

September 2012

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"In summer, the song sings itself." ~ *William Carlos Williams*

Website of the Month – A Gold Star for the Lone Star – "Don't replace your website until your *new* site is *at least* as good as the old." That should be an obvious rule, but most YMCA camps, in their rush to comply with new branding guidelines, lost almost all of their photos and functionality in the transition. Thankfully, here's a well-thought-out exception the others can now use as a template:

http://www.ymcadallas.org/locations/camp_grady_spruce/. -- *Could you imagine a mother making such an important (and expensive) decision with anything less?*

Blog of the month – Deer Valley Family Camp's exec Todd Brinkman posted to keep families updated on the replacement of their cabins. Now it includes a slideshow of how the first cabin looked when the first family moved in! <http://deervalleyblog.wordpress.com/>

Programing Outside the Lines – Some camp counselors have more ideas than they can use. Others have lived a sheltered life; at least that's the break I cut the camps I visited this past summer where *coloring* was an activity. Not that it isn't a good thing for kids to do; but I think it wastes the unique opportunity camp has to give kids inspirational memories *initiated by their own counselor*. For example, "What do you think comes out at night when we go to sleep? Let's hang an old white sheet with a light on it and see what it attracts." <http://outsidemom.com/2012/08/finding-night-critters-using-a-black-light/> Or, "Let's hang food a couple feet over a patch of mud (and make plaster casts of the footprints the next day)." My point: collect cool ideas so your staff have a *library* of activities they can use.

Let's Bring Back Nature – "Back in the day" every camp use to have a "nature" counselor. But as it became harder to find people who could teach it (coinciding with the decline in scouting), most camps let it disappear in favor of "fun." Be retro, help kids love the natural world. <http://www.naturerocks.org/> (from the Nature Conservancy and Children In Nature Network). Be a hero, give your camper-parents activities they can do with their own kids this fall.

"I didn't know places like this still existed." – That's what John Tilley says is the most common reaction to a family tour of Camp Coniston, NH. Can that be said of your camp? (Coniston fills completely, months in advance. Must be a good strategy!) – john@coniston.org

"They Wrote The Book On Camping" – Literally, the book that's been the text for camp management courses for decades. It's been completely updated once again by camping legends Armand and Beverly Ball. The eighth edition of *Basic Camp Management* is now available for purchase in paperback or digital formats. From the [ACA Bookstore](#) and Amazon.

A Good Map is Hard to Find – Here’s a former camp guy and current camp volunteer that as a “side business” makes these really cool maps for camps. (Try the one on the right to see how the “layers” work in Active PDF): <http://mapcertain.com/?110030> -- Thanks to John Duntley

Be A Better Salesperson (part 1) – Michael Ungar’s article in the September *Camping Magazine* is a really brilliant description of the different components of a great camp experience. I suggest you share it with parents NOW to help explain “what happened” to their child at camp this summer; use it with NEW parents next year; and use it as a discussion guide for staff training next summer. We should all include some of these points whenever we get a chance to talk about camp to parents, donors, our boss, and each other: <http://www.campparents.org/newsletter/1209/seven-experiences-children-need>

Be A Better Salesperson and Fundraiser (part 2) -- Print this graphic. Hang it up. Critique your efforts (so far): <http://tomfishburne.com/2012/08/types-of-social-media-strategies.html>

Do You Have Pedal-boats? – If no, good. Don’t get any. (The cheap ones are constantly broken. Even the expensive ones are much slower than kids tolerate. I wish I’d done more research before I made this mistake, years ago. Now I see stacks of broken pedal boats at camps I visit.)

You DO Have Pedal-boats? – Because of a death at a camp, I did some investigating. Most camps lock up paddles and oars for canoes, kayaks, and rowboats. Most camps don’t bother locking up the boats themselves (figuring without the paddles, they can’t be used.) And nobody locks up pedal-boats. But they’re different, because the “paddles” are attached to the boat. So if you lock your paddles, you may need to lock your pedal-boats, too.

Day Camp Themes – “We should write all this stuff down.” Here’s someone who did that. She created a Hawaiian-themed day camp week and collected lots of ideas and crafts and activities and songs; and put it into a 133 page e-book you can download for 10 bucks (imagine the time savings for your staff.). <http://www.ebooks-online.com/default.asp?eBookID=7001451> (Anyone else have great theme weeks all written down and willing to share?)

Sad Days for Former Campers – It’s a loss to alumni that feels like a death in the family. It’s a loss to all future campers who will never make those emotional memories. Camp Spruks (PA) had already closed once as a YMCA camp decades ago, but was reborn as <http://www.bhvc.org>, a resident camp for adults. Camp Wawa Segowea (MA) closed after the dissolution of the Poughkeepsie YMCA, but was reborn for 3 summers with the help of the Albany Y. <http://www.cdymca.org/locations/CampWaWaSegowea/Home.aspx>. Both are looking for organizations that could operate their own programs for 2013, otherwise the camps won’t reopen. It’s worth visiting their web sites while you still can. WaWaSegowea made especially good use of their [Facebook Page](#) this summer.

“When you work seven days a week, fourteen hours a day, you get lucky.” -- Armand Hammer

"What we learn to do, we learn by doing." -- Aristotle

"They all laughed when I said I wanted to be a comedian.
Well, they're not laughing now." - Bob Monkhouse

Best wishes,

Gary

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