or careers in Jewish communal service, weekly nights out to talk about current events in Israel, or Shabbat dinners.



Building your team: the importance of camp staff



Assume for yourself
a teacher, acquire for
yourself a friend.

Pirkei Avot 1:6

The truth behind the "camp magic"

This summer, approximately 12,000 young adults will work at a JCC day camp. These counselors and specialists—the camp staff—are the direct line of connection to the campers. They are the linchpin of a successful camp season. They are the reason campers will love or hate their activities or the bus ride, the reason they'll cheer or groan during singing and the reason they will or will not return the following summer. Great camp staff will be emulated, followed, and copied. With training and strong leadership, they will be the role models your camp parents dream of for their children. When nurtured and developed, they are a JCC's secret weapon to not only a successful camp, but to a vibrant whole JCC community.

The formula to a happy and high-performing staff

Disregard the needs of your camp staff and you will be left wondering why millennials are all so entitled and irresponsible, while other camps are turning away highly-qualified, engaged, enthusiastic staff for those same summer positions. Empower your staff, recognize their importance, care about them as individuals—and your bottom line will reap the benefit. If you look toward your camp staff line as a first place to make budget cuts, think twice. In fact, our research suggests that investment in day camp staff salaries correlates to higher total day camp revenue across every JCC peer group (related to salaries, not number of staff).

Here are four proven strategies to maximize the potential of your camp staff:

1. Create an environment of trust rather than fear.
2. Develop opportunities for genuine ownership.
3. Nurture a supportive staff team rather than managing a group of employees.
4. Set clear expectations and hold staff accountable.



Developing your team year-round

SUMMER



- Maintain clear and consistent communication with staff. Missing this is the number one reason we hear great staff say they don't want to return to camp – changing schedules, disorganized trips or bus lists, lack of ability to get supplies, or no information regarding food allergies for campers sets counselors up for frustration.
- Uphold clear performance expectations and a system for evaluation and feedback. This includes job descriptions, written evaluations, supervisors trained to evaluate and give feedback, and regular supervision meetings for all staff.
- Show that there's a priority from the camp leadership on relationship-building with staff, especially from the camp director.
- The camp director must be present around camp throughout the day and at any all-camp or large group events (flag, lunch, Shabbat). It is no longer considered acceptable practice for a director to be in their office for any significant portion of the day. Camp staff respond poorly to this kind of absent leadership.
- For JCCs with multiple camp sites, each site should have a director, who staff view as their leader. This enables the identity of the camp (and thereby your retention and revenue) to flourish.
- Maintain a system of peer-led and/or management-led staff recognition.
- Hold weekly staff meetings, used as a time to communicate logistics, build your team and educate. Never cancel staff meetings. These are often the only time your whole staff is together and it's a critical piece of keeping your staff invested through the summer and connected to your vision. Each meeting should include a reminder of that vision.

SUMMER



- Designate an individual or a team of staff dedicated to staff morale, with a budget dedicated to staff events, snacks, special gear and ongoing activities such as secret friends, Shabbat-o-Grams, staff running groups or basketball leagues, or weekly board game groups.
- Let rock star staff know you want them to return before the summer ends.
- Don't allow tipping. This is damaging to a camp staff for many reasons, but most significantly it is unethical at a community camp with campers receiving scholarships (as an alternative, provide an opportunity on your registration form for parents to donate to either a staff enrichment fund or a camper scholarship fund in their honor.)
- Connect staff to the JCC by offering complimentary summer memberships, and provide gym access to staff contracted by winter or spring break as an incentive to commit early.
- Require staff to complete mid-summer and end-of-summer written feedback on their camp experience and their suggestions for improvement.

FALL



- Process staff evaluations and identify those you do/don't want to return.
- Have post-summer follow-up with instructions for reapplying.
- Involve staff in online communication. A “why I loved working at camp this summer” series on the camp website or a weekly “staff share favorite summer moments” on Facebook are ways to do this.
- Involve staff in all camper recruitment and retention events, including reunions.
- Connect staff to work opportunities in the JCC, especially roles that would strengthen their camp skills and create opportunities for prospective campers and parents to connect with them.

WINTER



- Have in-person conversations with as many of your returning staff as possible. Ask their opinion. Challenge them to think critically about their performance.
- Visit college campuses where you have high numbers of camp staff and use these visits as recruitment events for new staff. Host a pizza party for your staff and encourage them to bring friends who may want to work at camp, or sponsor a Hillel “Camp Shabbat” where you have a table set up about working at camp. Ask returning staff to speak about why they love working at camp.
- Keep staff on any camp newsletter lists or JCC news email lists to keep camp and the JCC in their minds.
- Host fun staff events—they are more likely to want to return to camp if they feel like they're a part of a special community rather than thinking it's just a summer job.



- Touch-base with every summer staff person (new or returning) at least once a month from the day they're hired to the day camp starts.
- Connect new staff members to returning staff in a similar role so they have someone they can reach out to with questions other than the camp director. This also gives returning staff members a sense of ownership and models welcoming newcomers.
- Highlight staff in all communications with families and at in-person events. This shows staff that you value them and think their work is important. Include them on emails and newsletters so they can see your language in promoting their importance to parents.
- Create a staff training schedule that is fun and creative, with opportunities for staff to lead and with different voices heard. Make sure anyone leading a session has ample time to prepare and that there's a measure of quality control (they have to run through the session with the director first or with another member of the leadership staff).
- Identify the positive leaders on your staff and engage them in pre-summer planning responsibilities, whether it's filing, making schedules or organizing equipment. This helps create a buzz about camp for campers and staff, as these key leaders go home each night talking about camp.
- Convene an annual JCC all-staff meeting led by the executive director to get buy-in for camp from the entire JCC staff. (A divide between camp staff and year-round JCC staff can lead to disgruntled, frustrated staff on both sides.)

