

February 2014

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

[\(view as a printable PDF\)](#)

"I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow." – Woodrow Wilson

The Two Keys to Success – I've studied hundreds of camps. There's no one right way to run a camp; there are hundreds. That's part of why we love it. ***But those that struggle do so primarily because they don't use these two facts to guide how they spend their very limited time and money:*** First, Mom is the customer (she makes 95% of the camper registrations). Yet look at most camp websites and you'd never know that mom's #1 concern was safety, and #2 was the quality of the counselors and #3 was skill development and #4 was making friends. Nope. You'd think "smiling" was the only goal. Then call a camp's office and see how you're treated. Look at the facilities; do they meet the "mom test?" Why spend time on anything else until you've taken care of "mom?"

And the second key: Your success is tied more to your return rate than to any other measurable outcome. Mom not only decides if her child comes the first year, but only if she's satisfied will she suggest a second. Meet that hurdle, and she asks her child, "Do you want to go back?" It turns out there's one main reason kids want to come back: **they made friends.** (Conversely, if they didn't make friends, they'll look elsewhere next summer.) Your satisfied parents and campers become your word-of-mouth salesforce, finding your new campers for you.

Teach Friend-making? – Yup. If you want campers to come back *next* year, they need to make friends *this* summer. Yet less than 1/3 of camps deliver on that promise because they just assume it happens naturally at camp. Nope. Most standard camp activities keep kids *active* and don't encourage them to practice the conversations that promote friendships. Here's the only book I've found for camp counselors on the steps to becoming "Friend-ready," with lots of ways to guide campers in acquiring those skills. There's no better gift you can give your campers (and counselors) than these skills.

<http://www.advantagebooks.net/SteppingStones.html> (And I recommend her book for parents, too: [Raise Your Child's Social IQ](#))

Blow Your Own Horn – Because of their online presence, newspapers need a lot more local content (just as they've reduced their staff.) So it's never been easier to get a story that *you've* written published. Here's a great example: <http://www.cabinet.com/merrimackjournal/merrimackreaderssubmitted/1029496-308/merrimack-ymca-camp-sargent-launches-new-and.html> -- Contact camp director Randall Menken RMenken@nmymca.org to find out how he got his press release published.

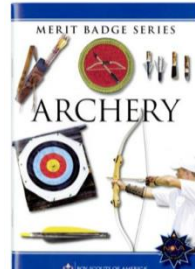
Video of the Month – Why I like it: It shows what camp looks like (waterfront, grounds, dining hall, campfire, cabins, activities), shows kids making friends, and shows counselors in charge. You seldom see

ANY of these in a standard camp video. So much information in such a short video! Obviously they knew what they wanted to show before they started to film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6sGDitaOkk#t=113> Camp Tockwogh (MD) Executive Director Elizabeth Staib-King says, "...this video has been my dream for the past 5 years! It's become a reality thanks to our production company, <http://thekitchen.co.>"

"Teach Your Children Well" – Recent camp impact research by [SEER Analytics](#) points to *learning new skills and developing competencies* as a critical linchpin to more aspects of camper growth than any other area. Yet of the camps I visit, less than half have any multi-day skill classes, and most that do have very poor instruction. Good curriculum isn't that hard to come by. My favorite sources are the Boy Scout merit badge pamphlets. Anyone can buy them online at:

<http://www.scoutstuff.org/bsa/literature-media/merit-badge-pamphlets.html>



Do You Send E-mail Newsletters? -- I get *lots* of camp newsletters. There are a few I enjoy reading. Most are just annoying. As usual, Seth Godin does the best job of explaining *why*:

http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2013/12/eight-email-failures-and-questions-for-those-that-want-to-do-better.html

"Have You Got This in a Small?" – Paul "Bear" Bryant sent in this important observation: "52% of people browse the internet on a smartphone or tablet and this number is growing daily. If you add the micro-sized laptops and tablet/laptop hybrids, then about 75% of the people are browsing on small screens. It is highly likely that your website was designed for a big screen. So, 75% of those viewing your site are having a hard time using it. You need your website to work on the little screen. There are two ways to do this.

1. "You can spend a little money and build a separate mobile website. **Pro:** It's cheaper than rebuilding that site you just paid a lot of money to have built. **Cons:** For affordability, most people will pare down the info from their main site so mobile users miss important content. The site may not size correctly on every small screens, especially new screen sizes you hadn't anticipated. Any changes you make to your main site will not be mirrored in this "micro-site" which means twice the work to make changes.
2. "You can build, from the ground up, a **mobile responsive** website. This is what we've done at Camp Sloane. **Pros:** This site responds to any platform on which it is being seen. It's the same site so when you change your website, it's changed – done. It has *all* of your site's content. **Cons:** It costs more to retrofit a site, so it's best to do when you are doing a total site overhaul.

