

June 2011

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

The teacher is one who makes two ideas grow
where only one grew before. - Elbert Hubbard

Using Coffee as a Carrot – Mary Gifford-Smith has 550 day-campers show up every morning. “We started making a big urn of coffee for the early-arriving staff. Counselors started showing up earlier so they could grab a mug with each other. Now with the combination of serving GOOD free coffee (and shutting it off at 8:15 a.m.!) we don't have any staff arriving late!” -- *reach her at Camp Combe, NY -- msmith@ymca-cnw.org*.

Gary's Soapbox – If you're already doing this, you're one of the FEW who understand the great risk the Norovirus (“Cruise Ship Virus”) poses for all camps. DOZENS of camps are shut down completely for a session or longer every summer when 1/3 or more of their campers and staff became violently ill... spread from a single person who brought it to camp. And each of these disasters was preventable. How do we know? Because once they adopt the hygiene they should have had to begin with, the problem goes away.

- 1.) I shouldn't be able to find a single staff member at your camp who doesn't know what the Norovirus is and how to prevent its spread.
- 2.) Don't tell me your campers “wash their hands” before lunch because you and I both know you're kidding yourself. All it takes is one person with the virus on their hands to grab the dining hall door handle, pass the bug juice, or use the same tongs as everyone else at the salad bar; and everyone gets it.
- 3.) Use water with bleach (follow directions on the bottle) to sanitize everything kids touch several times a day. Just a quick spray; don't wipe it off.
- 4.) Teach kids that “antibacterial soap” doesn't kill germs. Soap is for loosening dirt so that water can rinse it away. That's why it takes 20 seconds. Kids will wash hands WITH their counselors if you've got a place where a whole cabin can do it at once. (And sing “Happy Birthday” to measure 20 seconds.) Handwashing this way is VERY effective. (For a fun science project, teach kids *why* soap loosens dirt. It has to do with reducing surface tension. They'll see soap as magical. It makes water...*wetter*. Google it.)
- 5.) Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers (Purell, etc) immediately before food is served: at the table, as the first stop of the salad bar, before the BBQ buffet; even send individual wipes along on picnics and cookouts. Make it a habit to never start without it.
- 6.) Teach all campers and staff to NEVER share water bottles (this has proven to be a key source when an entire cabin comes down with the illness at the same time).
- 7.) All of your supervisors, foodservice, and maintenance staff should read the CDC's easy-to-understand info: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm>

June is “National Yo-Yo Month” – (Take a cellist to lunch.)

“Tree Mail!” – Hawthorne Hollow Girl Scout Camp (MI) has a regular suburban mailbox on a wood post in front of every cabin. (Less than \$10 at HomeDepot). Each has the cabin name (making it very easy to find where you’re staying). The mailboxes are used for lots of things: to hide clues for scavenger hunts (kind of a low-tech geo-caching), to deliver “teasers” for special events, schedules to weekend groups, and for this summer camp retro-ritual: Each day one cabin is responsible for sorting and delivering the mail (what a cool responsibility!) After lunch they deposit it in each cabin’s mailbox and flip up the red flag. From inside the cabin you hear, “Mail’s Here!” as an excited runner comes flying out to retrieve it. (Great memories are made of such details!) – Thanks to Jenny Fehn, jfehn@gssem.org



. See a photo in the printable version Gary’s Camping Newsletter at <http://www.garyforster.com/newsletter.php>

Make Crossword Puzzles – with the help of a web-tool. Here’s just one example:

<http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/>

He’s Such a Kidder – After being told at lunch that a raccoon was seen walking around during the day, Fairview Lake Camp (NJ) property manager Steve Michaelis mumbled, “Nowhere in my job description does it say I’m in charge of diseased animals. Otherwise I’d have to take out half the staff.”

sMichaelis@metroymcas.org

Don’t Get Fired – “Really, that’s your advice?” Maybe you’ll like this better: If your boss is confident s/he knows what you’re doing and why, you’ll have much less “backseat driving” and your Purchase Orders will more often be approved without question. One CEO put it this way, “I’ve got bigger problems elsewhere.” Yet so few of the camp directors I know take advantage of this opportunity because we usually wait for our bosses (or boards) to come see us and praise us. Try this: at least once a week, write a one-page summary of one or two accomplishments at camp. Be sure to include at least one story of an individual camper or counselor, and a photo that helps tell that story. (Watch these two 30-second videos on what Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg says about it.) <http://www.30secondmba.com/user/mark-zuckerberg>. Powerful people are starving for good news to share with each other. Give them something they can carry in a pocket or portfolio (or iPhone) and share over lunch or at a board meeting. It’s not about numbers, it’s about *story*. (You’ll be surprised how much your spouse, your parents, and the relatives of all of your young staff would appreciate this, too!)