JCC camps are strengthening Jewish connections... especially for the staff!

Day camp is transformative for children, but is all that *ruach* (spirit) getting under the skin of the staff too? According to our 2010 JCC Day Camp Study¹², JCC day camp staff report being influenced positively by the Jewish program at camp and making Jewish friends. Close to two-thirds of day camp staff report learning about Shabbat, Israel and feeling more connected to being Jewish while at camp. Half of those polled report being more interested in visiting Israel, and a third report being more interested in learning about being Jewish as a result of their time on staff at camp. These results parallel those found for Jewish overnight camps, where educators have long argued that a camp's impact on Jewish growth may be even more significant for the staff than for the campers.





The importance of training

In surveys of JCC day camps across North America, camp staff report feeling unprepared to do their jobs and camp directors report feeling dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of training they can deliver with limited time and resources. This makes sense, given that compared to the larger field of day camp, JCC camps on average offer less than half the number of hours of training recommended for camp staff.

Regardless of the size of your camp, your pre-camp staff training should include a minimum of 30 hours, aiming for closer to the 40 hours considered to be the industry standard of excellence. Rather than just pulling out and brushing off the previous year's training schedule, always start by asking these questions:

- What are our goals for staff training?
- What do we want our staff to be able to do, think and say by the end of training?
- What did last year's staff struggle with and how are we making changes to our training to address those needs?
- How are we modeling for our staff what we'll expect them to do when campers arrive? (How we greet staff the first day, how much time we devote to building community, and how much planning goes into sessions.)

What is additionally important for camps to remember is that what can often be considered "extra" (icebreakers, bonding activities, games) is actually critical to staff performance over the summer.



Follow this checklist to ensure you're delivering a high-quality camp staff training within these five key areas:

Drinking the Kool-Aid

- Has the camp director articulated their vision for the summer, in a way that gets the staff motivated and excited to be there?
- Do staff understand the mission of the JCC and how camp fits into it?
- Do staff understand the importance of camp as a Jewish identity-building experience and their role in creating that?
- Are there opportunities for returning staff to lead portions of training, giving them the time and supervision to do well?
- Do we have staff buy-in for any changes for the summer? If not, know that the campers won't buy in either.
- Do we emphasize team-building as part of the schedule, not as an afterthought, making sure to get them laughing and playing as part of training?
- Does our training model the level of engagement we expect from staff with their campers? If a director stands in front of the room reading from a handbook without any preparation or thoughtfulness in delivery, assume those camp staff will come unprepared with activities lacking in creativity and excitement.
- Regardless of our camp size, do we have a layer of supervisory staff between the director and the counselors, and do we start their training earlier to teach them how to be supervisors?

Loving the team

- Do we focus on building an environment of trust rather than one of fear for our staff (give them the benefit of the doubt, don't publicly embarrass or call out staff, treat them like adults)?

Knowing camp and program

- Do staff understand how to get what they need from where? (Supplies, maintenance needs, medical supplies.)

- Have staff practiced the choreography of all-camp times, such as flag, camper drop-off, and Shabbat, so they know where to be and what to do?
- Is there time devoted to Jewish literacy development of staff? For example, if you celebrate Shabbat at camp, does everyone know why, what it is and what's important for campers to get out of it?
- Are we teaching all specialists how to lead camp activities, whether or not they're a professional teacher? (Taking into account informal education vs. formal, integration of Jewish values, structure of camp schedule, etc.)
- Have you done a run through of the first day?

Knowing kids

- Do we provide focused training on child development, specific to the age group they are working with?
- Are we teaching staff about group dynamics, including how to handle group conflict and how to facilitate friendships?
- Are counselors given appropriate information about their campers in a timely fashion? (Do they know about a severe nut allergy before lunch on the first day?)

- If staff will have a camper with special needs in their group or at their activity, are they trained in how to prepare the child (and their peers) for inclusion?

Safety

- Are we following all American Camp Association (ACA) standards regarding training, whether or not we're accredited?
- Do staff know what to do in any possible emergency situation?
- Do staff know what to do if they lose a camper?
- Are we continuing to train staff using weekly meeting times?
- Do staff know how to approach visitors, including parents?
- If your camp is at a JCC where campers interact with members, have the staff been trained on this?



Creating a safe space for kids to grow



If you are not a better person
tomorrow than you are today, what
need have you for a tomorrow?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Camp breeds successful adults

In recent years, emotional intelligence—even more than IQ (intelligence quotient)—has been touted as the key to someone’s success or the cause of their failure. Camp can provide the ideal space—and one of the only spaces in today’s world—for learning and practicing these skills. Research validates this, and according to a recent American Camp Association (ACA) study¹³, campers (equally in day and overnight camps):

- Become more confident and increase their self-esteem
- Develop more social skills that help them make friends
- Become more independent and show more leadership qualities
- Become more adventurous and willing to try new things
- Realize spiritual growth (in Jewish communal speak, this means Jewish identity development)

These youth development outcomes don't happen automatically once kids step off the bus. They are reliant on a camp's ability to create a safe space for camper growth. Camps that have designed their programs to increase opportunities for learning and skill development are finding greater success in retaining their current families and attracting new campers. Parents are looking for opportunities that will give their kids an edge, and a camp that nurtures a child's emotional and social growth is the best thing that could happen for an eight-year-old's future resume. Peg Smith, chief executive officer of the American Camp Association (ACA), recently expressed these benefits of summer camp, saying, “We all know where kids go to receive ‘academic’ equipment for life, but there is a special place each summer where they can go to receive critical social and emotional readiness equipment.”