"The way I see it you must do one or the other right now, because 75% of the people out there are squinting at your tiny words on their small screen. Why are you frustrating them so?" – *reach Bear*

pbryant@campsloane.org and try his multi-platform website on your smartphone:
<http://www.campsloane.org/>



Motley Mugs – I work with a lot of church camps, and many of them use this same trick: they ask for guests and volunteers to donate all those "logo" mugs everyone has around the house but never use. So next to every coffee pot are trays and trays

of every kind of mug you can imagine! Easy to tell yours from everyone else's. And if a few break or "walk away," they just ask for more. And maybe best of all, it gives the impression that many people contribute to the success of "their" camp. *How else do you do this kind of thing? Let me know?*

Just The Facts – Ever wonder how many kids go to camp each year? (11 million). How many camps fill up each summer? (12%). Many more useful answers like that at the ACA: <http://www.acacamps.org/media/aca-facts-trends>

Kill the Ort Bucket – (Gary's Soap Box) – It's time to dump the measuring of food waste ("Ort") and the encouraging of kids to "clean their plates" by eating all they take. It's wrong on so many levels. Everyone knows that childhood (and adult) obesity is at a critical level, with kids eating too much and NOT knowing when to stop. If you teach them to eat everything on their plate, what happens when they go to the school cafeteria?... at home?...to a restaurant? ... all places where they don't choose how much is put on their plate? They eat way more than they should. I've heard some staff counter with "We're just teaching them to put less on their plate to begin with, so the food doesn't go to waste."

Let's follow that logic. When a camper isn't sure she'll like something, she won't put it on her plate. Even fewer kids try new foods at camp -- just when we have counselor role-models setting a good example and just as we're trying to serve more fresh fruits and vegetables. We measure their food waste and criticize the whole dining room for "too much waste," which creates peer pressure at the tables to *clear their plate* or "Give it to Mikey, he eats everything!"

Then they take their serving platters back into the kitchen and watch the cooks dump the remaining food into the garbage (because health codes don't allow us to re-serve food sent to the tables). The smart kids realize it doesn't matter if they eat all they take or not, because EVERYTHING left over gets thrown away. We look foolish, or worse, like liars. "But it's a fun activity... The teachers like it... What will we do in its place?"

Glad you asked! Read on...

Get More of What You Measure – "Our staff have not only been preaching the message to 'Eat better and move more,' but they've been practicing it as well," writes Steve Meyer, CEO of the Saginaw YMCA (and former director of Camp Timbers, MI). "We started tracking how well the campers healthier choices. We had a star chart posted in our dining hall and cabin groups earned stars for their collective group behaviors for these categories:

- Blue Star = group drinks at least 2-pitchers of water at every meal.
- Purple Star = majority of group eats at least 3-serving of dairy.
- Green = majority eats at least 3-servings of vegetables.
- Yellow = 3-servings of fruit.
- Orange = 3-servings of fiber.
- Red = exercise; at least 20-minutes of sustained cardio activity as a group. Mountain biking, 4-square, roofball, swimming, and aerobic dancing all count, as well as many other cabin group activities.
- Want environmental components? Add in stars for recycling, and for choosing foods and snacks by their low 'carbon imprint' or 'packaging waste.'

"It's easy to say that we do those activities anyway, but this program has caused campers to think and to be a part of making healthier lifestyle choices, something that we hope will stay with them after camp." -- *reach Steve at Steve@saginawymca.org*

“Rag” Program Centennial October 10-12, 2014 (near Half Moon Bay, CA) –

"The summer of 1995 is where life really changed, because that's when I became a Ragger. I can honestly say I don't know who I would be if it weren't for the Rag Program."- Sabrina Rodriguez, 2 time Emmy award winning news reporter/anchor, and past YMCA Camp Loma Mar camper.

Started in 1914 by Thomas "King" Caldwell, the Program Director who ran the Camp Loma Mar program for the Oakland YMCA, the Rag program began as a way to symbolize positive character traits exemplified by campers. Today, the program has expanded to camps around the world and focuses on goal setting and personal growth. Special Rag Program trainings will be held across the country this spring, and camps nationwide will celebrate all summer long. Join the homecoming at YMCA Camp Loma Mar this fall: <https://www.facebook.com/CLMRagger100> and <http://lomamar.ymcaeastbay.org/raggers> -- (*I'm packing my bags!* - Gary)

"Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks." -- Phillip Brooks

"Good judgment is the result of experience, and experience is the result of bad judgment." -- Mulla Nasrudin, circa 1208

"Sometimes, the only thing that keeps me going is not knowing what's coming." – Robert Orbin

Best wishes for your best year ever,

Gary

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