

December 2011

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Hide not your talents. They for use were made.

What's a sundial in the shade?" -- Benjamin Franklin

Why Send Your Child to Camp? – Of the hundreds of camp web sites I've seen, this is the question LEAST OFTEN answered. Here's a camp that does it very well. I suggest you create your own page: <https://campolson.org/whycampolson.htm>

Better Staff Training – Every evaluation I've seen on a camp staff orientation says "I wish we had more time to learn to work together as a staff." At Maine Arts Camp assistant director Candy Chon has each staff member pair-up with a "Goal Partner" *before* camp to share the personal and job goal they had each written for themselves. Later that week they each share "something special" they'd brought to camp that has special meaning to them, and have time to "show and tell" with their Goal Partner. Candy says "They look for more time to spend with each other; to have someone who's willing to listen because they care." -- reach Candy at info@maineartscamp.com

Writing More Gooder – I mean communicate more effectively and quickly, because that's all the time you've got. Some quick advice: <http://www.copyblogger.com/more-magnetic-copy/>

Juice Up Your Newsletters and Blogs – Everybody has a "Give Now" button, but almost *nobody* has a "Why Give." Sean Werner says: "[Why I Give](#) is a classic example of using things people say about you and your organization (also known as testimonials) to generate more giving." Easy to implement fundraising advice at: <http://www.marketingforonprofits.org/2011/07/social-proof-in-action-why-i-give.html>

Be a Better Carpenter – Fine Homebuilding Magazine is a terrific source for specific how-to skills that you'd normally have to apprentice with an expert for a year. You and your maintenance team can learn a ton of stuff for free from their one-minute videos. It would be a good in-service learning day to get a pizza and watch an hours' worth and talk about how you might use the ideas at camp (and your home!) <http://www.finehomebuilding.com/item/13158/building-skills-how-to-scribe-trim-to-fit-against-a-wall>

Camp Names – I've never done a study of *causation*, but there's definitely a relationship between successful camps and those where counselors adopt "camp names." Curt aka "Moose" aka "[The Recreation Guy](#)" aka "[Summer Camp Program Director](#)," collected 350 camp names if you'd like to let your staff give it a go before next summer: <http://summercampprogramdirector.com/over-350-camp-names/>

“The Mud Bar” – (It’s a place, not a snackfood.) The next big thing in young-camper programming! If you’ve seen kids use “water tables” and “sand tables” before, you’ll appreciate this logical next step. But for those of you new to the concept, imagine the fun of making sand castles, but being able to do it while standing so you’re working more at eye-level, and move around without knocking over your (or other’s) work, making it easier to work *together*. Here’s a cool example of how having lots of “stuff” available encourages creative behavior. I’m defining “creative” as taking two or more existing ideas and “smooshing them together” to create something new.

http://www.borganic.net/projects.php?subj=2&category=8&project_id=227

Got a Mentor? . . . someone wise from experience that’s willing to tell you the truth? Better than an MBA, in my opinion. Here’s an example of “sage advice” you might get (this overheard from Tom Archer, director of camping for the Manchester NH YMCA): *“Sometimes you’ve got to realize you don’t have the staff to play man-to-man like you’d hoped. You’ve got to go with the players you’ve got, and that might mean shifting to playing zone to get everything covered.”*

Cooler than Cabins? – Yurts have been the most popular way to quickly add more summer capacity lately, but there are some less expensive alternatives that I think have their own cool factor, in a cowboy kind of way: <http://www.rainier.com/photogallery/album-shelter/cottage-gallery/index.html> and <http://www.rainier.com/shelter/cottages/>

Micro Volunteering – David Venn writes: “In an effort to attract and engage more male volunteers LiveWorkPlay changed their volunteer strategy. Rather than just asking people to offer their time and energy to whatever needed to be done, they created a set of [micro-volunteer roles](#) with specific objectives and outcomes. This new strategy not only made current volunteers feel more productive because they could clearly see a return on their volunteer investment, but over time the organization was able to attract and secure more volunteer support from males.”

<http://davidvenn.squarespace.com/blog/2011/8/28/micro-volunteering-freelance-affiliates-and-employee-flexim.html> -- *Don’t ask for volunteers until you have jobs for them. Start a list right now. If you’re not using Storyboarding, this is an ideal time to start:* <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php>

Web Site of the Month – <http://www.fairviewlakeymca.org/> *What I like about it:* Beautiful rotating slide show on the home page; big photos that each tell a story so you’re not even in a hurry to move on. (The photo choices are very important: A frog, a fire, a cucumber, swim *lessons*, and a lake? Yes... way more descriptive than the standard “group hug” photos that fill most camp web sites.) And as soon as you *are* ready, “Summer Camp” is the obvious tab. That one click takes you to a clean, easy-to-read, logically labeled page of more good photos and well written paragraphs. At the end of that one page I’m almost ready to sign up. Do you have a page like that? One click away?

<http://www.fairviewlakeymca.org/summer-camp/summer-camp-main-page.html>

BUT so my friends at Fairview Lake don’t get big heads, there’s a problem in not knowing where to go *next* after that summer camp page. Ideally there would be hot links throughout the descriptions on that page, and at the bottom of that page. But for now, you have to look back up to the navigation bar at the top of the page and discover that a second level of tabs has appeared where you can choose “Traditional Camp”. If you can FIND it, it’s another very good page. <http://www.fairviewlakeymca.org/summer-camp/traditional-camp.html>

Another thing to point out: they have all the “Metro” navigation tabs that every metro wants their branches to have, but they put them in a format that isn’t likely to cause a parent to click the “wrong” button by mistake. They actually add to the design of the page. Brilliant.

See Gary Live...

PEAK (Preparing Educators for Adventures with Kids) experiential education conference. February 16th-18th, 2012 at beautiful, mountain-top YMCA Camp Greenville, near Greenville SC and Asheville NC. Anyone interested in learning the newest outdoor education activities, reinforce the classics, or simply learn more about the field should attend. Preconference events will be held on the 15th and 16th and will include ACCT levels 1&2 certifications and global water education through Project WET. The Call to Presenters is still open and available at this link: <http://www.campgreenville.org/peak.php>

Also **March 20 – 22** at the Camp Maintenance Conference www.campmaintenance.com; and New England ACA <http://www.acane-camps.org/conference/index10.htm> **March 30 & 31, 2012.**

Gary's Christmas Card – We were out with friends the other night when one said, “I love Christmastime!” I asked her husband how that worked, they being Jewish and all. He told me a lovely story I’d heard before. His father had said when he was young, that “Christmas is like any birthday party you’re invited to. It may not be *your* birthday, but that doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy the party!” Around the world people are celebrating the “spirit of Christmas” by giving gifts. Those three wise men supposedly being the first to deliver packages? The *true* first Christmas gift was Jesus himself, a newborn baby. A reminder that life for each of us is priceless, unearned, and miraculous. And the best way to say “thanks” for our own miracle is to love one another. It’s simply wonderful.

Merry Christmas!

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

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