

June 2010

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Given enough coffee,
I could rule the world."

— Author unknown

Improve Your Counselors? Get Better Coffee – I'm not kidding. Can you imagine the reaction if you had *good* coffee for breakfast? (Want to make an impression on your tripping staff? Give them a box of Starbucks "Via" tubes just before they leave on a trip!)

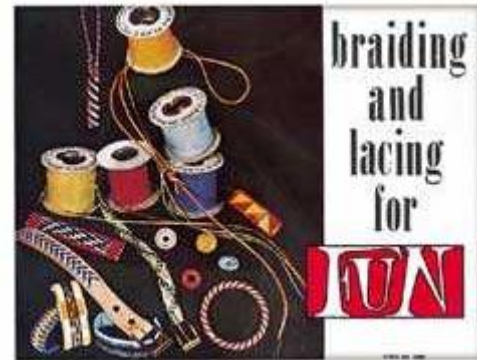
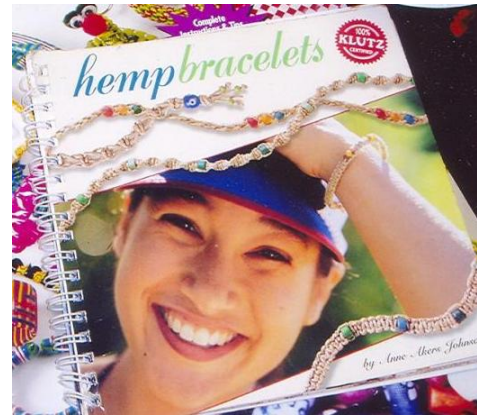
Improve Your Campers? Get Better Water – I'm not kidding here, either. Our kids and counselors want to carry water bottles with them. WE plead with them to "hydrate," but where do we expect them to fill all those bottles? Here's another case of our own paradigm being behind the curve. We SHOULD have a whole line of gooseneck faucets outside the dining hall, dispensing cold, filtered water. THEN you'd see your campers modeling their counselors, and everyone fillin' up their Nalgene bottles. Coolest thing I've seen? A Texas camp that keeps a large cooler of ice cubes and scoops in the dining room just for filling water bottles. *That's* remark-able. (See a photo in the PDF version of this newsletter at www.garyforster.com) (You know that dehydration is the initial cause for SO many sick kids at camp. So do something about it!)



Do You Matter? – Everyone wishes they had better alumni records. Wah wah wah. If your camp changed kids lives (campers and staff), they'll find *you*. And if you did a *great* job, their lives will show it. Like Sam Moulton, the Executive Editor of *Outside Magazine*, who proclaims in the June 2010 issue (p.76) that his own passion for the outdoors came from his experiences at YMCA Camp Manito-wish. He titled the article "Camps that Kick Ass." (Sam knows his audience!)

Instant Camp Activities that Build Friends and Send Stuff Home to Mom – I'm convinced that we've let too many traditional camp activities slip away because we have so many counselors who were never campers themselves. Protecting critically important traditions that really work at making friendships *and* letting parents see a piece of camp now falls on leadership (you). Don't hesitate getting personally involved so that sure-fire activities are a part of THIS and every summer. Here are places to get the stuff:

- **Friendship Bracelets** (from Klutz Books) shows how to make them: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1570540535?ie=UTF8&tag=jennifselkesw-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1570540535> Embroidery floss (from anywhere) is turned like straw into gold. Conversation and lessons woven into memories to keep, and to give away.
- **Beads** – A variation of the friendship bracelet, but more automatically social because kids are intentionally set up to face each other and share the beads, tools and materials. The most clever thing I ever learned? Cover the top of picnic tables with indoor-outdoor carpet for beading. No more beads rolling onto the floor! Everyone sharing... talking... listening. Free how-to videos at <http://www.shipwreckbeads.com/support/docs/videos>. It's hard to beat the S&S price on glass seed beads <http://www.ssw.com/arts-and-crafts-supplies/beading-and-jewelry-making/glass-beads/> and the wire, elastic thread, clasps, crimps, and tools.
- **Lanyard (Gymp, Craft Lace, Boondoggle)** – So many names for the same timeless activity! And when your campers bring them home as gifts, their *parent's* own camp memories rushing back. Priceless. And for you, it's cheap. But so few counselors know how to do it, you'll need to teach them first. And the cheapest and oldest book is still the best: "Braiding and Lacing for Fun," available for only \$3 from Tandy Leather (who also has a good price on the craft strip, too). Discount code #1005CF http://www.tandy Leatherfactory.com/home/61935-00.aspx?feature=Product_4.
- **Gymp/Lanyard instructions free** – Very good online instructions. You can give the kids the web site so they can take instructions home with them, too (for when they want to tackle the ultimate "Eight-Strand Tornado Corkscrew!" I still have mine.) http://www.boondogleman.com/prj_diamond_braid.htm



Punch Up Your "Punch List" – (That's what contractors call the final to-do-list created with the owners' walk-around just before completion.) I'm sure your maintenance staff already have too many things to do before your next session starts; but are they the *most important* jobs? I've created a list of critical things I see *all the time* when I visit camps during the summer. Print it out at <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php> and share it with your head of maintenance (or *your* boss if you need money!)

