

The Troop 8 Underground Press is proud to bring you

The Troop 8



Scoutmaster's Handbook

Everything you wanted to know about St. Thomas
Scouting that the Council wouldn't tell you.

*Compiled over the eons by Freitas, Geier, Morey, Milne, Regensburger,
Williams, McDevitt, McGuire, Maguire, Klobucher and company,
with contributions from the whole Troop 8 family.*

*Dedicated to the Troop 8 Scouts and Scoutmasters from 1989 thru 1996,
whose humor, insight, and hard work taught us all so much.*

Troop 8 Underground Press, First Edition

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If the Library of Congress chooses to catalog this, they're significantly stranger than we already think.

About this book

The Troop 8 Scoutmaster's Handbook was compiled by Bob Geier, a teacher, outdoor leader and 6-year scoutmaster at the end of his time working with the troop. It is a compilation of troop policies and practices as of early 1996. The work was heavily influenced by a host of other scoutmasters, scouts, and parents who contributed to the troop and to Bob's education over the years.

The Troop 8 Scoutmaster's Handbook is a part of the "Underground" publishing projects established during the tenure of Eagle Scout Andy Kraemer, who among other things was one of the principals in the modern version of the scout newsletter. Be sure to check out these other projects of the Underground Press : The Song & Quote book, The Cookbook, The Outings Guide, The Parents' Handbook (and probably a few more on the way). Like all the works of the Underground Press, this book is brutally honest, irreverent, humorous, and occasionally even correct. If you can't live with that, go read the silly "Official" Scoutmaster's Handbook (we recommend at bedtime, with a strong shot of Scotch).

Only the Gospel is gospel - this is just a handbook, and things can and should change over time. It's meant to give new scoutmasters a feel for the troop, and to occasionally remind older scoutmasters of things they've forgotten. Enjoy.



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Foreward

For as long as I can remember, the one thing about Troop 8 that has set it apart from other troops has been its leadership, both the scout leadership, and the adults who stand behind them. With reverence and admiration are spoken the names of Carey, Freitas, Geier, Morey, Regensburger and Milne, all of whom have “taken their turn in the barrel” as scoutmasters. These men, with the help of the troop’s assistant scoutmasters, have all added their strengths and kept this troop running through thick and thin. They were always there when scout leadership faltered, when that little extra effort would keep things going. Their sacrifices go unacknowledged, the patient hours spent turning boys into men for the most part unappreciated.

This book was compiled by these selfless guys to pass along the many things they (and the boy leadership) have learned on the hard road of experience over the years. It’s a wealth of information ranging from basic principles and expectations to the nitty-gritty “how to” of Scouting (or at least of Scouting the Troop 8 way). The Underground Scoutmaster’s Handbook is undoubtedly the most “real” guide to leadership and activity in an active troop that there is, and perhaps the best work put out by our Troop 8 Underground Press.



While the book handles the important information, it doesn’t really answer one key question - what keeps the good scoutmasters going? What inside them drives them to continue their hard work? I have no idea. But as I grow older and begin to reach the age where I will join the ranks of adult leadership, I began to see the satisfaction one gets when a scout learns a skill and goes out to use it, the self-gratification one feels after helping to shape a boy’s future. Perhaps it is simply this. Then again, it might just be a good excuse to go out and have some fun out camping. In any case, it seems that over the years we’ve been blessed by the great number of good men who come to help out. So give it a shot, and join them! The worst you could do is help.

Andy Kraemer

Scoutmastership Fundamentals

So what exactly are you getting yourself into as a Scoutmaster? What are the most basic things you need to know?

This chapter should help give you a clue. It's got everything from the basic requirements to the most important things to know about working in this new organization called "scouting." Unlike the rest of this book, which concentrates on the many tasks and details involved in working with a troop, this one goes to the heart of the matter. As a scoutmaster, your job is to *assist* the boys who lead the troop.

Working with kids can be nuts, but it's never boring. Even if you're an "old hat" scoutmaster you might find some new material here, borrowed from our colleagues in education. If you're new to scouting, this idea of boy leadership takes some getting used to. Read carefully, and don't worry - the other members of the "scoutmaster's patrol" will help you out.



Becoming a Troop 8 Scoutmaster

So... you've taken the first step. One of the scoutmasters, or perhaps one of the parents, has convinced you that helping out Troop 8 would be a worthwhile thing to do, and you've made it as far as talking to a scoutmaster and picking up this booklet. Who knows? You may even have checked out the "other" Scoutmaster's Handbook sold at the council office.

