

August 2010

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Thunder is good, thunder is impressive; but it's lightning that does all the work" – *Mark Twain*

iPhone, uGenius – "LJ" Johnston of Ft Worth TX Camp Carter wrote: "I have an old camp friend that's been so anxious with her only child away here at camp. She said to me 'If I could only hear his voice.' So at lunch today I did a mini interview, asking about his activities and some silly things like was he washing his hair and changing his underwear. It was only a minute long. I recorded it on my iPhone and instantly e-mailed it so she can play it again and again. Totally worked on a 'kidsick' mom!" – contact her at LJohnston@ymcafw.org (and say, "Dag Nabbit! Wish I'd thought of that *sooner!*")

Give Your Parents a Gift – Maybe you could include this with your "director's letter" after camp? <http://www.parentfurther.com/> (Suggested by Cherie Hammond, YMCA Camp Speers-Eljabar).

HERE's a Cheesy Day Camp Activity – Making toasted cheese sandwiches with an electric griddle! I saw this as a cooking class at Durham NC's Finley Day Camp. The counselor actually brought the electric pancake griddle from home! A loaf of whole wheat bread, some soft butter, Kraft singles, and your kids will have a skill to help get them through college!

RE: Boy Scout Merit Badge Books – My old Boy Scout buddy Jeffery Compton, [NY arts writer](#) and Customer Loyalty Programs consultant writes, "After getting your July newsletter I spent some time glancing through the Merit Badge books related to Music, Theater etc – an excellent resource for (even non-scouting) families interested in teaching their children more about the arts. Thanks for the tip!" – contact him at Jeffrey.compton@compdance.com

The Most Common Safety Mistake – I've visited many camps this summer and by far the most dangerous thing I repeatedly witnessed was lifeguards (and even waterfront directors) who had no idea how *or* why to do a buddy check, and what they were supposed to be looking for. IT'S NOT TOO LATE to do an in-service training right now so you *finish off* safer and let it sink in over the year so you *start off* right next spring. Here's the crux:

No matter how often you hold buddy checks (every 10 minutes? every 5 minutes?), it's not often enough to "keep kids from drowning." By that time you're not accounting for kids, you're accounting for *bodies*. The only person that would know immediately if a camper has gone under is... their buddy. THAT's why we require buddies, for *constant* one-on-one guarding. We do buddy *checks* to insure that buddies are sticking close together... close enough to immediately know if their buddy has gone under. "What do you do if your buddy has gone under or is too tired to swim? CALL FOR HELP! Right!" The critical part of a buddy check is looking for buddies that are NOT swimming together. Not so you can "hurry them up" to raise their hands, but so you can pull them aside and quiz them on *why* it's critical they stay together next time. And then you watch them and pull them out of the water for a stern talking-to if they still don't get it.

"You can't swim safely, even in a hotel pool, unless you have a buddy. And that's not just at camp, that goes for away from camp, and when you're an adult, too. *That's why* our staff always have buddies, too." (You *have* to set the right example if you want them to practice it life-long. You could be saving your counselors lives someday, too.)

“Really? My *staff*?” Do your climbing instructors wear helmets and use proper belay techniques when they climb on their time off? Of course they do. Safe, smart adults buddy up when they swim; they never hike without telling someone where they’re going and when they’ll be back; they always wear a helmet when biking (Lance Armstrong does). Life lessons, kids learn from watching us.

The same goes for boating. You always put your tag on the board corresponding to the craft you’re taking out. That goes for the lifeguard in the power boat, too. “Never go boating without somebody knowing where you’re going and when you’ll be back. Never.” And if the hour is over and there are still tags on the boating board? You locate those kids NOW as if they may be stuck on the lake somewhere. They just forgot? Tell them: 1.) You’re glad they’re safe because you and many others had been looking for them (guilt works better than shame); and 2.) “PLEASE always check IN and OUT. Someday it could help save someone YOU love.” Life lessons.

The best time to do a lost-swimmer-drill? Let the kids know it will happen sometime during this swim period. Part-way into the period, have one camper yell, “I can’t find my buddy! I can’t find my buddy!” or “My Buddy Needs Help!” (That’s modeling the appropriate, *responsible* thing to do. NOT modeling “it’s the lifeguard’s job to keep track of everyone”). Guards call an immediate buddy check to clear the swimming area (*anyone* with a whistle can start to blow it.. Search procedures start immediately while the buddy check continues. Or if it’s a “swimmer in distress” the lifeguard models appropriate use of either reaching assist from the dock, or from the water with their rescue tube: describing what they’re doing so EVERYONE watching can learn from it. Life lessons. Every day. Cool, huh?

“*We never did it this way before.*” That’s because you were taught by someone who was never trained specifically in open-water lifeguarding. The Boy Scouts have always had the best materials, primarily because they have a goal of “leadership from within,” and every Scout needs to know not just *what* the rules are for any activity, but *what the intentions are* so that even if details are forgotten over their lifetime, they’ll know the goals: never swim alone. Always swim within your ability level.

Camps aren’t just a safe place for kids to play in the summer. They should be where kids learn skills for a safe *lifetime*. More exciting than counting kids off by twos, isn’t it?

