

May 2012

## Gary's Camping Newsletter

### *Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders*

"Economists tell us that the reason to care is that it increases customer retention, profitability and brand value. For me, though, that's beside the point (and even counter to the real goal). Caring gives you a compass, a direction to head and most of all, a reason to do the work you do in the first place."

– [Seth Godin](#)

**Worthless Waiting?** – I visit a LOT of camps, and most take great pride in their daily schedule. On paper. But in practice I see kids doing an awful lot of waiting. Between activities. Before and after meals. And this waiting is usually done in very boring places -- nothing to do and no place to sit. Kids could be teaching each other games and making new friends through these experiences. I suggest some of the following:

**Building Places that Build Friends** –Here's a colorful handout of lots of successful pick-up games that will engage your campers at those critical locations where they gather between activities and before meals. If you've got one Gaga Pit why don't you have another? And if you *don't* have one, WHY THE HECK NOT?!? Get your staff to create some of these before (or when!) the kids arrive:  
<http://garyforster.com/library.php> You'll find Gaga rules and drawings there, too.

**Hip Pocket Programing** – Starting fun where there isn't any is one of the most wonderful skills we can give our campers. Imagine them going off to college, being able to creatively relax and laugh with a group of new friends WITHOUT first loosening up with alcohol? "Camp people" get more out of life.

"Moose" Jackson uses his non-summer months better than most for solving problems like this. One such solution is his hip-pocket activity guide; 50 spiral-bound 4 ½" wide pages of games, riddles, minute-mysteries, and more that counselors can use to role-model "starting the fun." And for as little as \$4 each, why don't you quickly spend 100 bucks and get these into the hands of your new staff?

<http://recpros.corecommerce.com/Summer-Camp-Store/> (This could be WAY more useful than that big inflatable thing you've been coveting!)

**Friendship Bracelets Make Friends** – One kid teaches another; they sit around and talk; they give them as gifts; they wear as keepsakes. A perfect camp activity. Here's a "How-To" well worth printing out and pinning to cabin walls: <http://www.michaelannmade.com/2011/07/woven-friendship-bracelet-tutorial.html>

**Play Pen** – Speaking of the Connecticut Camp Guys, they’ve created a sweet little tool for camp counselors: a ball-point pen with a pull-out scroll listing 20 great activities they can do on-the-spot without props (from Ultimate Camp Resource). The other side has quick tips on “How to Make a Good Session GREAT and Avoid Burn-Out!” They come with a printable description of all of the activities. This would be a cool gift, especially for first-year staff. For as little as \$2 each:  
<http://www.ctcampguys.com/images/Play%20Pen%20Flyer.pdf>

**“Let’s give them something to talk about.”** – Some kids and staff follow sports. Having a shared interest is a great tool for friend-making and friend-keeping. We can help model this at camp. Put up a bulletin board near where kids gathered at the flagpole before meals. Each morning post the front page of the newspaper’s sports section, and that day’s box scores for baseball. Dozens of kids will gather ‘round to talk baseball every day. When the Olympics start the end of July, there’ll be sports fans of every type interested in what teams are winning in “their” sport. Rooting for teams from many countries is a terrific way to celebrate diversity.

**Gary’s Biggest “Ah-Ha!”** – This continues to be my most popular magazine article; I’m guessing because it rings true to so many people (because like me, so many wish we had discovered this sooner!) A good handout for your camp board, your boss, and summer camp leaders:  
<http://garyforster.com/articles.php> If you want your campers to come back in 2013, you need this now.

**Good Use for Old Tennis Courts** – What if you could slow-down the game of volleyball so that players had more time to get in position, and heighten the sense of anticipation? That’s “Inverted Volleyball” or “Nitro Ball.” Use a tennis net (or volleyball net set low) and serve as usual; but from that point on the ball MUST bounce once between every hit (even between the maximum three hits per side). You can spike it down or bump it up no matter where you are. Use any kind of playground ball; any number of players. <http://www.peuniverse.com/Videos/VideoDetail/tabid/221/IndexID/803/Default.aspx> -- *Thanks to Brian Patenaude; passed along by that “Connecticut Camp Guy” Mark Pooler.*

**Questions for Discussions with Teenage Campers** – One of my favorite activities with teens was borrowed from Camp Tecumseh, our “Senior Village Workshops.” When the younger cabin groups were getting ready for bed, the four oldest cabins met in our nicest meeting room, sprawling on the carpeted floor. Each night had a theme: working toward goals, peer pressure, becoming a better friend, the pressures to succeed in school, creativity... a couple dozen to choose from. We’d start out with a story or skit or song, and sit in small groups of a counselor and 5 or 6 campers. Then we’d ask short open-ended questions. The teens loved getting to talk about their own thoughts and feelings in these close, intimate groups. The session would last about 45 minutes, but spilled over into the way they treated each other on the way back to their cabins. They matured before our eyes. Here are a few good questions:  
<http://www.marcandangel.com/2010/03/29/25-beautifully-illustrated-thought-provoking-questions/>  
If you’ve got some good sources for questions, would you share them with us? – [gary@garyforster.com](mailto:gary@garyforster.com)