Are you qualified? That's a question you should ask yourself. Yeah, believe it or not, there are qualifications beyond "Are you breathing?" and not being a convicted felon. The qualifications for being a scoutmaster are straightforward:

- 1) You must want to work with boys and young men.
- 2) You must enjoy being in the outdoors.
- 3) You have to be willing to learn - from everybody, including boys
- 4) You have to be willing to support the mission of St. Thomas Catholic Church.
- 5) You must be willing to make time.

The first qualification is of course the most important. Being a scoutmaster means working with a diverse, nutty, energetic bunch of adolescent and teenage guys. Not leading them or directing them - working with them. Not just the agreeable ones, but the zany ones too - and, if you happen to be a parent, it means working with and caring for other boys as much (and sometimes more than) your own. If the thought fills you with dread, or boredom, or a desire to march in and "shape them all up," then scoutmastering isn't for you. Don't worry, there are lots of other ways to help the troop that you will enjoy more and that will be of greater benefit to the guys. But if you think this sounds like fun, because you enjoy working/talking/playing with kids, then keep reading!

Scouting, we often joke, is about outing. A "good" troop is remembered by its scouts for all the wonderful and exciting things they did with each other in the outdoors. We at Troop 8 run a lot of outings - several per month, sometimes one event per weekend. If hiking in the rain, being dumped out of a canoe, or sleeping in the snow doesn't sound like fun to you now, it will be even less fun for you and the boys when it happens. But if such things turn you on (like you wear an "I'd rather be fishing..." T-shirt under your suit every day at the office), then you'll find volunteering as a scoutmaster very rewarding. It is after all, a perfect excuse to do things you enjoy. Tell someone you're going skiing for a week with a backpack and they'll think you're out of your mind. Tell them you're doing it as a Boy Scout volunteer and they'll be filled with respect and admiration.

Be ready to learn. If this is your first experience with scouting, it will take you a while to learn all the awards, terms, uniform rules and other foarah. Grab the Official Scout Handbook for starters (it's more helpful than the scoutmaster one), and then be sure to ask questions. Even if you've been scouting for years, you'll find a lot about Troop 8 which is unique - in our structure, in what we teach and how we do things. Much of our outdoors practice differs from BSA stuff and draws more heavily on the curriculum taught by the National Outdoor Leadership School and other wilderness educators. The other scoutmasters, and especially the scouts themselves, will have a lot to teach you as a new member of the community. If you aren't comfortable listening to and learning from a 12-year-old, or

treating an 18-year-old assistant scoutmaster as a genuine peer, then serving as a scoutmaster is not for you.

You should know that as a scoutmaster for the BSA, you must sign the Declaration of Religious Principle:

The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God and, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member ... Only persons willing to subscribe to this Declaration of Religious Principle and to the Bylaws of the BSA shall be entitled to certificates of leadership.

Troops, though they license a program from the BSA, are owned and operated by community organizations - in our case, St. Thomas Church. To be a scoutmaster for Troop 8, therefore, you must also agree to support the mission of St. Thomas in its youth programs, including scouting. That includes support for our religious tradition, including going with the boys to mass on Sundays, encouraging pursuit of religious awards, leading the boys in occasional parish volunteer efforts, and teaching sound Judeo-Christian principles. It also precludes teaching or encouraging the boys in ways contrary to Catholic faith and morals - no lively premarital sex stories, no campfire pro-abortion speeches or birth control talks, no disparaging comments about Mary or the pope. Honest discussions of religious differences with older boys, of course, can be appropriate. If you think this is a problem for you, let us know, and we'll put you in touch with an area troop more suited to your background.

To come to meetings, to go on outings, and then to do the individual work with boys that being a scoutmaster entails requires only one of your precious commodities - time. The time will be fun, frustrating, challenging, and always rewarding. But to work with kids, you need to be able to give them your time. Be honest with yourself (& your family). While the duties are shared between scoutmasters, you can expect to be needed one weekend a month, one weeknight a week, and several other evenings each month for talking with kids, planning events, etc. At least. If you can't possibly even come close to that now, it's OK - there are other ways to contribute - and when your time frees up, you can jump back in to the scoutmaster idea.

That's it! If you possess those five qualifications, then everything else - from tying knots to kayaking - we can teach you along the way.

Where do I sign?

Don't worry about that part. Just come to meetings, let the scoutmaster in charge know you want to come on a particular outing, and jump right in. Don't be shy, but do be humble and willing to learn.