The Best Buddy Check Technique? – (Thanks here to YMCA Camp Dudley, “The Oldest Camp” celebrating their 125th season). Kids check in as buddies (and there’s nothing wrong with triples. We shouldn’t make a big deal about kids *only* pairing up. Kids don’t swim in real life in even numbers. At least half the time they’re in odd numbers, so swimming in pairs OR triples should seem natural.) A staff member is supervising the buddy board, encouraging them to pick the “top” open slots for their pair or triple. EACH buddy group is numbered on the board, starting with “1, 2,3 etc”, and kids need to know their number. “What number are you?” ...”17!” ... “Good. Keep an eye on each other; always.”

When it comes time to do a buddy check (and it should probably be every 5 minutes at the start of swim periods and at the beginning of the week; maybe as long as 10 or 15 as they get the hang of it), you blow one LONGGGGGGGGGG whistle. To show that they know it’s begun, every lifeguard on duty also blows their whistle in unity so it’s LOUD. (One short whistle is of no use if kids have been laughing or have their heads under water. It needs to be at least 20 seconds long so EVERYONE hears it for themselves and swims to the side (or dock) to grab and raise their buddy’s hand BEFORE The whistle stops. Then immediately upon the whistle stopping, the first buddy group yells “ONE!” with their hands raised. Second group, “TWO!” and so on. If a number is blank, the staff person at the buddy board calls that number out in turn, (i.e. “Three!”) so that the counting goes off sequentially. If all groups are paying attention, it’s possible to do a complete buddy check for 120 kids in 60 seconds. “Good job! All clear!” Two short whistle blasts; back in the water. Some buddies take more than three strokes to get next to each other? Pull them aside and have a little “lesson.”

Unaccounted-for buddies? Everyone out of the water. Begin lost swimmer search. Phone and radio all program areas looking for the missing campers. EVERYONE learns how important safety procedures are. Campers look forward to the day THEY can be lifeguards and have that kind of responsibility.

Lifeguard Skills – Every lifeguard needs to know all of these procedures, but their PRIMARY job is to constantly supervise and SCAN the water they've been assigned. Scanning skills are too involved to go into here, but it's enough to say not nearly enough time is spent on teaching, reviewing, and supervising them. Kids don't drown on the surface, and drowning kids rarely call for help. Proper scanning helps *prevent* drowning and we must be sure everyone watching the water gets it right, that we make sure they have proper eye protection from glare (Polarized glasses), and that they are constantly rotated to new positions to prevent inattention. *Safe-Wise Consulting* has some ready-to-use risk management resources and links that are perfect for keeping you and your staff on your toes, safety-wise. <http://safe-wise.com/risk-management/newsletters.html>

Teach Swimming. Please – “In a recent [report](#), [USA Swimming](#) stressed that 70 percent of African-American children and 58 percent of Hispanic children have little or no ability to swim, despite many recent advocacy efforts to increase awareness of its importance. In contrast, only 40 percent of Caucasian kids lack swim skills.” http://www.aquaticsintl.com/2010/jul/1007n_divide.html And yet less than 50% of camps still require that non-swimmers take swim lessons. My opinion: we're dodging our responsibility. Make the commitment now to be ready to tell campers and parents you teach swimming next summer.

TAKE THESE PHOTOS... PLEASE! – Mike Hoefler writes: “Gary... hope you had a chance to see this video that Willy (and to a lesser degree I) put together. It's a great piece!” (It *really* is! – Gary) http://www.facebook.com/camptakodah?v=app_2392950137#!/video/video.php?v=433759521453 Here are a couple of neat, free tools you can share in your newsletter to help camps to understand their website performance from SEO perspective. <http://www.woorank.com/> and <http://websitegrader.com/> -- reach Mike at mhoefler@gmail.com

Make Ice Cream in Ziplock Bags! – A perennial “camp cooking” classic! Be a quiet hero and give your campers something special to do during family camp. From “The Craft Finder” www.kaboose.com You'll need for each person:

- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ cup milk or half & half
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- 6 tablespoons rock salt
- 1 pint-size (sandwich) zip-top bag
- 1 quart-size (or larger) zip-top bag
- 2 cups ice cubes

Fill the large bag half full of ice, and add the rock salt. Seal the bag.

Put milk, vanilla, and sugar into the small bag, suck out the air, and seal it.

Place the small bag in the large bag, and seal it WITH air in it.

Shake until the mixture is ice cream; which takes about 10 minutes.

Wipe the saltwater off of the small bag. Snip a bottom corner with scissors. Squeeze and enjoy!

“You've got a lot of choices. If getting out of bed in the morning is a chore and you're not smiling on a regular basis, try another choice.” -- *Steven D. Woodhull*

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.” -- *Jane Howard*

“I don't have to look up my family tree, because I know that I'm the sap.” --
Fred Allen

Everyone deserves thanks now; be generous with your praise!
*Truly; thank **you** for all you've done for kids and parents this summer. You've improved the world for our children's children.*

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.
How can I help the camp you love? Take a look, www.garyforster.com and drop me a line.

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