While there had been a shift in the last decade away from social work as the field of choice for Jewish communal professionals, trends in camping reflect that these skills are needed in camp management now more than ever before. While campers have always stepped off the bus carrying a certain amount of “baggage,” today’s “normal” issues of divorce, bullying, poverty and learning difficulties are compounded by other significant challenges like ADHD, cyber-bullying, anxiety disorders, gender



identification issues, severe food allergies and spectrum disorders. How to create a community that addresses each individual child's needs without compromising the good of the larger group is a balancing act difficult for even the most skilled professional.

Given this reality, how can we be maximizing opportunities to create safe space and achieve these youth development outcomes?

- Are our daily schedule and group structure (size, co-ed v. single sex, staff ratio) intentionally designed to allow us to achieve our desired outcomes?
- Do we teach counselors how to coach kids on social skills in a respectful and appropriate way?
If, for example, a camper is known for walking up to a group and dominating conversation, is a counselor trained to privately approach the camper to suggest giving three other kids the chance to speak before sharing a second or third story?
- Do we provide staff with tools to understand and shift the social dynamics of their group?
(Tools like group sociograms, having a social worker on staff to help staff navigate difficult issues, and daily meetings of unit heads to proactively identify issues are examples.)
- Do we teach campers and staff the meaning of Jewish symbols and rituals observed in camp and make sure campers are actively engaged in practice, rather than watching someone else lead?
Is Shabbat planned and led by campers or are they just sitting watching adults leading it?
- Do we create opportunities for kids to set goals and accomplish them?
Ask campers on the first day about something they've never done before but want to try at camp—and then make sure it happens. Or help a child do something he was afraid of at the beginning of the session.
- Does our program allow for camper choice, to teach independence and increase opportunities for skill development?
This may require redesigning your daily schedule.
- Have we built in opportunities for appropriate risk-taking? Do we encourage campers to step outside of their comfort zones?
- Are we including parents in the process, by treating them as partners rather than adversaries?
 - With clear and proactive communication systems, allowing only trained staff speaking to parents.
 - By being responsive to their calls in a timeframe set out by camp (summer calls will be returned before the end of the camp day, for example.)
 - By having an initial intake meeting with every new camper and their parents.
 - By using language in marketing and communication that focuses more on benefits (learned how to make a new friend) than features (went to a water park!), in everything from brochure text to summer newsletters.

Inclusivity for all abilities

JCC camps are committed to providing Jewish camp experiences for all children, regardless of their needs. Our camps are known for their exceptional leadership in working with campers with special needs, and there are remarkable examples of camps that have broken boundaries and creatively designed opportunities to meet the needs of individual campers. As community camps, we have an obligation to do our best to accommodate every child, but there will be needs that you are not able to accommodate. Saying “yes” when you don’t have the infrastructure in place to support a child’s needs can be damaging and detrimental—to the child, to the relationship with the family, to that child’s counselors and to the other campers.

Here are some considerations:

- What is our intake process for all campers, and at what points do we include professionals beyond our camp leadership?
- How are the child’s needs supported during the year—both in and out of school?
- What level of staff support is the parent requesting and do you agree that this will be enough/too much for the camp environment?
- Who else would you want to speak with to assess the camper’s abilities?
- Does the child understand social cues? If not, what strategies do they currently utilize to help?
- What are the physical needs of the child, and can the camp facility support those needs? What accommodations could be made to make it work?
- What are the medical needs of the child, and can camp safely accommodate these needs?
- What are the psychological/emotional needs of the child? Can the camp structure safely provide for these needs as is or will accommodations need to be made?
- Will the child benefit from any portion of the camp day separated from the group?
- If a shadow or aide is required, does camp provide this or does the family?
- If camp covers these expenses, are there funders to support the expense or does it come out of the operating budget?
- Does camp have an expert on staff, or does the camp have access to JCC or other outside expertise regarding inclusion and campers with special needs?
- How do families of children with special needs know what you offer?
- How are all camp staff and campers trained to work with campers with special needs?
- What camp work experience is available for teens who age out of being a camper?



Growing your own leaders

Are you growing your own leaders from within your camp community? The best leaders can be home-grown, and camps that provide a clear path to leadership opportunities will retain campers longer and strengthen the quality of staff by instilling core values and culture early on. Leadership development shouldn't start when campers are already teens. Once a camper reaches their "counselor-in-training" or leadership program experience, their years as a camper have already given them the foundation to understand what's important to your community.

Consider how you communicate these ideas to campers. Do you:

- Have clearly articulated camp values, with recognition and awards built around these values? (Rather than allowing staff to create awards for "dirtiest camp feet" or "cutest clothes" are you instructing staff to focus on qualities, such as "always willing to help others" or "friendliest?")
- Recognize staff publicly who model camp's values, not the ones who are the loud comedians?
- Have a way to recognize campers and staff as leaders throughout the year, such as honoring bar and bat mitzvah projects of campers, newsletters featuring campers accomplishing significant achievements, or staff doing meaningful work in the community?
- Offer staff salary bonuses for staff who have a leadership experience outside of camp, such as serving as president of a youth group or fraternity, youth group advisor, or participating in a semester abroad program?
- Create opportunities for staff to take on increased responsibility as an honor? For example, the most engaged and enthusiastic staff are picked to be team captains for a big, all-camp program, or the role of greeting parents at drop-off is reserved for the staff with the best interpersonal skills.