**Don’t Waste Leather** – Cub Scout and Girl Scout leader Paula Hrbacek has some great ideas in her craft blog. For instance, if you take the high cost out of leathercraft kids will be more likely to do it at home, too. She tells clever ways to make your own tools, and a super idea: use foam plates to practice on before

using real leather. (And here's my addition: get old leather belts from Goodwill to use as raw material for bracelets and key-rings). <http://www.examiner.com/article/cut-the-cost-of-leather-crafts>

**Memories You Can See and Touch** – Jon Kuypers, director of Camp Abnaki, VT shares: “We’ve been taking cabin photos for a while and still marvel at how cheap and quickly we can print photos and how much parents and kids love them. Then we started to branch out. Each session in addition to our cabin photos we take pictures of any sibling pairs on camp. Sometimes there are camper pairs, staff pairs, and even camper/staff pairs. You want a great way to make mom melt on check out day? Give her a free photo of her kids with their arms around each other at camp. Sometimes we have to prod them a little “ok guys, give us a big hug like you love each other”. We even have a bunch of staff who come down each session and pose too.” – reach Jon at [jkuypers@gbymca.org](mailto:jkuypers@gbymca.org)

**What Women Want** – 95% of camp registrations are made by moms, and mom's number one concern is “Safety.” Camp Chingachgook has one of the best signs I've ever seen -- “Our camp staff have three top priorities: 1. safety 2. Safety 3. SAFETY.”

One of the interesting findings from ACA's Outcomes research: kids feel physically safe at camps, but not always EMOTIONALLY safe, and by a wide margin. That confirms what we've heard from parent/camper evaluations for years: bullying is a major problem at camp for all ages and both sexes. Here's my advice: teach your staff to have *infinite patience* with kids and the mistakes they make in learning character, but have **ZERO tolerance** for behavior that is hurtful to others. Don't let a single instance of put-downs, exclusive cliques, swearing or physical intimidation go without reaction. Not one - - without using it as an opportunity to teach self-control.

“The Bully Coach” Dr. Joel Haber has “12 goals toward prevention.” Excellent for staff training now, and an in-service review, later. <http://www.acacamps.org/bullying/bullying-prevention#twelve>

**Katniss and her Mockingjay** – Paula Schaefer DeTellis writes: “Gary, I saw your comments last month about archery. My daughter and I just went out and got our archery certification. I was able to get the level two certification, which means I can certify any staff at the level one. The book has weeks of lesson plans all made out as part of the class. There are plenty of skills to work on with the kids. I agree with you that archery will increase in popularity. With the "Hunger Games" and the new Disney movie that is coming out this summer called "Brave" (It has another bow and arrow wielding heroine.), it will definitely shoot through the roof.” – *for a list of Archery Instructor Courses:*

<https://webpoint.usarchery.org/wp/Events/ListEvents.wp>; and see Paula's camp at [www.campwoodhaven.com](http://www.campwoodhaven.com)

**Feel Good** – Your summer staff (and their parents) might enjoy this upbeat video as they prepare to head for camp: <http://pinterest.com/pin/260505159665996562/> (Thanks to Artie Lange, Eric Rightor, and Jen "JD" Deasy.)

**Replace the Negatives** – Sherman Lake (MI) YMCA's resident camp director Paul Kreider writes: “At the Brandwein Leadership Seminar last month, Michael mentioned that he wished every camp would teach something about ‘positive self-talk’ at the archery range. So often at the firing line, we hear campers mumbling awfully negative things to themselves as they prepare to shoot (‘I suck at this,’ ‘I’ll never do this right,’ ‘Missed AGAIN,’ etc...). Turns out, this really affects their performance.

“Normally, everyone shoots one arrow, and then before we begin a second round, I briefly remind everyone of some of the finer points of proper shooting technique. Then, the second round happens with about the same results as the first.

“One day, I did an experiment. After the first round of shooting, I spoke for about 60 seconds on positive self-talk – what it means, what it sounds like, and some examples of negative self-talk that I had heard on the firing line during the previous round. I demonstrated what both negative and positive self-talk looks and sounds like and how it might affect my performance. And then, we shot the second round.

“In the second round, EVERY camper shot better than the first, had a whole lot more fun doing it, felt better about themselves afterward, and walked away not only with a new ‘level-one’ skill, but a lasting life skill as well.

“This summer for staff training, our schedules will reflect a more intentional effort to teach life skills at camp activity areas. As Brandwein says, ‘Where you focus is where you go!’ – reach Paul at [PaulK@ymcasl.org](mailto:PaulK@ymcasl.org)

**And Awayyyyy We Go!**

– Jackie Gleason

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“The only way to have a friend is to be one.”

-- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

“There is nothing better than a friend,

unless it is a friend with chocolate.” -- *Linda Grayson*

“I had a friend who was a clown. When he died, all his friends went to the funeral in one car.” -- *Steven Wright*

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Best wishes,

Gary

Want more campers next summer? Have me spend 24 hours in your camp this summer.

“Camp Solutions for Great Camp Leaders”

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