What Stinks? – Ever have a bathroom or cabin that smells bad no matter what you do? Worth having at least one bottle of this stuff just in case you need it on check-in day!

<http://www.scoe10x.com/scripts/SCOE10X-Odor-Eliminator.asp>

Photo-Shoot Storyboard – Yeah, 90% of camp web sites *still* suck. Probably yours, too. And one reason is *you don't have* the right photos; (photos that show counselors and campers actually *doing things together*.) If you *really* don't want that to happen again, get a cork-board and hang it where staff can see it. Start cutting out photos from brochures (not just camps) and web sites (just right-click on the photo and all except flash slide-shows will let you “copy” it to your own collection where you can then “print” it). Push-pin them on your cork-board *as you collect them*. Add sticky-notes on *what* about the photo is important (“shows safety, instruction, and beautiful waterfront”). Then use that board during summer/retreats/outdoor education to get exactly the shots you need. (Take some yourself; ask volunteers and staff who have a good eye to also take them.)



Quality Videos -- Camp Wabansi (WI) director Heidi Kruger writes, “THANK YOU for suggesting “Animoto” a few newsletters ago. We use it to make a video of every program we run now. We post them on our social media and even sell DVD's in our Camp Store. Anyone who hasn't purchased a subscription to this by now should do it - it's essentially like having a professional create your marketing material for pennies! Here are our latest ones: <http://animoto.com/play/onK6HE4Vn1tz3EF0X06Q3g> and <http://video214.com/play/4z14A0D1w10J07CiAkH06g/s/dark>.” -- Reach her at heidi.krueger@greenbaymca.org

Teach Skills, Not Luck – Former camper and current consultant to casinos world-wide, Jeff Compton says, “My sister mentioned a concern she had regarding the camp she sent her boys to last summer. She noticed that they had acquired a draw poker habit with lots of wild cards (2 & 3s). The boys also mentioned (and they liked the camp) that the staff (on break) were frequently seen playing poker with money on the table (small stakes I am sure – but still). Kids can learn a lot of good things from cards (especially how a common \$2 deck can provide lots of entertainment and skill training on a rainy day) – but it should be restricted to simple games for younger kids (fish, old maid, concentration or whatever) and more skill games for tweens (rummy, gin, bridge). Poker *with lots of wild cards* is a pure game of chance – and very little skill. And gambling should never be encouraged with campers (even for chips.)” -- jeffrey.compton@compdance.com

Drill Baby, Drill! – If your lifeguards aren't doing drills every day, they're being cheated.
 1. *They keep you alert* – The biggest problem with being a lifeguard is... nothing happens. You scan and scan and never see anyone on the bottom. A partner gets in the water with sweatpants on and quietly slips them off and leaves them on the bottom. Another on shore starts a stopwatch to see how long it takes for a

guard to spot them. (The goal is less than 10 seconds). As soon as they're spotted the guard should yell "Clear the pool!" and proceeds to retrieve the "victim." A timer with a stopwatch yells "This is a Drill!" so nobody panics, and everyone gets to practice their part (including a buddy check for everyone else).

2. *They build respect* for the guard's skills and authority. Guards aren't cops (like most kids see them); they are highly trained safety professionals. Give them a chance to look like it and everyone will take them more seriously.

3. *They build team pride*. Before kids enter the waterfront, put on a "show." Play the theme from "Baywatch." Stand at attention, drop and do push-ups, run in place, grab rescue-tubes and do simultaneous rescue entries into the water. Take your positions to cheers from the crowd!

More at: <http://www.aquaticsintl.com/education/lifesavers.html>

Prevent Nature Deficit Disorder This Summer – Just because kids go to camp doesn't mean they actually spend much time outdoors or come in contact with nature. Richard Louve presents a list for parents (that you can hand out on their way home). There are some challenges here we can use, too.

<http://www.childrenandnature.org/blog/2011/05/23/what-are-you-doing-this-summer/>

Helping Kids Grow...Vegetables – Lots of camps have tried. Most end up as weed-patches. Here are a couple resources on how to make your efforts more "fruitful." Key words: high-yield (think green bush beans), drip irrigation is fun for kids to put together (with a timer), and mulch (because kids don't like to weed.) <http://www.homefarming.com/> and <http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/design/tips>

"Well done is better than well said."

- Benjamin Franklin

"If it's free, it's advice; if you pay for it, it's counseling; if you use either one, it's a miracle."

- Jack Adams (1838-1918) US historian, author

"You are a poor, pathetic, gullible fool who seeks advice from bakery products."

-- (Found in a fortune cookie)

Best wishes and thanks for all you do,

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

“Great Solutions for Great Camp Leaders”

Q: “How come I never see my camp mentioned in the newsletter?”

A: *When was the last time you sent me an e-mail about something that works at your camp?*

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