You’re welcome here, period, and other lessons

Two years ago a friend sent me the article “10 Things You Can Learn From the Apple Store” by Guy Kawasaki. He argues The Apple Store can teach any business in any industry to be more successful. It turns out there’s some good stuff for faith-based organizations as well. What follows is the first three “things” Kawasaki shares, and how I/we feel they translate to Christikon’s ministry.

**Stop selling stuff.** When Steve Jobs first started the Apple Store he did not ask the question, “How will we grow our market share from 5 to 10 percent?” Instead he asked, “How do we enrich people’s lives?”

Think about your vision. If you were to examine the business model for most brands and retailers and develop a vision around it, the vision would be to “sell more stuff.” A vision based on selling stuff isn’t very inspiring and leads to a very different experience than the Apple Retail Store created.

Relevance to Christikon: Stop worrying about numbers or competing with other camps (i.e. they have a pool, we must have one as well)—outdoor ministry’s equivalent of selling stuff. Rather, ask guests why they’re here, what they’re looking for, and how this camp can bolster their faith and connect it to life.

**Enrich lives.** The vision behind the Apple Store is “enrich lives,” the first two words on a wallet-sized credo card employees are encouraged to carry. When you enrich lives magical things start to happen. For example, enriching lives convinced Apple to have a non-commissioned sales floor where employees feel comfortable spending as much time with a customer as the customer desires.

Continued on the next page
Word from the director by Mark Donald continued from previous page

Enriching lives led Apple to build play areas (the “family room”) where kids could see, touch and play on computers. Enriching lives led to the creation of a “Genius Bar” where trained experts are focused on “rebuilding relationships” as much as fixing problems.

Relevance to Christikon: The way we enrich lives is to strengthen faith. Our vision is to imagine that every aspect of the Christikon life (worship, program, dishes, all camp games, overnight, cabin time, service projects, backpacking, Capital Campaign, and everything else) is designed to grow guest faith and help them see themselves as disciples. Before each training, decision, action or vote we try and ask, “How will this help strengthen the faith of our guests?”

Hire for smiles. The soul of the Apple Store is in its people. They are hired, trained, motivated and taught to create magical and memorable moments for their customers. The Apple Store values a magnetic personality as much, if not more so, than technical proficiency. The Apple Store cares less about what you know than it cares about how much you love people.

Relevance to Christikon: The biggest factor guests use to determine whether or not they’ll return is not the beautiful mountain valley where we’re located, but rather whether they feel welcome and believe people are genuinely glad they’re here. Our staff make the difference, and when hiring them I don’t look for the most theologically astute or depth of outdoor experience (we spend 3 weeks training for that), but rather whether they have the gift for hospitality, to develop community, to live our motto, “You are welcome here, period.”

We strive to create intentional Christian community in which each part of our life together helps strengthen faith of our guests, staff and all else we encounter. While comparing our ministry to Apple’s business can be an “apples to oranges” exercise, Steve Jobs idea of “enriching lives” is exactly what faith communities (when at their best) can offer the world. And while I am typing this on a Macbook Pro, I find the gospel of Christ and life of faith has a profound ability to enrich lives, and promises to do so long after my iPhone is outdated and my computer dies.

2019 was a great summer—Christikon enjoyed a robust increase in onsite participation, and saw our trails program almost completely maxed out. Faith stories from guests and staff alike were profound. As we move into the last months of the year, we give thanks for the many gifts God has bestowed on this ministry, and look to where God leads us in the year to come.

— Mark
Christikon offers a blessed reprieve from technology

By Thomas Twiton

One of the many unique parts of working at Christikon is the disconnect from technology. To spend your entire summer without Wi-Fi or cell service sounds like a major sacrifice, (it certainly chagrined my computer science professors), but it truly is a blessing. I found myself connecting with those around me more deeply, experiencing the beauty of creation more fully, and finding myself open to God’s presence more readily.

This summer, many of my dearest friends — and most frequent Snapchat and Messenger contacts — returned to camp, and I did not. What caught me off guard was the echo of that experience even as I was away from camp. While I still had my phone, I had fewer notifications, and while I missed them it also reminded me to keep their ministry in my heart.

