

January 2012

## Gary's Camping Newsletter

### *Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders*

"When you stop chasing the *wrong* things you give the *right* things the chance to catch you." -- *marcandangle.com*

**Please Please Please Answer Your Phone** – You can't expect to fill your camp if prospective camper parents get voice-mail when they take *their* time to call *you*. You won't listen to me? Check out what Seth Godin says: [http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2012/01/sold-or-bought.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2012/01/sold-or-bought.html)

**"They'll Fight Over It When You're Dead."** – See the power of a good headline? Studies show that 80% of the time you spent crafting the paragraphs on your web site and brochure will be **wasted** if you don't have a great headline (or navigation link) to capture the reader. Everyone scans when they look at web pages and brochures. They scan *headlines* to see *if* and *where* to start reading. Do you see why prospective camper-moms can't find the information *they* want on your site? You're not using the language they use. Your navigation buttons are typically jargon, not headlines. I love this new formula for writing headlines, from *Bnonn Tennant*: <http://blog.kissmetrics.com/how-to-write-headlines/> (And that "Fight over it when you're dead" headline? It's from a Saddleback Leather ad).

**Use Your Staff Interviews to Prevent Child Abuse** – From <http://www.praesidiuminc.com/>, the experts: Only 4-5% of offenders have a criminal record (so don't kid yourself thinking criminal background checks are *all* you need to do.) Encourage high-risk applicants to self-select out. As a part of your interview, say: "We have zero tolerance for abuse. We screen. We monitor. We cooperate with authorities. We require a signed code of conduct." Abusers don't want to be watched that closely, and look for an place they can be inconspicuous.

**Advertising Your Great Camp Jobs** – Want to see how it's done? Check out <http://www.coolworks.com/ymca-of-the-rockies-snow-mountain-ranch/profile> And hope *your* staff aren't looking there! Or better yet, get right into your own "summer camp jobs" page and make it tell a compelling story. (I'd start with some good headlines, eh?)

**Web Site of the Month** – A camp board member volunteers his time to create these information-rich pages. <http://phoc.org/summer-camp-overview> Read this "intro" and click on the age 7-9 year old "Adventurers" program to see how well they understand a mother's need to know. (*Greg short is the volunteer*: <http://gshort.com/portfolio.htm>)

**RE: "Camp Names" from Last Month** – Jeffrey Compton writes, "How about a contest? Toward the end of camp have the campers submit their best camp nickname or camp slogan. Besides some interesting submissions – it also provides direct feedback from the campers. (Too many 'Camp Barf' tells

you something about the food.)” -- *former camper, and publisher of Arts America*  
<http://artsamerica.org/>

**Adopt a Cause** – Want your “professional role models” to have something to sink their teeth into? How about having them teach compassion, cooperation, and world peace? Your camp could be responsible for creating an entirely new rural library in Africa. Parents and kids can collect the books; campers can hold a carnival to raise the money to ship them (only \$500). Thanks to volunteers like you, the Africa Library Project has already opened 700 libraries. <http://www.africanlibraryproject.org/learn-more-overview/newsletters/198-recipe2011> -- *Started by former YMCA camp director Chris “Cloud” Bradshaw*

**“Point B”** – or “If I should ever have a daughter,” by Sarah Kay. Over a million views of this short TED Talk video. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if one of your female counselors read (or recited) this as a chapel devotion this coming summer?  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/sarah\\_kay\\_if\\_i\\_should\\_have\\_a\\_daughter.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter.html) (The transcript is available, too.)  
-- *And if you ever wondered what “TED” stands for but didn’t want to ask, it’s “Technology, Entertainment, and Design,” the original focus of the first conference.*

**Affirmation Statements** – You know, quotes that motivate and pump you up. They’re especially popular at some Christian camps that pick themes for the summer and build elaborate “trigger” skits to start each day. The affirmations are on banners hanging around camp so kids (and staff) get these visual cues burned into their visual memory. (Especially good for non-linear learners, like me!) The A.E. Finley YMCA Day Camp is divided up into units, and the “sports” village guys made signs out of famous sports quotes, like



“You miss 100% of the shots you never take.”



Inspiring for kids, staff, and parents.