In Troop 8, we want you to get used to working with the boys, and them to get used to working with you, before we "sign you up." It's a chance for all of us to get to know each other (boys and adults) and see how we like working together in scouting. (Plus, we get to find out if you snore...) No pressure. Often times, folks discover that it's not what they thought it would be, or that they really don't have that much time. That's OK. There's no obligation to buy.

If things go well, both you and we will know it. After a while, one of the scoutmasters will get around to having you fill out an official BSA Adult Leader Application, including a section on refer-

ences & phone numbers. If appropriate, the scoutmasters will then recommend to the Troop Committee (the parents) that you be added to our roster. The Troop Committee Chair then checks your references & background, and presents it to a vote of the Committee. From there, you must be approved by the pastor of St. Thomas (this is usually pro forma).

Do you need to worry about any of this? No! Just keep helping out and working with the boys, and sometime after a few months you might get informed that you're "official" and can now lead outings yourself, counsel merit badges, etc. The rest is busy work for us.

Welcome aboard!

The Structure of Adult Leadership

Some troops borrow heavily from the military model Baden-Powell used in designing scouting for boys so many years ago, with strict ranks and uniforming, and a clear hierarchy at both the scoutmaster and boy leadership levels. If that's what you're into, you're in the wrong place.

Troop 8's style of adult leadership hails more from the academic "collegial" model - a group of professional peers who share a common endeavor. For this reason, we usually refer to all adult leaders as "scoutmaster," and will frequently refer to "the scoutmasters" as a collective body. Each scoutmaster gives according to his talents and availability. Many tasks will get rotated around the scoutmasters to help distribute the load - Bob might be in charge of the December ski outing, Dave is in charge of the January polar bear campout, Derek is in charge of the February meetings, etc. When any one of us gets bogged down by commitments in the "real" world, the rest fill in and take over for a bit.

We do designate "*The Scoutmaster (in-chief)*," and usually rotate this position around. The Scoutmaster has some additional duties by way of working personally with the Senior Patrol Leader and PLC on troop planning, showing up at parents' committee meetings, and getting the scoutmasters together to discuss and implement program ideas. The Scoutmaster is also the person on the "hot seat" for making the hard decisions which impact parents, like "no, John can't go on this outing, he's not prepared," or "no, the rule is that dads must have been canoeing with us on a day trip if they want to participate on a weekend trip." His job is to insulate the rest of us from that heat.

There are several reasons for this structure. First, we think people work best where they are happiest, and we like to change the operating structure in order to put people in roles where they'll work best with the kids. Second, sharing responsibility means that nobody gets burned out, and we all keep an eye on each other. Third, and most importantly, the stricter hierarchy doesn't work well for our kids. St. Thomas students tend to be bright lads from professional families who don't have experience with the more military model, and don't respond well to it. So we try to model for them the cooperative style of working & sharing jobs together.

The Role of Individual Scoutmasters

This one is pretty much up to each scoutmaster and to the needs of the troop. We want people to share the things they find most enjoyable with the boys.

Generally, each scoutmaster is given one group of boys (patrol) to get to know and work with for a period of time. What group that is depends on the interest and personality of the scoutmaster - first year, second/third year, older scouts, whatever. This is the group the scoutmaster has the most personal contact with, keeps track of, helps with advancement requirements, etc.

Usually, each scoutmaster will also have a set of merit badges that he counsels for the whole troop. These are areas or hobbies in which you have a particular interest or enthusiasm to share.

Different scoutmasters will take the lead role in planning and logistics for specific outings, depending on their area of skill. Dave and Bob might take turns planning canoe outings, while Pat might usually lead the planning for ski trips. Some scoutmasters might just do support logistics, like guiding the troop quartermaster or helping scouts with meal planning.

In short, the roles and structure will change to fit the talents of the scoutmasters and the needs of the troop. The only rules are that we try to put people in positions where they can contribute the most to the scouts, and we try to “share the load” among as many as possible.

Working with kids

If you're like most scoutmasters, you volunteered because you were once a scout, or maybe because a friend dragged you in, or perhaps because you like the outdoors, or your kid is in the program and they needed somebody. Besides, you like kids.

Liking kids is a necessary first ingredient to being a good scoutmaster. Respecting kids is an even more important ingredient. Working with kids, though, especially boys in this age range, is an art. Be prepared, it's going to be wild!

This section is going to give you some tips and techniques on working with kids of different age groups. There is nothing that will be more important to your life as a scouting volunteer than developing your "kid technique" - your ability to talk to and manage boys individually or in groups. Most of these tips come not from scouting but from professional educators, who have to work with these guys every day, and in less favorable circumstances. Trust us, they work.