Now it’s autumn, and I have greedily devoured all the beautiful pictures of the summer they have shared on Facebook and Instagram, photos of people and places that are achingly familiar. I have loved hearing their stories and catching up, and even though there is a melancholy in not having been there physically, the connection I have to them and to camp is indelible. I don’t ever want those stories to stop, and it is our mission to welcome everyone we can into the story, which is why I give to Christikon’s ministry as a donor.

Staff sentiment continued from front page

Ellen had visited camp only once before, and despite hearing all of my camp stories many times over the years, she was diving into something unknown. I was terrified that after several years away, I would return to find that the camp I loved so deeply no longer had a place for me. For both of us, being a married couple several years older than the rest of staff brought fears that we would find ourselves isolated from the community. Nevertheless, we headed up the road and put ourselves at the mercy of the summer.

At the end of the camp season a couple months later, after we had said our last farewells and started down the road, Ellen and I pulled over the car just past Alpine Lodge and both began to cry. We cried from missing our dear friends now scattered across the country, we cried from mourning the deep community now dissolved, and we cried for the radical, grounded life of faith so ever-present at camp and yet so hard to maintain in the world down the mountain. But more than anything we cried from the awe and gratitude of having been part of something that made our departure so intensely sorrowful.

Nobody headed up to camp, whether staff, guest, or camper, knows what they are getting into. God always works on us and through us in ways we never expect or intend. The things we had feared at the beginning did prove challenges we had to navigate, and they were but a few of the many challenges we faced over the course of the summer. But rather than isolate us from the community, our unique circumstances helped us to forge our place within it. And rather than face the summer’s trials alone, we faced them together with a group of some of the finest people we have ever known.

Each day, each week, each season Christikon is being made new. And each day, each week, each season, there is always a place for each of us to join the community and be made new ourselves.

“If faith can move a mountain, tell me, what’s gonna move my faith? I believe in that clear Absaroka air ‘cause it takes my breath away…”

Thank you for your donations through Thrivent

The following list is those who have chosen Christikon to receive Thrivent Choice Dollars from April 24, 2019, to October 2, 2019. If you are eligible, please consider choosing Christikon. Thank you to all those who have chosen this ministry over the years. We are grateful!

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In kind gifts:

- Camp Maintenance
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  John Standish ...................................... Billings, MT

SERVICE PROJECT

Deck replacement work crew needed for June

After more than 20 years, both the Main Lodge and the Canteen decks need replacing. Work crews tore down both this fall, and our plan is to invite a crew of skilled (or coachable!) laborers up to camp during the first week of June (1st-7th, stay for a few days or the whole week as schedule allows). We’ll provide housing and food and have all materials onsite. Our camp architect, Al Rapacz, will have all designs in place, and our Property group will run the project.

If this interests you and fits your schedule, let us know and we’ll add you to the list. We hope for a group of 10-15 or so, and welcome you to spend a few days at Christikon and help build a deck to last at least another 20 years.
By Shaun Seedhouse

Christikon is special. Not just because of where it is, but because of what it does.

I had no idea what to expect six years ago when the new camp director called me and asked if I would consider serving on the board of directors. The thought had never crossed my mind because I had never been there. Moving to Billings in 2002, the closest I had ever gotten to Christikon was the Good Shepherd parking lot when we loaded our children on the bus every summer. But I knew what church camp was about, and how impactful it can be. Making sure the opportunity was there for my kids and future generations of children was the reason I wholeheartedly accepted the request to serve.

Some of my fondest childhood memories in the church were from Lutheran camps. I would even go so far as to say that my early camp experience set my path as a Christian, and from my experience on this board I know that I am not the only one.

When young people are trying to comprehend the world and their place in it, hearing about God’s love and his plan for them is life-changing. Christikon has a special way of sharing that love with its unique location and beauty — from majestic hikes, to meadow Bible studies, to campfire worship. What better way to feel a little closer to Heaven than at the top of a mountain?

The past six years have flown by, and Christikon keeps getting better, from refurbished cabins, to new bathrooms, to the resurrection of the iconic Blackfoot Lodge. The tireless effort put forth by dozens of volunteers each year to make sure that our camp continues to be a wonderful place for kids and families to get a little closer to God is simply inspiring. I am so thankful for those who serve on the board, the camp staff, the volunteers and the continued support from our donors. Thank you for the opportunity to serve an institution with such a rich history and promising future.
To send a gift to Christikon, include this form with your check and mail it to:
Christikon
1108 24th St. W.
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Or make a gift online at christikon.org

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