The leadership ladder

Use this chart, or modify it to reflect your camper population, to design your leadership progression from camper through staff years:

	Camper Age			
	5–7	8–10	11–12	13–14
Stewardship of camp <i>Opportunity to care for the place—camp beautification projects, clearing trails, leaving it better for the next generation</i>				
Leading <i>Opportunity to be in charge, on stage, performing, in front of a large or small group, team leadership, older/younger camper buddies</i>				
Giving back <i>Community service projects in camp or in the larger community, like soup kitchens, gardens, painting, clothes drives, fundraisers</i>				
Communication skills <i>Conflict resolution in the bunk, solving problems one-on-one, comfort in front of others</i>				
Responsibilities <i>Cleaning the grounds for Shabbat, passing out snack, lining up for flag</i>				
Privileges <i>Extra choice period, front of bus, leading a special part of Shabbat</i>				



Strengthening your core: intentional program design



Look not at the
vessel, but rather
at what it contains.

Pirkei Avot 4:20

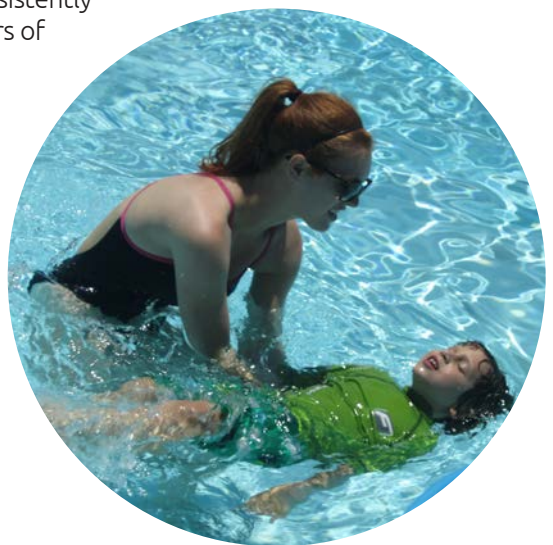
Creating a camp day with depth and purpose

A common misconception is that traditional camps are a thing of the past. There's a perception that specialty camps are the answer to bored kids and parents looking for other options. In actuality, our highest performing JCC day camps are traditional camps, showing that it's the program design and implementation, not the camp model, that's problematic. A thoughtful and well-designed traditional JCC day camp prioritizes individual growth, community-building and Jewish engagement in its program and policy design. When a camp program reflects a clear and intentional focus on each of these, camp will thrive.

Five essential elements of program design

1. Specialization

Traditional camp does not need to equal basic camp. Too often, activity offerings at traditional camps are too broad and generalized and only include art, sports, music and nature. The program relies heavily on special days, field trips and special events to keep things exciting, without enough depth to the program core. This perpetuates the concept of day camp being day care and encourages shorter session lengths, when the goal should be increased session length (which leads to higher retention and a more significant impact on JCC membership and engagement overall). Specialization is the difference between offering just "arts-and-crafts" or offering ceramics, jewelry-making, woodshop, painting and tie-dye. Specialization is also the opportunity for campers to be learning and developing new skills, which typically requires campers staying in one activity for multiple days. We hear consistently from parents that they are not looking for eight hours of intense basketball, but they want their child to have an opportunity to select basketball as a frequent activity, with skill development rather than just play as the focus when they're there. When their child is only attending basketball as a general pre-assigned group "sports" hour, their goals are not met. The opportunity for campers to specialize and be developing new skills is a key differentiator in camps where kids are bored and retention is low versus camps where kids are engaged and come back summer after summer.



2. Choice

Giving children opportunities to make their own choices teaches independence, grows self-esteem and confidence, and encourages responsibility. At camp, choice gives campers ownership over their day and allows them to specialize based on their own interests. Choice also enables healthy social development and minimizes camper conflicts, because campers are not with one preset group throughout the entire day. A camp program should provide for increased choice as campers age up, with the younger campers given fewer, more structured choices in their day, and older campers having an elective-based schedule with fewer group-selected or predetermined activities.

Bunk time or group-based time is a critical part of fulfilling JCC camp's goals of community-building and teaching how to be a part of a group, but developmentally as kids age, they should be empowered to be making their own choices to build their sense of self.

3. Intentionality

Intentionality is the act of creating an experience rather than just letting it happen. Camp can be a powerful environment for personal growth, but the idea of “camp magic” can be deceiving. The camp “magic” is actually the result of thoughtful, outcome-based program design, where everything has a purpose and can be connected back to the

mission and vision, starting from a place of asking “why?” Why do we do Shabbat? What do we want the campers to get out of that time? How do we want the attitudes, behaviors, skills and knowledge of campers to be different after a few weeks of participating in camp Shabbat? Every part of the camp day should be analyzed in this way, from morning flag, to lunch time, to bus departure, to swimming lessons. According to American Camp Association (ACA) research¹⁴, positive youth development is the outcome of challenging opportunities and supportive relationships. In other words, unless you’re intentionally designing camp to create these moments, they aren’t happening.

