

May 2011

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"For my part, I know nothing with any certainty;
But the sight of the stars makes me dream."

- Vincent van Gogh

DO THIS! – To help build friendships, build picnic tables. Lots of them! (a picnic grove so everyone can eat outside, one at every ball-field, one outside every cabin, inside cabins for playing games, at great views...) You can get excellent plans for a great table FREE at <http://www.bobsplans.com/>. (I suggest: make tables 8' long and they'll hold 10 kids). More good advice on *when* to assemble tables at:

http://www.garyforster.com/documents/Its_Hammer_Time.pdf

Sell Good Stuff – One of the hardest things to do is find a t-shirt design that kids will not only *buy*, but also *wear* when they get home. When I look for a t-shirt printer, it's their designs I'm looking at first. For instance, with "Pirates of the Caribbean IV" just out, you can bet it will be one of "the" camp themes of the summer. I suggest jumping on a shirt order like "Jolly Marshmallow" with your camp's name: <http://camp-shirts.com/art-from-the-heart.html> Kids'll pay an arm and a leg for one.

Give Good Stuff to Good Staff – We all need to find more excuses to thank *individual* staff members for a job well done; one we actually saw them doing. An immediate "I really like what I just saw" beats out almost anything, unless you combine it with a "memento" that will keep that moment alive all summer. Have you seen those "Camp Well, Live Well" shirts? There are at least 16 different clever sayings you can get on the back (like "Camp: where the air smells better than you"). You could have your own customized with your camp logo, but every "gift" would be the same. "On-a-Roll" will sell you your choice of any 12 or more shirts, mix-n-match the quotes you like, for just \$9 each (more if customized). Imagine keeping track all summer of who you've given shirts to, so by the end of the year everyone had been given one that you specifically chose for them, and presented at a meaningful time! <http://camp-shirts.com/campwell.html> (and no, I don't get a cut!) Or come up with your own "Immediate Thank-You's that Last" and I'll share your ideas next issue.

Bending Over Stands Taller – *Chris Thurber writes:* "At the camp where we work, the guiding principle of our staff is leadership by example, or L.B.E. Each staff member is constantly striving to set a good example, knowing that kids emulate adults' behavior, be it good or bad. Cabin leaders use proper manners, clean language, and good sportsmanship. They never ask a camper to do something that they themselves would not be willing to do. Perhaps the best example of L.B.E. that we ever saw was a



bleary-eyed cabin leader who began picking up trash one morning after some raccoons had ransacked one of the camp dumpsters. He didn't whisper a single obscenity, nor did he solicit anyone's help. Yet within five minutes, there were 10 or 12 kids helping him throw all that disgusting trash back in the dumpster. His L.B.E. was his demonstrated willingness to do the right thing, even if it meant getting dirty. Campers respect leaders like that." – From **Chapter 2.4** of the *FREE* online parents' guidebook: <http://www.summertimehandbook.com/> (I strongly urge you to forward that link with your own endorsement to all first-year moms; and EVERY parent you get an information request from, whether they've signed up yet or not. If I was on the fence, I'd send my kid to the camp that sent this to me. – Gary)

The Whole Idea is to Hit the Target – I go CRAZY when I see campers shoot arrow after arrow and every one hits the dirt while the archery counselor sits by and does nothing. This is our fault. We put all of our energy into stressing SAFETY with our counselors, and spend almost no time in the actual skills of teaching. We're not babysitters. Campers expect to GET BETTER. In the case of archery, there's no thrill bigger than hitting the target, and then improving *where* you hit it. Here's an example of the great stuff that's readily available so you can EXPECT your instructors to spend their time standing and working with each child: http://www.visionrealization.com/Resources/Camp_Activities/Archery.pdf

Get BIG – While we're on the subject, have you bought BIG archery targets yet for this summer? At least 48". If you want kids to hit them more, the two easiest ways is to make them BIGGER and set them LOWER to the GROUND. You can even get them on [Amazon!](#)