*And you’ll love this:* the kids paint the sides of their Gaga Pit like the boards of a hockey rink!

**Create a Food Network** – Chef Charlie at Maine Arts Camp admitted to me that he knows the primary reason kids sign up for his classes is “They like to eat.” But he not only helps them turn out tasty food that includes fresh herbs and vegetables from the camp garden, he gives them life lessons. At least twice a day he reminds them a trained chef’s French secret: “Mise en Place -- A place for everything, and everything in its place.”

As campers were divided into teams so that each part of BBQ Chicken over Pene Pasta was all ready at the same time, he let everyone know the assignments for each group before “turning the kitchen over to them.” For example, the pasta cookers’ job included:

- The water is already pre-heating, so you can bring it quickly to a boil.
- Read the instructions on the pasta box.
- Get ALL of the supplies collected BEFORE you put the pasta in the pot:
  - (Kitchen timer, colander in the sink, hotpads, serving bowl...)
- Communicate closely with the chicken and sauce chefs so you know exactly when to put the



pasta in the water so that everything finishes together. He reminds them, “We use timers and recipes for *guidelines*. What do we *cook* with?” “*Our eyes, mouth, and head*” everyone joins in! Key concepts, repeated during each class.

Each camper takes home the “Recipe Templates” for each dish cooked that week, which are also “spiced” with the camp logo, other “insider tips” from Chef Charlie, and plenty of information so they can duplicate their results for their family when they get home. <http://www.maineartscamp.com/>

**Fill Empty Beds** -- Scotty Jackson of YMCA Camp Seymour, WA, writes – “We wanted to serve more *members* of our YMCA, and one of the few places our Y’s have kids of the ideal camp age (10-12) is in Day Camp. Very few day campers end up going to a resident camp (less than 5% from my surveys); and part of that is because Moms are already stretched thin by having to pay for camp for every-day-of-the-summer if she’s using it for childcare. What if we could offer a session of resident camp for a fee much closer to what those moms already budget for day camp? If we’ve got empty bunks, there’s no reason not to put campers into them if the parents can afford to pay more than our direct costs. As a result we served 150 new families with camperships for resident camp.” [sjackson@ymcapkc.org](mailto:sjackson@ymcapkc.org)

**The Best Stuff I Ever Did** – I did because I had to. Sink or swim. Fight or flight. Win or lose. Get more campers this summer or fear losing my job. Motivation is a beautiful thing. Just ask the leaders of really successful camps why they get so much done... *before... every... summer*. I’m serious. Ask them. (*Could you use help in setting and accomplishing priorities before summer? Recruit a fresh set of eyes for a day.* – Gary)

**See Gary Live...**

**PEAK (Preparing Educators for Adventures with Kids)** experiential education conference. February 16th-18th, 2012 at Camp Greenville SC/NC <http://www.campgreenville.org/peak.php>

**Iron Chefs and Flannel Shirts** – The North American Camp Food Service is **March 6 – 8**, and the Camp Maintenance Conferences (**March 20 – 22 where Gary speaks every year**) are both held every year at YMCA Camp Chingachgook on Lake George, just north of Albany New York. It's a great way to reward your key staff with valuable training and networking. Find out more at the conference websites: [www.campmaintenance.com](http://www.campmaintenance.com) and [www.campfoodservice.com](http://www.campfoodservice.com) **Questions?** Write or call Carol Lewis [clewis@cdymca.org](mailto:clewis@cdymca.org) (518) 656-9462.

**ACA New England** – I do three or four workshops here every year. It's a lot of quality training for very little money – two solid days, Friday and Saturday; easy to fly to Manchester NH (served by Southwest). <http://www.acane-camps.org/conference/index10.htm> March 30 & 31, 2012. Bob Ditter, Faith Evans, Chris Thurber, me, and more.

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"You don't let the guy with the broom control how many elephants are in the parade." -- *Merlin Mann*

"The man who carries a cat by the tail learns something that can be learned in no other way." -- *Mark Twain*

"I prefer to think of the homeless as... outdoorsy." - *Sue Silvester*

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Gary

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*Tradition: Every camper and counselor taps this sign each time they exit the dining hall at Camp Belknap, NH <http://www.campbelknap.org/>*