4. Aspirational Arcs

Just as a character arc in a movie shows how a character unfolds throughout the story, an aspirational arc in camp is the way a camper’s experience unfolds and the way their complete journey is created, from the beginning of a summer to an end and over multiple summers. What is a camper looking forward to? How will their experience build upon what they are doing now? What do they see ahead that’s exciting and different, with new challenges? Without aspirational arcs, a camp program will be monotonous and campers will lose interest very quickly. Here are two tools to help you develop your camp’s aspirational arcs.

From one year of camp to the next (complete for every transition in camp):

Transition in camp (i.e. from 3 rd to 4 th grade)	What's different about my regular day?	What's different about my space?	What's different about my special events/ field trips?	What's different about my privileges/ responsibilities?

In all activities, from the beginning of a week to the end:

Example: Archery

Camper age	What skills am I learning?	What am I working toward? What can I achieve?	How is my growth recognized?
5–6	How to hold a bow and arrow, how to shoot	Hitting the target	Campers who hit the target are honored at Friday's Shabbat celebration by getting called up in front of camp to receive a silver arrow (arrow wrapped in tin foil)
7–9			
10–12			

Points to consider when thinking about aspirational arcs:

- Just like being on stage in a play or scoring a goal on the field, how does every activity give campers an opportunity to showcase their new skills and talents?
- Is camp different enough from one year to the next for campers to feel like there's something to come back for that they haven't experienced yet?
- How are transitions introduced to campers? Parents? (Are parents of 7th graders informed of the process to become CITs and staff early on, so they understand their appropriate role? Are campers brought to see the shelter that will be their home base the following summer?)
- How are important transitions recognized and honored? (From one unit to the next, from camper to CIT, CIT to staff)

5. Content

Content is the meat of your camp program. It's among the most important, yet most neglected key differentiators between successful and unsuccessful camps. Without oversight of content, what actually happens when campers are at activities is left in the hands of that summer's specialist. Without attention to content from the camp leadership, the quality will suffer. The content will be repetitious from year to year, with 6-year-olds and 11-year-olds doing the same projects, and a camper coming for multiple weeks or summers doing the same things over and over. What measures of quality control are in place for your day camp program, and how do you design a program that's guided by the leadership of camp, but created with ownership and investment of the summer staff?

- Set up time in the spring to meet with specialists individually or as groups to allow them to begin planning earlier, and contract them with the

understanding that their salary includes pre-summer work.

- Include time during training and throughout the summer for specialists to be planning their activities, including support in how to integrate Jewish values and concepts into activities.
- Create a loose structure for each program area to give specialists a framework to follow and to avoid kids repeating projects every year.

Example: Israeli Culture

4–6 year olds	The land of Israel
7–9 year olds	The people and cultures of Israel
10–12 year olds	The heroes of Israel
13–14 year olds	The politics of Israel
C.I.T.s	My personal connection to Israel

- Develop ways of creating institutional knowledge
 - Create binders for each program area and unit in camp so that the supervisors have a resource when they start their job each summer. The supervisors are required to turn in the following at the end of the summer:

For program areas: All lesson plans, write ups of any special days, a letter to next year's supervisor that gives tips and suggestions for how to do the job well, and an inventory with a wish list of what they would suggest to run the program area well the following summer.

For unit heads: A letter to next year's supervisor that gives tips and suggestions for how to do the job well, write ups of any special days or programs, and any other camp-specific resources that would be appropriate to include.



So you want to start a specialty camp?

Here are some factors to consider:

- Is our traditional camp operating from a place of stability and strength? If not, specialty camps will be a short-term distraction rather than a long-term solution.
- Is our intention for this camp to solely exist to generate revenue, or is there also a mission-based purpose? If so, how is the program designed for this?
- Are we fostering community-building and creating Jewish touch points for the campers?
- Does it fit into what we already do? Does it align with our values? (If you promote confidence and self esteem, should you add a specialty girls camp focused on hair, makeup and shopping?)
- Will this specialty camp foster year-round JCC engagement of campers and families?
- Are we looking to retain specialty campers or viewing them as one-summer revenue? (Typically retention is much lower in specialty camp programs and these campers come for shorter sessions.)
- If we will be outsourcing the program, do we have measures in place for quality control?
- Is there interest from the community?
- If we're bringing in high-level instruction for specialty camps, are we giving traditional campers access to the program? (For example, if you bring in gymnastics coaches for a gymnastics camp, do the traditional campers have gymnastics led by these coaches as a choice at any point in their camp day?)



Creating a culture of loyalty and retention



Hillel teaches that you should not separate yourself from the community.

Pirkei Avot 2:4

“At Zappos, our belief is that if you get the culture right, most of the other stuff—like great customer service or building a great long-term brand or passionate employees and customers—will happen naturally on its own. Your culture is your brand, so how do you build and maintain the culture you want?”¹⁵

Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos

The importance of camp culture

Any conversation about camp marketing or recruitment starts with a look at your camp culture. As we’ve learned from Zappos and other exceptionally high-performing, successful companies, a strong and positive culture is a prerequisite to success. For Zappos, this culture is built around its 10 core values, which “are reflected in everything we do and every interaction we have.” (www.zappos.com). Values like “create fun and a little weirdness” and “build a positive team and family spirit” set the parameters for whom they hire, how they train and what sort of community they create. They understand that it all starts with happy employees, which translates directly to happy customers. Their philosophy couldn’t be truer than in a camp setting.

