

March 2012

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul" -- *Yiddish Proverb*

Your Web Site Still Sucks – Why is it so hard to get camp directors to fix their biggest roadblock to new campers? (I'm serious... If you know, please tell me). Let's start at the beginning: the Headline of your home page. <http://blog.kissmetrics.com/ultimate-home-page-headline/>

Web Site of the Month – A very clean and easy-to-navigate site; especially for first-time visiting moms. Click "overview" to see a great narrative that shows how well they describe what makes them special. Good writing, works. <http://campwinnebago.com> -- *(If you haven't read my own article on web site design, or need to share it with your web designer, or your web Nazi: http://garyforster.com/documents/Brochures_and_WebSites-gf.pdf)*

Kickstarting Good Ideas – Teambuilding facilitator Amy Climber writes, "I thought you might be interested in a new set of processing cards I've developed. They are gaining momentum fast on kickstarter.com (in fact, it may be a site you'd want to highlight in a future newsletter - great potential for some camps). <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/123430/climer-cards> My project is 'Climer Cards,' a set of facilitation/processing cards based on 50 watercolor paintings I've made. They will be professionally produced into playing card size sets just in time for the summer. They are designed to be used by facilitators, consultants, camp counselors, teachers, even parents." – *Contact Amy: aeclimer@yahoo.com*

Quick Demographics – www.Zip-codes.com

Camp Photos for Parents? – "Just use SmugMug and it's free." -- *Suggested by Dimitri Stankevich, of Camp Orkila. dstankevich@seattlemca.org Brilliant!*

Treating Campers Like Individuals – Dr. Chris Thurber describes an easy system for making sure no camper goes unnoticed. <http://www.northstarpubs.com/articles/cb/each-and-every> *Delegate this to your Unit Directors -- right now?*

Really Good Grass, Man -- <http://www.pearlspremium.com/> 12 inch root system so it never needs watering? Mow it once a month? Now THAT'S preventive maintenance!

Flatter Somebody, Sincerely – Emir Butler of Camp Jorn had heard me talk about Camp Belknap's closing night ceremony during an "Eight Hallmarks of Great Camps" presentation. She wrote and asked me to describe it in detail. *(If you'd like that description, send me an e-mail, too.)* They've already made it a new Camp Jorn tradition! Emir writes:

“Just wanted to let you know the progress of our pine cone ceremony. We had a fantastic winter camp and ended with the ceremony on the last night. We had luminaries light the trail (about 5 minute walk) out the yurt village with a fire already roaring. I spoke about what you said, the first spark etc. Then we had each camper throw their first cone in and they were asked to say something. Amazing comments and thank yous from them, a couple were crying and didn’t want to go home, very moving and meaningful! Then explained the second pinecone and they liked a lot.

“I’ve talked to a few parents and got great feedback about winter camp in general. One said ‘Ian knows to take his pinecone out when he’s feeling sad about missing camp; it’s sitting on his shelf in his room’. Can’t ask for more than that.” -- Contact Emir at registration@campjornymca.org, and check out her very nice web site: www.campjornymca.org

We Ask; Do We Listen? – Most camps have their school or church group-leaders fill out some sort of evaluation. But what do you DO with all them? While working for a camp recently, I found these brilliant ideas from school teachers, hidden for 3 years, because they had no system for collecting and saving the **suggestions** from evaluations:

- “It would be interesting to have students work as “observers” or “recorders” in some of the team building activities. Often, I think, the students are too engaged in the scenario to monitor how well they are working as a group.”
- “Everyone seemed very competent in the technical aspects of the challenges. But leading discussions and reflections varied between your camp instructors. The more experienced instructors are able to elicit more thoughtful discussions.” (*Hmmm. Maybe we should have some of our teambuilding staff shadow our BEST staff occasionally, to keep everyone’s skills up.* – Gary)
- “The high ropes tower was a great exercise for those kids who did it. Could students who were too afraid be put to work doing something else to engage in the activity? I don’t know what, really, besides serving on the ‘mule team’ to lower the climbers. Maybe using ART or PHOTOGRAPHY to capture the essence of the activity, to be shared after dinner. The same could go for those who won’t do the ‘leap of faith.’ Maybe it would be worthwhile for them to put on their harnesses BEFORE seeing the course. As it was, some were too scared to get clipped-in because they had already seen the height of the challenge.”
- “Could we have some boards for the beds instead of the sagging springs? At least as an option?”

These are really good! What gems do you have hiding in your files? (Maybe share some with me?)

Expose Your BS to the Sunlight – Most camp web sites have too many words; (maybe the result of trying to sound important by using the jargon we pick up at conferences!) Since we’re in the middle of camp conference season AND web design crunch time, take a few minutes to laugh at these “Jargon Generators.” These are best read out loud over a beer with friends. After you’re done laughing, review your own work to see where you can simplify your message. <http://www.sciencegeek.net/lingo.html> for education-based jargon, and <http://mysite.verizon.net/grantspeak/> for grantmaking mumbo-jumbo. If you’re a REALLY first-class new-economy Bullshooter, you’ll need the *original*: <http://www.dack.com/web/bullshit.html> -- (*First heard in Kivi’s [nonprofitmarketingguide](#).*)

Paid Advertising on Facebook – Unlike “ad words” with Google, on Facebook you can pick WHO you want (moms in certain towns) to see your ad (even if they aren’t LOOKING for you). George DeTellis, Executive Director of Camp Woodhaven, MA filled me in on his success in the first 2 months of this year:

“I am buying advertisements by the 1,000 impressions. Not per click. I am spending 16 cents per 1,000 impressions. My advertisements have had 8,034,486 impressions (that is how many times my ad showed up on someone’s screen. That’s 8 Million! I have had 1,291 clicks to my website. My average cost per click is 99cents. 21 connections are people who ‘liked’ our camp page.

“Just as important: I have a unique ad for each zip code. I use their own town’s name in the headline. These ads are only hitting people between the ages of 25-50 with a family in the towns I select.

“I’m getting parents completing on-line requests for camper application at my website and telling me that Facebook was the source of how they find me. Plus, I’m getting phone calls and people are saying they saw my ad on Facebook.

“I can mail 6"x9" postcards total cost for less than .25cents including buying the mailing list, So spending \$1,275 on Facebook is equivalent to mailing 5,100 postcards. Or maybe two or three ads in a newspaper. I just spent \$1,128 to buy 5,000 four-color brochures for school distribution.

“I have great word-of-mouth, I have a great return rate, what I want is the new customer, that I don’t know, and none of my customers know. So spending \$1,275 on Facebook I think is a good value. We’ll see how it ends up. I’ll try to track this through to the end of the season. **‘It’s not who you know - it’s who you don’t know, that you want to know.’** The immigrant from China or India, the person that just moved into the community.” -- Reach George at george@campwoodhaven.com. (How do you buy the ads? Bottom right corner of Facebook, click “more”).

“Half of the American people have never read a newspaper. Half have never voted for President. One hopes it is the same half.” — *Gore Vidal, author*

“Nope.” – *Gary Forster*

**What you do with kids and their parents is more important now, than ever.
Thanks for constantly getting better!**

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC
“Camp Solutions for Great Camp Leaders”
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Hudson Day Camp



Camp Woodhaven in West Boylston - day camp for children ages 5-12, Ride the bus to camp from Solomon Pond Mall

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