

July 2014

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

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"A clever person solves problems, a wise person avoids them."

– Albert Einstein

Death at Camp – This recent news story (and Einstein's quote) reminds us that standard procedures like monitoring an inexpensive "weather radio" and checking weather radar online could mean the difference between life and death to your campers and staff: <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/camp-director-speaks-out-killer-storm-moved-upon-us-so-n152071> -- thanks to Norris Lineweaver

Make Books Cool – Please take a look at this [article](#) about "Little Free Libraries," that includes one built by my son and installed on the street outside my brother's house in San Diego. Imagine having a mini-library (a box on a post) in each village of your camper villages or sections. Being cleverly crafted and the incongruity of them being outdoors will attract kids and staff to see what's inside.. And because it was started by a Rotarian (and this article is from the Rotary magazine), I'll bet you could get a local club to either pay for or build them for you. Or have campers do it. Ask parents to bring books when they check-in. Encourage counselors to add to them.

<http://therotarianmagazine.com/diy-libraries/> -- *Let me know if you've done anything like this, and what works best at camp –*
gary@garyforster.com



Support Your Camper-Parents – Most camps don't contact camper-parents at all while their kid is at camp. Yet it's the time parents are most concerned about their child. Many others send links to endless poorly-shot, unedited and uncropped photos that are painful for a parent to sort through. For the trust a parent places in you, and the cash they've put-out up front, don't you think they deserve a photo of THEIR child doing something at camp under the watchful eye of his/her counselor? The response you get from this is simply amazing; and generates terrific, spreadable, "Purple Cow" word-of-mouth. (*Here's an article you can print out and share with your photographers.*)

<http://www.northstarpubs.com/articles/cb/making-camp-sticky>

When an Activity Bombs – They called the bomb squad...

<http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2014/06/18/3117009/bomb-squad-baywood-summer-camp.html>

Safe Summer – Our friends at Safewise Consulting bring you a "one-sheet" of safety tips for summer camps. It's a good mid-summer staff refresher: <http://safe-wise.com/risk-management/newsletters.html>

Young workers are more likely to get injured at work. Every nine seconds a young American worker is injured on the job, making employees under 25 twice as likely to get hurt at work. Staff training and orientation, especially about safety and accident prevention, is essential for all organizations. With high rates of young worker injuries it is important that summer programs, which traditionally employ young staff, to spend time helping them to stay safe. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has a section of their [Website](#) dedicated to helping keep younger employees from harm. Find resources and information [HERE](#). – thanks to Mike Gurtler at Safewise.

High-Five Camp Rules – Seth Houser of Camp Arrowwood has a really clever way to help his campers remember their camp code of behavior. Which finger symbolizes each rule is one reason it works: It's logical, insightful, and even a little funny (that middle finger rule!) Worth a look; maybe try it this summer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYrVjOhEVJ8&feature=youtu.be>

SWAT Team – Camp Chandler's LITs all get practice building a positive attitude toward servant leadership by washing dishes in the dining hall as a part of their "Servant's Working All Together" Team. Can't you just imagine the Swat Team's skits at flagpole on how to properly scrape their plates, or use their napkin to wipe the sticky-stuff off their spoon and fork so it doesn't get baked-on in the dishwasher? -- Contact Justin Castanza, Assoc. Director jcastanza@ymcamontgomery.org

"You know what music is? It's a harmonic connection between all living beings." – Robin Williams in "August Rush"

Why Do We Sing Camp Songs? – Willy Therrien is one of the great philosophers of camping, and past director of Camp Takodah in NH. I asked Willy for his thoughts on how "intentionally" he and his staff used camp songs. He replied: "Here are a few reasons why we generally stick with traditional songs and hold off on using current pop songs for singing at camp:

1. **They sound better.** Great songs can be sung unaccompanied. The great folk songs of the 1900's and pop music written in Tin Pan Alley could be performed on a street corner or in someone's living room or parlor - sometimes with a small guitar or banjo. Today's pop music is crafted differently - it relies on instrumental hooks and rhythm tracks that marginalize the role of the singer. Vocal parts are more ornamental and designed to show off a vocalist's talent rather than to carry a melody. And those vocal parts sound pretty weak without an accompanying band or karaoke tape

2. **They're portable.** Campers sing camp songs all over the place - in the cabins, in the Dining Hall, in the shower, on the car ride home... Songs that sound good unaccompanied can get carried anywhere.

3. **They leave some mystery** - Remember when, as a child, your parents would talk about some things that you would understand 'when you got older?' By referencing adult themes like sexuality, violence, criminals, and death, old-time songs tend to use metaphors and innuendo that keep some mystery in the song. Old time songs also tend to refer to the consequences of dangerous acts in ways that resemble Roadrunner Cartoons - winding up in jail, having 48 kids, and blowing up the planet - rather than the explicit images in the lyrics of a lot of songs on the radio.

4. **They're unique to camp** - If you can hear it on the radio and sing it with your friends at school, what's the point of going away to camp? Things at camp should feel different, and songs from another era - or songs written at your camp - lend to that feeling of living in (and belonging to) another world.

5. **Feeling a part of Tradition** - As songs are passed from generation to generation, it's pretty cool for kids to go home singing the same songs their grandparents once sang. It gives families something to connect with one another about. That's important, since so few of our grandparents went to a camp that had a Ropes Course or Windsurfing...

6. **Challenge and Rewards** - When campers master learning some of the tongue-twisting lyrics and tricky melodies of a few of our camp songs, they feel some real accomplishment and mastery. It's also created a tradition where campers teach one another songs rather than staff having to teach kids - it gives them a kind of ownership in the camp experience.

7. **They can change** - The words to these songs changed dozens of times before they even arrived at our camp. We have multiple songs that go with these same melodies. The folk tradition lends itself to change, and that has made it easy to alter or omit songs when they don't fit well at camp. Some of our oldest camp songs had some racist overtones in them when I looked back at old word sheets. Glad to see they could evolve as our country's social awareness and morals evolved.

8. **Camp Pride** - We must have a dozen "pride" songs about how great our camp is. People can't spell our camp name without singing the words to in their head. There's nothing like hearing our campers roar some of these songs and cheers in the Dining Hall at the end of a great session at camp.

“**Finally**, I can't overlook the benefit of "new" camp songs. Songs don't have to be "Old Timey" to work at camp, though most of our songs are over 60 years old. We have some campers from other nations and ethnic backgrounds that have brought some great, positive music to camp that will be with us for decades. I can't wait to learn some new ones this summer.” -- *Willy Therrien* wtherrien@gmail.com

Best wishes for your best summer ever,

Gary

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