

July 2012

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Most of us spend too much time on what is *urgent* and not enough time on what is *important*. -- Stephen R. Covey, author of *"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"* (which sold more than 15 million copies in 38 languages), died on Monday July 16th at an Idaho hospital from injuries he suffered in a bicycle accident in April. He was 79.

A Masterful Response – Fairview Lake Camp in NJ lost one of its most historic buildings last week to a lightning strike and fire. You can just imagine parents' intense concern and the grieving of alumni. Executive Bob Kahle's interview the day-after is the best response I've ever heard in a camping crisis. Worth watching to see what and how he addresses each stakeholder's concerns with real caring: <http://www.njherald.com/story/19070646/fairview-lake-camp-building-burns-after-lightning-strike>

Do-It-Yourself Water Park – Here's the premise: Real "splash parks" get boring pretty quick because the only thing interactive about it is getting wet. And we're teaching kids that when it gets hot you need to spend a lot of money to cool off. That's not what you did when YOU were a kid; you got a lawn sprinkler and set it up in the yard.

Now imagine you tell a group of campers, "Gee kids, I'm really sorry but we were gonna' build you a water park for this summer but we just didn't have the time. All we've got is this pile of parts, so we'll have to wait until next year. (Next to you is a pile of 6 hoses, 5 different types of sprinklers, and a couple of three-way hose attachments to hook the hoses together.) One kid will immediately say, "We could build it! Let us have the stuff!" If you're *real* good you'll say something like, "I don't know; do you guys think you could figure out how all of this stuff works? You'd have to try it a bunch of different ways to test the best design. Could you do that?") Then give them a piece of dry lawn that needs watering anyway.

The next day let a new group do it in a different piece of lawn. Maybe offer to let them look through the maintenance shop for more supplies, like a stepladder and some quick-grips. NOT ONLY will they have more fun than a splash park, they'll have learned to CREATE their OWN solutions WITHOUT SPENDING MONEY! (Though *you'll* have spent about \$120 at Walmart or ask parents to bring in their old ones.) Parents: be sure to do this with your own kids, too. Do NOT set it up for them. Let THEM figure it out!

Some Assembly Required Miniature Golf Course – Apply that same principle to mini-golf. It's a little fun to *play* mini-golf; it's an *adventure* to actually build a course out of 2x4's and logs and old tires and rocks and other junk. I've seen daycamp kids bring stuff off the bus with junk they got from their dad's garage to add to their designs! This isn't just a one-period job. Let them come back again and again to work on it and "try out" their designs. And re-design. And host a tournament. They'll want their parents

to play it when they get picked-up (warn the parents that they *need* to make the time to see their kid's accomplishment). Then put it into a pile for the next session's campers to discover and start afresh. (You can get putters for \$2 or less at Goodwill; free from camp board members! Everyone wants an excuse to buy a new putter! And ask them for used balls, too!) Grandparents: try this one with your grandkids.

Will Work for Food – John Tilley of Camp Coniston included a request to bring items for the local food bank with his check-in day information. “We gathered 400 pounds the first check-in day. Many parents said they would bring more food to check out. Many parents (more than 40) mentioned how great they thought this was... teaching kids how to care about others.” And imagine the impact on their small local community. – John@coniston.org

Simple Thing = Huge Impact – Zayanne writes from Camp Surf (CA): “Just stepped in from check-in to share a quick idea that is working really well for us... We wanted to make sure campers feel welcome from the moment they arrive. Our answer – quick nametags! Families are greeted in the parking lot and right away we have the campers write their name on a white mailing label (a lot cheaper than buying nametags!). Now during check-in all staff know which kids are staying at camp (and which are little brothers and sisters) and we can greet our campers by name. Staff also know that green writing means it is the campers first summer, and blue means they are returning so they already know where to get wetsuits and where the camp store is etc. As an added bonus, all campers can start learning each other's names right away, instead of waiting until the end of check-in for name games and making their permanent ‘wood cookie’ nametag.” -- reach Zay at zgardner@ymca.org