Walking the walk

If an online shoe store can do it, camps have it easy, right? After all, aren’t we values-based communities already? According to Hsieh, the first step to getting culture right is not just having core values, but using them as the guideposts of everything you do. When camp directors focus time and attention on developing a positive staff culture based around core values, it trickles down to the campers. Camp culture is critical and can be generally broken down into five core areas:¹⁶

1. Core values
2. Rituals and traditions
3. Signs and symbols
4. Communication and behavior
5. Leadership





Cultivating loyalty leads to retention

A positive culture instills loyalty, which translates into high retention of campers and staff, parents who become your best cheerleaders and salespeople and alumni who want to stay connected and can't wait to send their own children to your camp. Day camp directors who do this best say they create a community modeled on overnight camp, where the kids just happen to go home at the end of the day.

In our camp, do we...

- create a feeling of family, not just for our campers and staff, but also for our parents?
- focus on relationship-building and teach counselors how to do this?
- have special traditions and rituals?
- honor milestones (1st year camper patch, 3rd year backpack, etc.)?
- create rites of passage?
- maximize community-building opportunities, such as morning flag, lunch, and Shabbat?
- push staff to do everything over the top (costumes, goofy skits, signs leading up to big events)?
- create a "camp" space and environment, especially if you're based at a JCC?
- significantly mark beginnings and endings?
- celebrate and honor each other (recognition, awards, birthdays)?
- design a program with aspirational arcs (see page 66)?
- promote stewardship, empowerment and ownership, from the bottom up?
- offer increased opportunities for specialization and choice as campers age up?
- provide opportunities for older campers to lead younger campers?
- treat parents as partners rather than barriers?
- have excellent customer service?



When walking into a camp, within a few minutes you can get a sense of what the culture is like. Is staff happy and engaged, even when no one is watching? Do the director's interactions with campers and staff seem natural and warm or forced and uncomfortable? Is there a positive, upbeat vibe or can you hear counselors or older campers grumbling under their breath and rolling their eyes? Is staff gossiping around campers? Does everyone seem to be on the same team or is there an "us" vs. "them" mentality between staff and supervisors? These are a few of the signs of a damaged culture, which indicates a need to step back and think about core values and how they're taught and modeled from the top down.

Breaking down your retention

The stronger and more positive your camp culture, the higher your retention will be. It costs more to recruit a new camper than to retain a returner. As we know, one unhappy parent can damage both your ability to hold onto your current campers, and your ability to attract new families. Your retention is one of the most important ways to measure a summer's success. Understanding the picture created by your retention numbers is how you can improve your program and develop a targeted recruitment strategy.

Once registration opens for camp, a camp director should have a system in place to be tracking retention weekly, using this formula:

You had 300 campers last year

250 of those campers are eligible returners
(subtracting those who have aged out of camp)

200 eligible returners signed up for this year

$200/250 = .8$

Your retention is 80%

JCC day camps should strive for an 85% retention rate for campers entering 1st–4th grades.

After 4th grade, you can anticipate retention dropping slightly as campers look to other options and overnight camps, but it still should stay above 65 to 70 percent. This number is largely within your control and the economy or competition should not be acceptable reasons for low retention. The response, “their friends wanted to go somewhere else this summer,” can be changed to, “my friends say there’s no other camp we should be at than yours.”

In addition to tracking overall retention as part of a camp's weekly reporting of registration statistics, a camp director should also be regularly evaluating the previous summer's retention broken down into the following subsets:

Grade
Zip code
Counselor
School

Bus
Synagogue
Bunk group
Gender

The ability to track your numbers like this allows you understand the story of your summer and plan accordingly. Are you seeing slow registration from your returning 5th grade boys? Why? What was going on for them last summer? Who in the group was a leader, whose parents can you call to learn more? Have you noticed a dip from a particular school or synagogue? Dig a little deeper to understand why. Are you seeing that one particular counselor has high retention from their campers all summer? Make sure that's a staff member you're targeting to return. When monthly calls are made to all the campers from the previous summer who are not yet registered, the reasons for not returning should be recorded and tracked, rather than just leaving messages.

Knowing these answers allows you to identify issues, address them and plan strategically for recruiting new campers. If you notice you're low in 3rd grade girls, you'll want to look at how to strengthen their program in camp, and you'll also know that you should identify a positive parent of a 3rd grade girl (the kind of camper you wish you could clone) to engage on your camp committee or to host a parlor meeting. You may want to use photos of girls that age in your marketing materials, or post an article on Facebook about raising confident girls, to position your camp as having expertise with this population. There are lots of creative and inexpensive methods you can employ to target recruitment once you understand what you're recruiting for specifically, rather than wasting time and resources with a generic and non-specific recruitment plan.



Camp365

Retention is strengthened when campers and families feel connected to camp all year. JCC camps have the added value of being a part of a built-in year-round system of engagement through the JCC. We call this Camp365—creating opportunities for your camp families to stay connected to the camp community all year long. When this happens effectively, you'll not only successfully retain more of your campers, but you'll also be generating a buzz about camp for prospective families.

