

Matt Markins Bio

Matt joined Awana in January 2013 as vice president of Marketing, Strategy and U.S. Publishing, most recently occupying the role of President and Chief Strategy Officer. The Indiana native, who calls Nashville home, previously served as D6 Conference co-



founder and director with Randall House Publishers and holds a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Studies and Theology from Welch College.

“From my first encounter with Awana as a children’s discipleship ministry in my local church through the almost decade I have served here as both a VP and President/CSO, I have been uncompromisingly convinced Awana is the best solution for child and youth discipleship,” Matt said. “As we move into the future, I am increasingly passionate about the need for biblical child discipleship. Awana has always been and will always be about the Gospel. We will continue to resource local churches and equip loving, caring adults worldwide to raise generations of children with lasting faith.”

At Awana, Matt has been instrumental in setting long-term ministry strategy. He has led innovation throughout the organization, including making the launching and training of Awana clubs more efficient, streamlining staffing to match ministry needs, spearheading numerous research projects that have allowed Awana to be more effective and purposeful in resourcing churches, and setting the direction for Awana to become increasingly donor-fueled. Matt has co-authored three books on children’s ministry and child discipleship, the most recent being *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church*. Most recently he launched the Child Discipleship Forum.

During Valerie Bell’s tenure as CEO, Awana increased its reach from 3.7 million children in 119 countries to more than 4.9 million children in 133 countries. In the nearly six years she served as CEO, Valerie helped lead the Awana ministry to solely focus on child discipleship and encouraged those who worked at Awana, as well as those who served in local churches, to “fall in love with children again.” Other accomplishments during Valerie’s leadership include co-writing *Resilient* alongside Matt and other members of leadership, with almost 20,000 copies distributed; leading through COVID-19 and its far-reaching effects, and establishing the current leadership team.

“My six years serving as CEO at Awana have been the best ministry of my life,” Valerie said. “While leading through this rapidly changing culture and global pandemic have been more than challenging, I have seen God move in and on behalf of the Awana ministry in 132 countries with nearly 5 million children. These challenges have shaped the leadership of this ministry. Those who lead after me are ready and determined to continue pursuing being the global leader in resilient child discipleship. I transition to CEO Emerita with a full heart and all the confidence in

the world in Matt Markins and the leadership team of Awana. While we're standing on the shoulders of those who have founded and grown this ministry, I truly believe the most awesome globally impacting days are ahead as we seek to raise up the greatest generation of resilient disciples."

As CEO Emerita, Valerie will be externally focused on advocating for Awana and child discipleship, nurturing donor relationships, and networking for the organization.

"The Board of Directors is extremely grateful for Valerie's perseverance, leadership, and intention in building a world-class leadership team," Awana Board Chair Gary Thomas said. "We're excited to serve alongside Matt as he and the team continue to lead this ministry to reach more kids around the world with the Gospel and lasting discipleship."

Incorporated in 1950, [Awana](#) is a global nonprofit organization, fueled by the generous donations of individuals, churches and organizations, as well as resource sales, to accomplish our mission of equipping leaders to reach kids with the Gospel and engage them in lifelong discipleship. Our vision is that every child would come to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Right now this is happening in 133 countries worldwide through 66,000 churches, reaching over 4.9 million kids with lasting faith in Christ.