Can You Learn Leadership? – Anne Weinberg writes, "I was looking for a quote for a talk I was giving and knew it came from a Michael Brandwein book. You know that one about 'When we know what to expect, we're going to see more of it.' And the story about how a superb staff person can make up their own program. Anyway, how about reminding directors about Brandwein's books 'Training TERRIFIC Staff! A handbook of practical and creative tools for camps' and 'Learning Leadership - How to Develop Outstanding Teen Leadership Training Programs at Camp' (nice foreword by the way!)" -- Reach Anne at atw@stwmnd.net; order books at <http://www.michaelbrandwein.com/yproducts.html>

Drinking Water Keeps Everyone Healthier (part 2) – From Jill Makkay: "Here's how we help campers and counselors refill their water bottles: We have a dozen 5 gallon Home Depot Water Coolers set up around the entire camp facility. They are filled first thing in the morning and throughout the day as needed. Makes it easy to drink water with their counselors; often!" -- jmakkay@hamiltonymca.org

Crafting Friendships – When the weather is nice, mom says "Go outside and play." Just because the *supplies* for a program are kept inside doesn't mean the *activity* needs to happen there, too. Arts and crafts are almost ALWAYS done in the "craft hut." But why? Everyone would rather be under a tree at a picnic table. Two great things to do under that tree are Friendship Bracelets or Leather Craft, which are very social activities and result in great gifts and souvenirs to take home. KEYS TO SUCCESS: have kids sit across from each other (it's the talking that makes it great); be in the shade; and for beading cover the table with a piece of carpet and the beads won't roll away! Leather supplies from TandyLeather.com; Get "[Basics of Bead Stringing](#)" for \$9 from Amazon; Beading supplies: Try bestbuybeads.com and call them for custom starter-kits for camps. Real bargain beads (\$1 for 14") at <http://dollarbead.com/>. Or just go to your local Michaels or Hobby Lobby.

Didn't Hire a Friendship Crafter? – You can't beat a "Klutz" book for easy-to-follow instructions. Get the "[Friendship Bracelets](#)" book (from Amazon for \$12 at this link, and a whole-lotta floss while you're at it) and you get enough supplies for a whole group. Others from Klutz: Hemp Bracelets, Best Paper Airplanes, Juggling... *Any counselor can be your Friendship Crafter!*

Staff Training Photo – Here's the best camper birthday card I've ever seen. Get your staff to hold up two newsprint banners. The top one says "Happy Birthday;" the one below it of equal length is left blank. Print up enough 4x6 copies for every camper (as little as 10 cents each online). Take a Sharpie and write the camper's name on the bottom banner; mail for their birthday. WOW that's cool! -- *(Thanks to Bob Gagner at YMCA Camp Icaghowan WI, Bob.Gagner@YMCAmpls.org).*

DECIDE! – That's so often the difference between a fully functioning camp and an uncomfortable group of individuals. Summer is the BEST time to build your utopian dream; to take steps toward the Promised Land. But FRIST you'll need Ten Commandments; and for business (especially camps), these are the best I've seen: <http://ahaleadership.com/2011/05/09/> (In a hurry? Just read the ten headings the first time through, print it out, stick it on your door). – Thanks to Bill Sengstock, Director of Facilities and Camps, Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan Bill bsengstock@gssem.org

(I get a lot of requests for the "Summer Camp Punch List" from last year. It includes many of the facility things I most often see left undone when camps open for the summer. Here's the direct link: http://www.garyforster.com/documents/Facility-Tips_June-2010.pdf).

New Merit Badge – If you're a former Boy Scout like me, you'll want to support this effort to create a "Duct Tape Merit Badge" <http://www.dtmb.gobot.com/custom.html>

"Bring me all of your dreams,

You dreamers*...

Bring me all of your Heart melodies

That I may wrap them

In a blue cloud-cloth

Away from the too-rough fingers

Of the world."

- Langston Hughes

* (I think he meant to say "counselors and campers." -- Gary)

"If you don't have a dream, how can you have a dream come true?" - Jiminy Cricket

"Ambition is a dream with a V8 engine." - Elvis Presley

Best wishes for YOUR dreams,

Gary

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