First, a note about ages:

First-year scouts (6th grade, age 11-12) : If many of us had our druthers, 5th and 6th graders would be involved in a more advanced webelo program; the 6th graders really aren't quite up to scouting as Troop 8 practices it. But they do love it. For this reason, 1st year scouts are kept in their own patrol. They need contact with scoutmasters who are wild, enthusiastic, and like to work with this kind of high-energy, shorter attention span crew. This age group will want to do everything, but often won't have the discipline or size yet to succeed. They need to work on basic skills that can be taught in shorter sessions and games; they need to be able to try new things a bit, but only when success is likely. Example: When teaching this group to ski, work for a short time on technique, but then let them run straight down the hill for a while, crashing and burning. They can't pay attention to skills instruction for very long, but they crave the excitement and success of surviving a fun run. Pick a hill where they won't kill anyone. They are a bundle of energy, but when the energy runs out they crash quickly. This age group will also be at times more cautious and shy than the older boys, and some may be prone to homesickness or get-attention "illness." They also will (on average) both go to bed and rise earlier. This group still has the values of their parents. Discipline should be direct and clear, with punishment as appropriate.

Second and third year (7th and 8th grade, age 12-14): At this age, kids are changing quickly. Attention span improves, so does self-consciousness. This increases the desire to be good at things, and the willingness to work on them. This group just laps up skill instruction and challenges. They love the measure of independence and responsibility that they get in scouting, and want to share every thought, insight, and idea with you. Trusting them with something or allowing them to do something cool on their own is a huge hit. (Example: Lend one your SLR camera. Show him how to use it and take care of it, explain where he must put it when he's done. Then let him go at it. You'll get some OK photos and a friend for life. But be prepared to respond kindly to breakage - not likely but possible.) They learn both intellectual and physical skills amazingly quickly. This group stays up later and rises later. They are often still a bundle of energy, but are developing better endurance. This age group is actively developing their own personality and values, and will be most profoundly affected by your compassionate critique of their day-to-day choices. Discipline should be creative, with humor, and tend toward brief isolation and removal from the group. Avoid embarrassing.

Older boys (high school, age 14 +): The more you can respect and treat these boys like adults, the better off everyone will be. They are as intelligent as any adult, and are better learners. Physically, they are up to anything a scoutmaster is, though endurance to cold may still lag. While they don't have experience, they do have ability. Put them to work. Rely on them. Treat them as junior colleagues. Ask their opinions. This age group has developed basic values and rules of life of their own. They will be constantly adjusting them, observing and talking to you as they do so... if you'll listen and treat them with respect. This group goes to bed late and might awaken for a tornado. Discipline at this age should emphasize guilt and disappointment, as when a friend lets you down.

Boy Leadership

Scouting is somewhat unique in youth activities in that it emphasizes and even requires that the troop be run by the boys. This is sound educational philosophy. In order to learn leadership, boys have to experience it first hand. To learn judgement and decision-making, they need the opportunity to really make decisions, and live with the consequences. If they're going to learn about the importance of voting, for example, then their elected leaders must really have responsibility which will affect them. They should be allowed to experience (for good or ill) the results of their choices.

This will be different than almost every other activity the boys are involved in. In competitive sports, the coach (an adult) will make the plans, tell them what they are to do, and guide them while doing it. Another adult, the referee, will supervise and correct them while they play. Other adults (their parents) will cheer and reward them. In scouting, *they* will be making the plans and figuring out what to do. Other *boys* will be guiding them. While we keep an eye out, we allow them to make mistakes and correct them themselves. The cheers and rewards come from *within*, from their own sense of accomplishment and the respect of their fellows.

While scouting is weird in this respect, compared to other youth programs, it is also more real. The boys will learn far more about themselves, about working with others, and about decision-making and values in the scouting program than they will in any of those other programs. The coach will develop their soccer skills, to be sure, but scouting will develop their judgement and character.

IF we, as scoutmasters, let it. One of the reasons all these other activities have become "organized" (meaning run by adults) is because we adults are just dying to jump in and "do it right." We hate seeing pickup soccer games with no officials – there aren't enough kids for a full team, and the boys sometimes cheat! Let's get them in a league and do it for them. In other words, let's take everything away from them – the officiating, the team decisions, the organization of people, the self-improvement – everything except the game. But let's make it a competition, just to give them something to work toward. Oh yeah, and we'll give them a uniform. They should be proud of that.