Year-round retention strategies

During camp	Right after camp	Throughout the school year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain positive and proactive parent engagement • Calendar a daily/weekly communication plan focused on outcomes, not activities (a newsletter that shares individual stories of growth rather than just reporting on field trips) • Post photos online regularly • Utilize the take-home access to families for education • Train staff to cross-market with other JCC programs • Train staff to use language selling next summer at camp • Send out mid-summer surveys of parents, staff and campers with follow-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-of-summer surveys of parents, staff and campers with follow up • Identify key areas to address for change based on feedback received • Invite parents to be ambassadors, hosts of parlor meetings, committee members • Send a "thanks for being with us!" postcard at the end of each session • Send an end-of-summer mailing with how to register for next summer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with campers and/or parents if there were any concerns from the previous summer • Have monthly touch points with campers, with at least half in person (add new campers as they register) • Plan reunions when camp staff will be available to attend • Create social media conversations for parents • Promote camp gear days and photo send-ins • Send camper and staff birthday postcards • Send holiday mailings with family resources • Develop agency-wide support and cross-selling from other JCC programs • Put a countdown to camp online • Post camp videos • Connect happy returning families with new families • Target marketing for JCC events to camp families otherwise unengaged • Call first-time campers in the week before camp starts • Be present at any local events with kids, representing camp

Want to “camplify” your after school program? Here's how:

- Have “choice” periods where kids can select what they want to do.
- Incentivize camp staff to work as part of a JCC year-round team (well-liked camp staff are pied pipers in a JCC).
- Have an ongoing *Maccabiah* throughout the year with teams and weekly fun competitions.
- Have an Israeli culture center or station and create a space that connects kids to Israel through Hebrew posters, Israeli snacks and music and conversational Hebrew lessons.
- Bring your camp’s Shabbat rituals into your Friday afternoon after school program. Invite parents, members and JCC staff to join.
- Make use of communal times to build community, like arrival, departure and snack time. Use music, dance, skits and cheers to bring “campiness” to these times to build a sense of community for the kids.
- Create as many programmatic tie-ins as possible by offering whatever is most popular at camp in after school programming. If gaga is the best thing ever at camp, make sure there’s an accessible gaga pit for the after school kids with time designated for play.





Strategic marketing and recruitment



One who acquires a
good name, acquired
it for himself.

Pirkei Avot 2:7

“Marketing is the name we use to describe the promise a company makes, the story it tells and the authentic way it delivers on that promise.”¹⁷

—Seth Godin, marketing guru and author

Telling your story

Your success in marketing and recruiting new families stems from two questions:

1. What’s your story?
2. How is it shared?

What's your story?

You are never just selling one session at camp. Your ability to tell your camp story hinges on articulating passionately and concisely what makes your camp unique and how a child will grow as a result of his or her time with you—not just over one summer, but over several years. You’re selling belonging to a tribe; a culture and a community so special and important that an outsider cannot help but want to be a part of it. Those two elements—individual growth and meaningful Jewish community—should be equally represented in your story.

Many parents have their own camp experiences to draw from and connecting to parents emotionally will invite them into the conversation in a personal way. Ideally in presentations this is coming from the camp director, as a parent’s trust in the camp director will lead them to be more likely to sign up for camp. While campers want to see and hear about features (the cool new gaga pit, a giant climbing tower), parents want to know about benefits (learning how to make friends, building confidence, trying new things, gaining resilience).

Your story should incorporate both of these important elements, with photos that show both features (kids jumping off a water trampoline) and benefits (a counselor putting a life jacket on a camper or a camper’s face showing pride and achievement at the moment she reaches the top of a climbing tower). How is your camp going to lead their child to become a confident, happy, successful adult who wants to be engaged and caring community member?





How is your story shared?

Ideally, you've created a camp experience of excellence that will largely sell itself, as the number one driver of day camp enrollment is word-of-mouth. Therefore, it's not only about how well you tell your story that draws in new families, but it's also about how well your story aligns with the reality of camp and how well it matches the story told in the locker rooms and on Facebook by your current and past families and camp staff. For example, you can tell a room full of prospective families about how "the camp day starts with the awesome bus ride, which is a fun and exciting half hour of games, singing and cheering!" If in actuality the bus ride is boring, staff are disengaged and kids sit with earphones on, this disconnect between

marketing and reality will break trust and lead families quickly toward another camp.

While we know how important it is to be recruiting new families, as a field, JCC camps are not telling their stories well. A 2010 marketing study¹⁸ found that **JCC day camps are lagging behind private day camps in branding, web presence, social media presence and messaging.** While the study specifically compared New York-area camps, additional research found that the findings reflect the reality across the entire field. As the 2010 study illustrated, if a parent is comparing camps online, as most parents do today, they won't even consider calling the JCC camp if they feel there is a lack of investment reflected in a poor online presence. To parents, a robust website conveys expertise

(“this is what we do and we do it well”) while one stagnant inner page of a JCC’s website conveys lack of priority and professionalism toward camp.

Building a brand

It wasn’t too long ago that you were in control of your brand. Before social media, word-of-mouth impacted your brand, but it was largely dictated by the messages you put out in your advertising and brochures. That’s no longer the reality in marketing and now brand management is a whole new conversation. When anyone can post a negative Yelp review about your camp, how you’re proactively building your brand becomes even more important. Building your brand is about incorporating your story and values into everything you do. Every postcard, T-shirt, drop-off at the bus, letter, magnet, phone call, tour—every single interaction a family has with camp should be representing this consistent and authentic story.

Here are some factors to consider when building your brand:

- Clearly articulate your core values and what makes camp unique.
- Make sure the voice and tone of all camp communication matches the qualities you want your camp known for. If kindness, compassion and respect are important values in camp, make sure those values are reflected in everything—from notices about field trips to calls with the JCC front desk staff.
- Have one camp logo that looks and feels different than the JCC logo (there are great examples of camp logos that graphically connect to JCC logos).
- Anyone who speaks with parents should be trained in how to answer questions, share information and avoid conflict. Negative interactions with untrained camp staff can lead to damaged camp reputations.