Camp Directors: Carpe Diem Yourself – If you're in the last weeks of summer camp, you may have succumbed to the most alluring job: responding to daily problems and being the hero. I often fell into Stephen Covey's quadrant of “urgent” tasks. I wasn't *making* time for the *important* things that would yield big results in the future. Fortunately, I had several mentors that not only set good examples, but expected me to keep up. From them I learned:

- Every Thursday during free swim, ask the campers “Who wants to come back for another week! I'll call your mother and see if you can stay!” Those additional campers could be the difference between making budget or not. And even if a mom said “no” it gave her something to tell her friends about: “My child likes *our* camp so much he didn't want to come home!”
- Thinking of trying something new next year? *Experiment* with it *this* year first, with just a portion of the camp. There were times I was sure something was going to work, and it was a good thing I found out before “betting the farm” on it. And other times we hit a home-run and quickly rolled it out for all the campers to try. Class schedules, overnights, special meals, themed activities, parent communications, etc.
- Get feedback *during* the summer, not just after. Talk to parents on the phone or in person a week after their child gets home and you hear a whole different set of things than you hear at check-out! And then make changes right now so kids in current sessions benefit.
- If a parent complains, say how sorry you are that it happened. That you really want to know more so you can make sure everyone learns from the experience. If they ask for a refund, give it. I was shocked at how often anger was turned around. By listening instead of defending, they almost always closed with “It was a good summer overall. She'll want to come back. I just wanted to make sure you knew (and *cared*) about this.” Now I'm saddened every time I hear a

director argue with a parent, as if “being right” was more important than the parent’s inflamed perception of the director’s lack of concern.

- And schedule time, every day if possible, to be where campers and staff are gathered and just look “available” to listen. (My first camp director Bob Wright use to make a big deal about coming down to the pool in an ugly bathing suit and making one big splash from the diving board. Then he’d sit in the sun on the deck and “hold court” for whoever wanted to talk.) No clipboard, not moving fast, just watching and enjoying. And asking open-ended questions like, “Tell me about this?” By listening more than talking, the real important things come to the surface. We succeed one child, one counselor, at a time.

Website of the Month – I’m really disappointed with most of the ways camps share photos during the summer... parents can’t copy them, often thumbnails are too small, no captions, too many each day, no action photos. Look at this nice gallery (scroll down to the “session” photos):

<http://www.lwycamp.org/camp-photos/> Click on one of the large thumbnails and it opens in a photo viewer that let you “right click” to save photos you like. –For info contact Tim tmcelravy@lwycamp.org

Copyright Infringement? – Brent Ayres of Camp Surf (CA) complimented my music selections for camp slideshows, but warned about using music without permission, suggesting Animoto as a great slideshow program they use that includes a selection of permission-granted music. Good advice!

But if you’re an ACA camp, your membership includes a special ASCAP license to use copyright music for your campers and camper families. See: <http://www.acacamps.org/membership/ascap> and the “FAQ’s about using music on DVDs.” (That should help you sleep easier!)

And YouTube even has a service where they will attach your choice of music in return for their “buy here” link for the tune. Search “approved music” for how to do it.

What’s Cookin’ Good Lookin’? – Beautiful YMCA CAMP CLASSEN in Oklahoma is looking for a full-time food services director...it will pay about \$33,000 per year plus housing, utilities, and 12% paid retirement. Contact camp executive SHall@ymcaokc.org.

“Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.” — [Thich Nhat Hanh](#)

“Summer will end soon enough, and childhood as well.” — [George R.R. Martin, \(A Game of Thrones\)](#)

“Sun is shining. Weather is sweet. Make you wanna move your dancing feet.” — [Bob Marley](#)

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Sunny regards,

Gary

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Stephen Covey's Seven Habits are:

Habit 1: Be Proactive

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

Habit 3: Put First Things First

Habit 4: Think Win-Win

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

Habit 6: Synergize

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw