

February 2011

## Gary's Camping Newsletter

### *Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders*

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing." -- *Walt Disney*

"I Was Looking At Your Web Site... How Come It Still Stinks?" – Yeah, yeah, I'm grossly generalizing. This applies to only 95% of you. So, does yours look anything like *this*? =>  
<http://www.campjornymca.org/camp-activities.asp> (Note the hotlinks on the bottom of the page to the next questions mom will likely have.)

**Yes, This is Real. No, I Didn't Write It** -- David Sherry at the Des Moines Y Camp got a request from a grandparent looking at camps for *lots* of grandkids: "We ignore all camps with little or no photos of the facilities or activities, since we have learned from experience that they are usually pulling a scam. And, the kids tend to get very upset that their expectations have not been met. Or, to put it another way, they freak out. So we show them exactly what your camp has set up for them each day... and off they go to camp." -- *Did I mention that 95% of you don't have these on your web site?*

**Write News, Continued** – Last month I suggested you write and submit your own newspaper stories about camp, and YOUR camp. Here's a great one: <http://millburn.patch.com/articles/snow-may-be-on-the-ground-but-the-summer-camp-search-starts-now> -- *thanks to Karen Robson, at South Mountain YMCA, NJ. (If-I-were-you I'd copy some of her terrifically descriptive phrases.)*

**Write News Part II: Make News** – Mark Pooler, one of those crazy "[Connecticut Camp Guys](#)" and director of day camp powerhouse Camp Sloaper, does an annual "Polar Plunge." What paper, or TV station, could refuse a story like this? [http://www.myrecordjournal.com/southington/article\\_71514f6a-26a3-11e0-94ab-001cc4c002e0.html](http://www.myrecordjournal.com/southington/article_71514f6a-26a3-11e0-94ab-001cc4c002e0.html) -- *(Now whether parents will TRUST these guys with their kids, that's a different story!)*

**Write News Part III: How Many Cool Things are in This One Story?!** – "The South Montgomery County YMCA (TX) invites families to join them for their monthly Friday Night Movie Series at **their new Creekside Amphitheater**. The February event features wild west fun including **campfire, s'mores, popcorn, chili and beans tasting, camp sing-along-songs with stories and skits**, western tattoos, and **bandanas**. Families are encouraged to **wear their hats and boots**. The fun begins at 6:30 p.m. and the featured presentation on the big screen is *The Apple Dumpling Gang*. Bring your picnic dinner, lawn chairs, blankets and flashlights. Popcorn and refreshments will be available. If we experience inclement and/or winter weather conditions, all activities will be moved inside." – *(Brilliant! What family with young kids could resist? And even if they can't go, it's established this organization as the experts in outdoor programming.)*

**RIGHT News part IV: Brochures NO; Postcards, YES.** And I'm not the only one saying it: "I LOVE the whole idea of anything on a postcard. In my work for the Planned Giving Company, we do 'storytelling postcards' for major organizations like University of Denver and the Ronald Reagan

Foundation... If we can 'fit' planned giving messaging along with mission information on a postcard — *anything* should fit on a postcard! Maybe your new slogan should be 'if it can't fit on a postcard, get rid of it'... we should be able to explain any concept in three sentences or less." — *More great stuff from Kivi's* <http://www.nonprofitmarketingguide.com/blog/2011/02/17/the-three-sentence-rule-yeah-i-stole-it/>.

**Are You Maintenance Man/Woman Material?** — "The Inspector Game" from Fine Homebuilding.com is blast to play... if you know your stuff, *or* want to learn. (Be sure to send this to your facility people!) Want big fun? Challenge each other live on a big screen at lunch! Everyone will learn stuff. <http://www.finehomebuilding.com/pages/the-inspector-six.asp>

**Camp Maintenance Conference**, March 22 – 24, 2011 -- This is as practical as it gets. Learn new skills, techniques, and strategies for saving time, money, and energy. Property management workshops focus on safety, technology, equipment use, long-range planning, codes, regulations, and problem-solving for the camping industry. This year's conference is all about saving money, time, energy, and campers. Join me (Gary) and your colleagues! [http://files.e2ma.net/5812/assets/docs/maint\\_food\\_reg\\_0111r.pdf](http://files.e2ma.net/5812/assets/docs/maint_food_reg_0111r.pdf) or call 518-656-9462. It's cheap to fly to Albany NY on Southwest; free to stay at camp (or pay for the Holiday Inn!) We expect a LOT out of our employees before summer arrives. Here's how we "sharpen the saw" so we get more work done with more satisfied staff.

**Trash Your Management Style** -- Treat every employee the same? Huge mistake. Maybe the biggest. <http://nonprofitconsultant.blogspot.com/2010/10/trash-your-management-style.html>

**Teach Kids How to Do Good** -- What do *you* do at camp to help kids understand the joys of philanthropy? Practicing empathy, and then taking action? Here's a decision you can make now that will engage campers, parents, and counselors: create a new library in an African village. Former camp director Chris Bradshaw has helped groups create over 560 libraries already! Parents and kids bring recommended types of books to camp, and the kids hold a carnival or other fundraising event to cover the shipping. World-changing! <http://www.africanlibraryproject.org/>

**I LOVE this Name** – In general, I recommend camps name their programs with descriptive words that actually help parents understand the nature of the program. So calling your 8-year-olds "Adventure Camp" might be confusing to parents who are most concerned with safety, and goes cross-grain with the more traditional use describing teen programs (i.e. "Adventure Trips" and "Adventure-Challenge"). Most parents already know that "CIT" means "Counselor in Training;" (it even has a song in the movie "Meatballs!") But I'll concede that occasionally a unique name can attract attention. Like "TILT" at Pleasant Hill Outdoor Camp in OH. (Yup, "Teens in Leadership Training.") For that age group, I think it's pretty cool.

Take a look at *your* names. If you've got a very high return rate (over 65%), then you can rightly say tradition prevents you from changing. But if your first-year camper return rate for a program is less than 45%, then what have you got to lose by asking, "Are we making it *harder* to sell because of the cryptic names?"

**Moms Expect Us to Be Child Development Experts. Let's Use That** -- Camp exec Jessica Speer-Holmes writes: "Hi Gary! You shared a brilliant strategy of becoming a local expert in something related to child development and then getting myself invited to speak at PTA meetings etc. Here's my area of expertise: <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Why-Be-Out-There/Benefits.aspx>. Reach Jess at [executive@camphirock.org](mailto:executive@camphirock.org) -- (I used this technique to speak about Parenting Skills at my son's PTA. It was such a hit I was invited to a dozen other schools! I even sold copies of "GET OUT OF MY LIFE! But First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?" And of course I was introduced as "our camp director, Gary Forster")

**Phone-a-thon Fine Tuning** -- Brent Birchler, director of Camp Ockanickon, NJ, picked up on a point I missed on my "how to" article. He replied, "The only thing I could add would be about leaving messages. When we're doing our phone-a-thons and get an answering machine, we leave a message saying why we are calling and that we'll put a pledge card and information in the mail for them. The caller writes a personal note on the back of the pledge card explaining their ties to camp and why they feel camp is so important for children. We even received a \$1,000 gift specifically because of my note on the back of a pledge card." -- *Face to face is best; a personal phone call is good; and a personal note is way better than a junk-mail solicitation. Thanks, Brent!* [brent@ycamp.org](mailto:brent@ycamp.org) (Gary's Sample Script and Secrets at: <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php>)

**Remember That Time When We...** <http://www.postandcourier.com/news/2011/jan/23/remember-that-time-when-we/> on the power of simple programs like Indian Guides and Indian Princesses... <http://www.ymcagc.org/princess/>

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"I base my fashion taste on what doesn't itch." -- *Gilda Radner*

"Let's form proactive synergy restructuring teams. -- *Scott Adams*

"I love camp people. They have such a high tolerance for pain." -- *Jack Lund, CEO, New York City's YMCA*

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*Most Sincerely,*

*Gary*

Gary Forster, LLC

**"Great Solutions for Great Camp Leaders"**

I facilitate effective Strategic Planning with several camps each year; but the reasons many initiate the process are actually **tactical** shortcomings that can be corrected almost immediately, and at low cost. Invest in one invigorating day to reach your goals -- *this year*. Take a look at [www.garyforster.com](http://www.garyforster.com) and drop me a line.

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