

February 2010

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"The greater danger for most of us is not that we aim too high and miss, but rather, we aim too low and hit." – Michelangelo

"Boo-hoo! My YMCAs Don't Find Campers for My Camp!" – Take a look at what Seth Godin has to say about this. (Maybe you'll believe *him*.) http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2010/01/what-the-industry-wants.html NOW brainstorm what it is that your local Y staff need in THEIR lives. Can you provide it and tie it to doing a better job of passionately selling your camp when a parent calls their front desk? Hint: they do NOT need \$5 per camper. They DO need someone who really appreciates them and shows it in person (and a **Valentine's Day balloon for each Y's front desk staff members** would be a great start.) Discuss.

Best Elevator Speech Part I – *"Imagine the perfect summer day . . . floating in a pond, splashing through creeks, hiking a leaf-canopied trail, catching a wily fish, and making new friends. This perfect summer day happens at Whippoorwill Farm Day Camp, located on a 50-acre farm in Williamson County, Tennessee."*

THAT'S what I remember of camp and childhood; THAT'S part of why I sent my kids to camp; and these two sentences brought the images and smells and feelings *right back*. Have you got two sentences that good on your home page? No? Then how about *by tomorrow?* -- <http://www.whippoorwill.com/> (If you can't write like this, don't beat yourself up. Just find a little money and hire someone to help you, like other successful businesses do.)

Best Elevator Speech Part II – Nathan Brant of South Mountain YMCA suggests, "Check out this camp website. Try not to drool on the keyboard. It has a simple, but good home page. It's low on text, high on photos - most of which are action-oriented. Very nice." -- <http://www.camphighlander.com/> --reach Nathan at ceo@smymca.org and friend him on Facebook as the "Camp Theme Guy."

Take Time to Laugh (especially during annual support campaigns!) – You may have seen this last year. I think they get funnier each time I see them. The premise: What if they did a show like "The Office" on Annual Fundraising. ("Ultimate Camp Resource" king Chris Pallatto created them to liven up training for his fundraising volunteers.) This short version has just the "Steve Carrel" bits:

<http://video.yahoo.com/watch/4085252/11026995> (My favorite line: "A good fundraiser treats donors like criminals; they have money that belongs to you, and you need to get it back.") This 2nd link is the 16 minute version that actually includes the legit training tips, too:

<http://video.yahoo.com/watch/4086647/11030454> -- reach Chris at chris.pallatto@ghymca.org.

Time to Cheat – At most keynote speeches I ask questions like, "How many of you have read Jim Collin's book 'Good to Great?'" If 5% of the people raise their hands, it's a good night. I still can't figure why people who consider themselves 'camp professionals' do so little to actually treat their own job professionally. But finally there's a single summary of "The 100 Best Business Books of All Time: What They Say, Why They Matter, and How They Can Help You." And you can get it for a short time on Amazon for only \$5.72 until the hardcovers are gone.

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B002BWQ56I?ie=UTF8&tag=toddsatte-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B002BWQ56I>

Don't Treat Your Staff Like Mushrooms* – It was funny once; now it's so common we just nod when we hear it. Be different. This time of year your staff *need* to be a part of coming up with solutions for low enrolment. "Protecting them" from the critical issues isn't doing them any favors, no matter how heroic it makes you feel. You owe it to *them* to encourage their best efforts at helping the camp they love succeed in tough times. Using just a few of the chapters from "The 100 Best Business Books" (above) or the marketing articles at www.garyforster.com could create the best "book club/marketing brainstorming" sessions your team has ever had. Act quickly, and let me know the things your teams come up with so we can all celebrate. **(Never heard this one? Just ask around. You'll laugh hard when you hear what it means, and you'll be setting a good example by admitting there are things you admit your staff are smarter about than you are.)*

BEFORE You Hire Your Camp Nurses – Consider buying "the" handbook so you can give them a copy as soon as they agree. The forethought will show you really care, and they're most likely to read it now when they're excited (and a little apprehensive). "The Basics of Camp Nursing (Second Edition)" by Linda Erceg and Myra Pravda from www.campnurse.org or <http://www.acn.org/>

Preventing Homesick Kids Makes Your (Caring) Camp Stand Out – In addition to the handbook above, Myra has also authored an inexpensive little book for parents. A nice thing to offer first-time parents if they anticipate homesickness might be an issue, and would like the very best advice. I kept a stack ready to mail if a parent needed extra assurance. At www.offtocamp.com

Sharpen Your Saw – You camp maintenance staff have quite an adventure ahead of them between now and summer. Do you think they could get more and better work done if their minds and spirits were sharpened now, instead of waiting for your hearty "thank-you" at the end of the summer? Me too. One (of many) ways to do that is to have them attend the annual **Camp Maintenance Conference, March 23 – 25**. This year we've got a rare opportunity with **Mario Hurtado** presenting on many of the "Purple Cow" facilities he's help create at Camp Jewell over the years. Smart, funny, and honest. (A dangerous combination for me as he's bound to set you straight on some of the things I've been saying!) Lots of workshops, and a brand new version of my "This Old Camp," too. Always at Camp Chingachgook on Lake George, NY. Download the brochure (with great photos!) from: http://www.garyforster.com/documents/2010_Maint-Food_Reg.pdf For more information, please call 518-656-9462, ext 6602 or email clewis@cdymca.org. Also the site of the equally stimulating (think "Iron Chef" of camping!) **North American Camp Food Service Conference, March 9 – 11**.