Newsletter of the Month – Nice use of photos, easy to read; just a single column so you can read it as fast as e-mail, (just because Constant Contact can let add lots of columns and crazy fonts, doesn't mean you should!) http://campaign.constantcontact.com/render?v=001tCA0n-fejtsE4kai-JOtO_wK0u0hT50yW2CvfL54hCR2wFWXx7fAJmLue3pj15yohOdLFF89cgRLQkrEe60yZpLCTVXXrCfvYMnJ7s4lDR9mZC7hpWTxmw%3D%3D

How Many Empty Beds Do You Have? – If it's more than 6 per session, then you're marketing job isn't done yet. (You have a HUGE PILE of money you're about to flush down the toilet if you don't fill those beds). And I'd be willing to bet that your web site is *still* lacking. (If parents had been able to get their questions answered on your web site, they would have signed up. They didn't.) The two most common problems (in 2/3 of all camp web sites) are:

- 1.) **No photos of your facilities and property**; no map of where you're located.
Here's a very simple but very effective *single page* that makes THEIR camp more believable than yours: http://www.southwoods.com/facilities_home.html . Should take your "web guy" less than an hour to create IF you provide the photos and captions; link it to your home page.
- 2.) **Only a single paragraph describing** summer camp. (Take a look. Two-thirds of you will be shocked at your own web site when you see it from Mom's perspective). You probably have a paragraph that tells a little about "why" your camp is so good. Great counselors, dedicated staff, a *list* of stuff kids can do. And that's it. But *every other* camp has that same stuff. The best have these: WHY we're different (with photos to back it up), HOW you can expect your child to have changed as a result of your camp experience, and WHAT components make that happen differently at your camp (with photos) than all the others. And for Pete's sake put in lots of photos of counselors working with your kids. Kids hugging kids does nothing to *differentiate* your camp!
- 3.) WHY NOW? Because in this economy **moms are STILL LOOKING** for camp and they're NOT LOOKING at *you* for long. GET someone to do this for your web site RIGHT NOW. Need examples of quick, simple fixes they can just copy? Just send me an e-mail.
- 4.) Why did I say "more than 6 per session? Because if your program is ANY good you'll ask your campers, "**Who would like to stay another week?**" about Thursday afternoon, and by calling those parents THAT NIGHT you'll fill about 6 beds. Every week. Don't ask? You just swept thousands of dollars out with the trash, you missed the opportunity to *really* make the summer for kids, and more important, share with parents how much their children love your camp. But maybe you've got more important things to do. (**All of you that DO these things...** how about some short testimonials we can **share with your peers** that need the encouragement to make this a priority? Send them to: gary@garyforster.com)

Web site of the Month – Simple is better. Here's a beautiful example of the MOST complicated you should get. Great first impression, easy to navigate. Everything a first-time camper parent could ask for, SO WHY DON'T YOU???! <http://www.ymcasv.org/ymcacampcampbell/>

You Just Never Know – Your camp is around since 1948, and for the first time an unbelievable lightning storm hits. And when you wake up in the morning one of your cabins just isn't there anymore. <http://www.wfmz.com/news/23820765/detail.html>

Black Fly Problems? Knats, no-see-em's, even those relentlessly aggressive deer-flies: whatever you've got, they can ruin summer. Here's an outdoorsman's tip I recently learned: Get some duct tape and position several strips on the top of a ball cap sticky side out. Those nasty critters fly around your head and get stuck to the tape. Kids will be amazed at how many they collect! Have competitions! Guess why one person attracts more than another! All in the name of scientific exploration!

“It ain't what you *don't* know that gets you into trouble.

It's what you *know for sure*, that just ain't so.” -- Mark Twain

“All generalizations are false. Including this one.” -- also Mark Twain. What a guy.

Best Wishes for your Best Summer ever,

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

“Camp Solutions for Great Camp Leaders”

It's a good time to book fall board presentations to prepare for strategic planning.

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