

October 2012

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But since no one was listening, everything must be said again." – *André Gide, (Nobel-prize-winning writer)*

King Me – "Hi Gary... I took your checker board & small benches idea and expanded a little. They were a big hit. Second only to 4 square. The board is routed into the table. I had a few CITs paint the squares. I now have several tables, and I'm building more. Some with tic tac toe on one side." -- *Dick Boldi, Camp Rotary (MA) Camp Manager* -- DICKBOLDI@aol.com



Facebook for Faces – YMCA Camp Wilson (OH) took and posted a "family photo" for every family every check-in day! Most importantly, they're really good photos so they're likely to be saved and printed.

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150879650450793&set=a.10150872407985793.399475.219940945792&type=1&theater>

Anywhere Table Tennis -- "We just discovered this genius idea and bought six of them. The staff are sold on the idea and have already kid-tested the equipment. Walmart is out of them currently, but Amazon.com and Buy.com occasionally promote them with special pricing." The retractable Anywhere Table Tennis net attaches to almost any size table, up to 75 inches wide and 1.75 inches thick, regardless of shape. The set also includes 2 paddles, 3 balls, and a mesh carrying bag." -- *Bruce Spoelman, Executive Director YMCA Camp Pentalouan* -- bspoelman@pentalouan.org

Clear Communication, Tested – "Black text on a plain background elicited reliably faster reading performance than on a medium-textured background. When compared to reading light text on a dark background, people read black text on a white background up to thirty-two percent faster. In general, the greater the contrast between the text and background, the easier the text is to read." ---

<http://usability.gov/pdfs/chapter11.pdf>

"Oh, The Places You'll Go!" – The staff at Camp Echo in Burlington, N.Y. take turns reciting lines from the Dr. Seuss's book. A pretty amazing after-summer gift to their campers; and a terrific way to show parents the diversity of the staff and a tour of the activities and the facilities. It works for a staff recruitment video, too. <http://www.summertimeculture.com/camp-echo-oh-the-places-youll-go/> – from *Matt Ralph at Summer Camp Culture*

Before You Go to Another Conference – I suggest you watch this 11 minute TED Talk by Austin Kleon called “Steal Like an Artist.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oww7oB9rjgw&feature=related> If you have anyone in your life who would like to be a creative person, his book by the same name is a great gift.

“Soaring Tablet Use -- and an online commons increasingly battling information overload has fundamentally changed web design as we know it,” says Nonprofit Tech. “Bigger pictures, less text, larger fonts, and easy-to-tap and click buttons and navigation are the new Web design aesthetic. Since the **iPad is the top selling tablet** and its dimensions are compatible with desktop and laptop devices, if your nonprofit is considering launching a new website, then the following eleven nonprofit websites will help guide your design decisions. <http://nonprofitorgs.wordpress.com/2012/04/22/11-nonprofit-websites-that-look-great-on-ipads/>”

Better Meetings -- Ron Ciancutti ‘s article in Parks and Rec Magazine is a sharp to-do-list on how to improve the meetings you call, and the meetings you attend. <http://www.northstarpubs.com/articles/prb/improved-meeting-dynamics>

Refinishing Wood Floors – One of the classic fall camp maintenance jobs is resurfacing wood floors. Here are good articles on sanding: http://www.jlconline.com/flooring/secrets-of-a-floor-refinisher_2.aspx; and an alternative that can often make floors last longer: <http://www.jlconline.com/flooring/restoring-wood-floors-without-sanding.aspx>

Nasty Little Buggers – Nope, not bed bugs; the kind that eat the wood in your buildings. Most folks know about termites; some know about carpenter ants. But few know how to recognize a common pest of untreated wood, so often found in camp buildings: Powder Post Beetles. I ran into them again several times this summer. They leave lots of perfectly round holes, like a 1/16” drill, but instead of sawdust they leave ultra-fine wood powder. Here’s how to get rid of them before your buildings fall down: <http://www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef616.asp>

Big Confession – As a camp director I would sometimes fall into a trap of convincing myself that if I bought the right big new activity or facility that it would make my camp outrageously fun. Counselors and parents would thank me and campers would flock to us. And the more time I spent in the office and with adults, the more I believed it. I even got good at selling it.

But whenever I spent time with campers and staff (and my own children) I was reminded of what we *all* knew once: at Christmas or birthdays it’s not the fancy presents that kids play with the longest, it’s the empty box. Here’s a test: where have *you* made the best memories? Going out to an expensive dinner with friends?... or *cooking* dinner together with friends?

Most of the camps I visit either *have* big expensive toys for kids to play with, or they’re *wishing* for big toys. Yet the most *successful* camps challenge kids to be more creative than that. “What can we do with of what we’ve got?” What kid would remember an event where you *rented* the costumes; compared to crazy and clever made-up costumes and props *they* helped create?

We lament at helicopter parents that buy their kids everything they want, including a bouncy-castle for their birthday. And we turn around and do what at camp? Buy a “blob?” Rent a movie? Build a theme-park ride? Send our campers on field-trips because we’ve run-out of fun at camp?

I think we can rob our kids of the best experiences. If fun at camp depends on our expensive new equipment, what have we taught them? That fun isn't something you create, it's something you *buy*? (Don't they get that message already... everywhere?)

I'm not saying a camp shouldn't have unique facilities or make big plans. But don't let those plans keep you from providing what they really need *next summer*. Some empty boxes.

What kind of "empty box" experiences do *your* campers have? Share them with us? THANKS.
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Network with Outdoor Educators – John Haskins at Islandwood, WA highly recommends the 2013 Residential Environmental Learning Center Directors' Conference in Cuyahoga Valley National Park at the Environmental Education Center, 3675 Oak Hill Road in Peninsula Ohio January 18-22, 2013. \$295 covers everything - conference fee, lodging, meals, pre-conference field trips, evening entertainment! Visit www.conservancyforevnp.org Registration is open now. Call 1-800-657-2796 x100 or email cdages@forcvnp.org

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." -- *Aristotle*

"The best way to learn to be a good manager is to be well managed." – *Esther Dyson*

"Yesterday I told a chicken to cross the road. It said, 'What for?'" -- *Steven Wright*

Best wishes,

Gary

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