Headline I'd Like to See: "Early Bird Eats Cash; Would Rather Have Had Worm" – I often hear, "If an Early Bird Discount is throwing money sway, what else can we do?" Don't assume that money is the only reward that counts. Was Apple giving out discounts to the people that camped out for days to be the first to get the newest iPhone? Read this quick advice on ways to reward your loyal members: http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2008/07/scarcity.html What incentives do you have for BRAND NEW camper parents that sign up for the very first time? THOSE folks could use an extra motivation. Two of my favorites:

- The Des Moines Y-Camp's "All programs are backed by our **Character Value Guarantee** which states If your camper does not have a better understanding of the character values of caring, honesty, respect and responsibility from their camp experience, we will refund their camp fee."
- And "A **Bully-Free Summer Sleepaway Camp** – New York YMCA Camp is known as a Global Camp, where children from all over the globe come to share safe adventures, great fun and build new friendships."
- (And you *know* the most sincere form of flattery is...)

Dave Wright on the Next Big Thing – “With all the talk about social networking, there’s only one blog that’s worth my time to read, and that’s Seth Godin’s. Here’s an excerpt from a brand new e-book he offers for free, containing the thoughts of lots of great thinkers today:

“There are tens of thousands of businesses making many millions a year in profits that still haven’t ever heard of twitter, blogs or Facebook. Are they all wrong? Have they missed out or is the joke really on us? They do business through personal relationships, by delivering great customer service and it’s working for them. They’re more successful than most of those businesses who spend hours pontificating about how others lose out by missing social media and the latest wave. And yet they’re doing business. Great business. Not writing about it. Doing it.”

Download it at: <http://sethgodin.typepad.com/files/what-matters-now-2.pdf>.

(Gary’s 2 cents: This e-book’s terrific layout makes it fun and easy to read. Each page could be printed out as a “thought for the day” poster for your office!) Reach Dave at dwright@camptecumseh.org .

Supporting Young Entrepreneurs – Doug and Jan Simons of Camp Bishop, WA are looking for a replacement for their camper “earn your way to camp” product that was no longer permitted to use the Y logo on their peanuts. Here’s my suggestion: “Both Sam’s Club and Costco have plans for non-profits that use their wholesale-priced stuff for fundraising. I’ll bet you could find something that is of high quality and SO much cheaper at Sam’s or Costco that the kids will easily be able to sell them at a 100% mark-up (like big Snickers for \$23 a case of 48). Did you know a puffed rice cake has a glycemic index of 82 for 23 grams, yet a Snickers bar is only 41 for 60 grams! Now THAT’s a sales pitch!) They can also sell packs of Planters ® Peanuts to catch the “low carb” crowd (like me), and they’re only 25 cents a pack wholesale. Get some little “Y” stickers and put them on. One good source for the stickers: http://secure.sportsawardsonline.com/applications/yshop/store/search_results.asp?query=stickers as low as 3 to 4 cents per sticker!” *Put stickers on your Snickers. What other newsletter gives you that kind of advice?*

Please Foreword this note from Shawn to Your Teambuilding and OE Staff – “Would you be willing to help with two research projects exploring the skills of ropes course staff and the ecological literacy of outdoor education staff? I’m conducting these projects and would love to hear from you. The survey(s) are electronic and take at most an hour.” Shawn Moriarty (Camps Jewell, CT and Lakewood, MO; now Camp Jones Gulch, CA). Contact him at asinglefootstep@gmail.com.

Spirituality at Camp: a Priceless Opportunity Knocking at Your Door – For 36 years the YMCA Christian Leadership Conferences (CLCs) have strengthened day and resident camp leaders, child care workers, YMCA staff and volunteers in their roles as YMCA leaders. During a weekend training event, workshops are conducted on a variety of leadership subjects which may include the YMCA Rag/Leather Program, the “C in the YMCA”, devotions, singing, storytelling, prayer, discipline, chapel, the YMCA mission, YMCA Character Development, and much more. A Christian atmosphere is projected without preaching a particular doctrine. Find out about hosting a CLC at your camp, or where you can send your staff to attend at a ridiculously low cost (thanks to the inspiring financial support from benefactors): <http://christianleadershipconf.org/> Do you know of other good resources for inspiring camp staff to include exploring faith as part of your camp’s mission? Let me know and I’ll share them.

“Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire.” — William Butler Yeats

“Come on baby light my fire.” — Jim Morrison & Robbie Krieger

Warm regards,

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

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