- What camp name do you put on a T-shirt? To build loyalty and brand identity, camp needs one name. Having 20 different specialty offerings may be best for your agency programmatically and financially, but they don’t each need their own camp name. They can be specialty tracks of your one camp. Multiple camp names confuse families and diminish opportunities to build brand loyalty.
- The camp website, brochure and video should all be consistent in messaging—in both language and images. Anyone posting photos, tweeting or posting Facebook posts on behalf of camp should be trained to represent your story. Every photo that’s posted online should reinforce that.
- Make sure your policies reflect your values. If building community is an important camp value, think very carefully before offering a la carte days, which make building community very challenging.
- Be known as amazing communicators with awesome customer service.
- Utilize your camp brand year-round to build Camp365.

Turning happy customers into your best sales team

Happy campers, staff and parents are our best recruiters of new families. New campers come to camp based on what they hear from their friends. How are you using your returning families as your sales team?

- Put camp into their conversation on a regular basis (invest in camp gear that people will want to wear beyond the gym. For a few more dollars you can create walking billboards for your JCC camp).
- Find the positive influencers and connectors who other parents listen to and ask them to host informational meetings for their friends.
- Build a “parent ambassador” program and incentivize these parents to grow their

neighborhood/school/synagogue presence in your camp. Develop these parents as passionate advocates by engaging them in monthly group “parent ambassador” calls, clearly outlining expectations and goals and making them feel like part of the camp team.

- Create a refer-a-friend program with a financial incentive for parents and a really cool special gift for the camper.
- Encourage bringing prospective friends to events.
- Hire your best cheerleaders to work at camp. Parents can make great day camp staff, especially if they have kids with lots of friends.
- Think about if they would make a good committee member or future JCC board member. While not all parents are ideal for lay leadership roles, this is an important way to create advocates for camp, both within the JCC and in the larger community.
- Invite them to host an Israeli staff person or volunteer for camp in another way. A parent who chairs a new camper night will be talking about camp to their friends for weeks.

Reaching families beyond your network

Word-of-mouth and the internet are the two primary ways parents choose camps. Beyond that, there are several key platforms where JCC camps have found success in reaching new markets.

Synagogues

- Send photos of campers from that synagogue for use in member communication.
- Invite all rabbis, religious school directors and youth directors to visit or to have a special guest role in a week’s Shabbat.

- Camp directors should build relationships with rabbis and educational leaders. If there’s a question about Jewish content or practice, the JCC should invite feedback.
- Try for a camp presence during Sunday school through any way they allow (presentations in classrooms, a room in the lobby, sending home a flyer, etc.)
- Work through camp parents and board members to strengthen relationships between camp and their congregations.

In the community

- Be an insider—the camp leadership should be seen as active community players. Not outsiders trying to sell them something.
- Send photos of all campers to the Jewish and secular papers, with captions—action shots of activities or pictures that show staff engaged with campers are best. They’re more likely to use it during the off-season as filler if it’s at their fingertips.
- Send press releases about unique camp events to tell your story.
- Invite day school directors and Hillel directors to visit.
- Target recruitment at grandparents—lots of kids spend part of their summers living with their grandparents and even when local, grandparents often will be footing the camp bill. Host an event for seniors or go to where Jewish seniors congregate (a deli? a grocery store?) and hang a camp advertisement geared toward grandparents there. Host a camper/grandparent event in the off-season.
- Run a PJ Library Day at camp and invite the whole PJ mailing list as a recruitment event for camp with no fee.



In the JCC

- Use pictures from camp and highlight camp programs in all JCC newsletters, on Facebook, in JCC-sponsored program books and event guides and on JCC websites.
- Send flyers home inviting parents to a recruitment presentation during the after school program.
- Hold monthly info nights for families at the JCC with camp activities for kids.
- Design special “Camp Days” for vacation days, drawing from the most popular camp events, staffed by camp staff.
- Staff a camp table in the lobby of the JCC at heavily-trafficked times.
- Offer family picnic days (target preschool families) run by camp.
- Create combination programs with JCC overnight camps that are closest to you.
- Create day camp specialized trips connected to a JCC specialty overnight camp.
- Host preschool family events at camp.
- Run JCC staff events at camp, such as weekend BBQs, family days, and staff retreats.

Social Media and Web Presence

- Use the web as a primary driver to camp. Your website should convey professionalism, expertise and excellence in service, program and staff (this requires a more substantial web presence than simply an inner single page of a JCC website.)
- Maintain a camp-specific online and social media presence, separate from the JCC's.
- Carry the personality of camp into your online voice. Make sure your values are reflected in how you use the internet (Post articles that relate to kids in sports, with a note that says, "At Camp Chai we care about great sportsmanship too.")
- Develop a social media plan with goals and a strategy, including a calendar of when items will be updated, pictures posted, newsletters sent, and returning staff lists posted, for example.
- Use social media to create a conversation, not simply to broadcast events and information.
- Make sure social media strategy and implementation is included in someone's job description, otherwise it falls through the cracks.
- Develop a web presence for camp alumni, with a portal from Facebook for them to enter their contact information.
- Engage your community with interesting and thought-provoking stories, photos and information. Encourage them to take an active role on your page by asking questions, posting trivia, sharing news about camp.
- Share memorable content! Share stories about campers and staff, in-season and out-of-season. Find ways to model your camp values through the content you select. If caring for the environment or repairing the world are important camp values, have regular columns in your newsletter or on your website that highlight ways campers and staff are living these values outside of camp.



End notes

Page 7

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Additional resources

Tools and resources to supplement this guide can be found on jcca.me. For questions and additional support, contact JCC Association's camping department.



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