That's not scouting, or at least good scouting. (Well, maybe the uniform...) We aren't "organized." We don't take leadership and decisions away from boys to run things our way. We might offer assistance to help them run it their way, but we won't save them from the messiness of the world. They need to muck around in it, make mistakes, get dirty. They need to learn by experience, trial & error. We let them.

Boy leadership is frustrating. It will drive you as a scoutmaster nuts, watching as the simple 5-minute process of cleaning dishes becomes an hour-long ordeal. You will be constantly tempted to

“take over” and make it better. To run the meeting yourself. To teach the skill yourself. To rescue them from the consequences of their own decisions. This is an urge you must fight with all your might, and with the help of the other scoutmasters.

In Troop 8, we use the “thumb-twiddling” signal. When we see a fellow scoutmaster about to “dive in” when he shouldn’t, we give the thumb-twiddle signal. This is to remind him of what he *should* be doing. Sitting back twiddling his thumbs. We have even in the past carried around Chinese finger-traps to shove our fingers into when we get tempted to intervene. It is often worse than torture, and we all weaken occasionally. It’s then that we need others to rescue us.

If you think it’s bad for us, imagine what it’s like for the parents! They thought scouting was another nice youth activity - well organized, neat, clean, proper, uniformed, even with nice slogans and laws. “What do you mean it’s up to the boys? They’re just kids!” “Your meetings or campouts... they seem so disorganized. Why, I could do a better job running them! In fact, I think you should do X and Y and...” As parents, their life is doing things for their kids – driving places, planning vacations, providing meals, buying equipment. When the kids do something on their own, it’s an assignment from an adult, like homework or a chore.

Remember, scouting is run by the boys. It’s a chance for them to be important, to take responsibility, and to learn from trying. As a scoutmaster, your job is always to keep that in mind, and to take a bit of your time to teach parents about the way scouting works, too. It will be tough for you, and harder at times for them, but your job as scoutmaster is not for yourself, and not for the parents. It’s for the boys.

Scaffolding

Now that we’ve got the idea of boy leadership down, what are you supposed to do as an “adult” leader?

Well, boys don’t suddenly turn from naive 5th graders into brilliant scout leaders, and we shouldn’t expect them to. Their job is to plan and to lead, but they usually don’t have the foggiest idea of where or how to begin. They need ideas, and tools, and some guidance. Our job as scoutmasters is to provide the “scaffolding” - the structure and support within which they can build the building.

Providing this structure is critical. Without it none of your boy leaders will do a thing. The task will be so big that they won’t know where to begin or even what questions to ask. Faced with too daunting a problem, they just won’t begin. If you’re really being dense that month, you will mistake this for irresponsibility and berate them for laziness or procrastination. For a comparison, think for a minute of how you’d feel if a friend came to you and said “At our last meeting we decided we needed to set up a factory in India. We chose you because you’ve seen a factory before. Congratulations! You’re in charge.”

The idea behind scaffolding is to provide enough structure so that things get done. The boys do it, working within your framework. When they’re finished, the scaffold quietly disappears - all that gets recognition is the wonderful things the boys have accomplished. You provide the structure, the tools, sometimes even the bricks & mortar and some architectural advice. They build what they want and need, and they get all the credit.

To properly scaffold scout leadership, you need to work a lot with the leaders individually and in small groups. You need to give them examples and occasionally lead them through things so that they can “see” an idea in action. For example, don’t just expect an SPL to be able to run a planning meeting. Get together beforehand with the SPL and spend some time brainstorming what to do, selecting things from the brainstorm list, making an agenda. Talk about how to “keep things moving,” and ask what he might do if someone gets “antsy.” Play-act. Send him home to work on the agenda & make a list of the stuff he’ll need at the meeting. Now he has developed a plan and has an idea how to go about it. More than that - he’s worked through a method he can use with the PLC - brainstorm, select, plan.

Of course, as you have successful meetings and develop a “tradition,” things become easier. Other PLC boys move up to the SPL position having seen both good and bad meetings. You still need to meet with them, but it will be faster. This should be your goal – to develop self-sustaining “traditions” and experiences in the boys that enable them to run the troop, and allow you to do less.

Another example. You sit a patrol of boys down to plan meals for a weekend campout. “Go to it!” you say. That’s a laugh. Mom does all the meals at home, except for Pop-Tarts. They don’t even know where to begin. Scaffolding. Give them a short recipe book to choose from, with simple stuff and perhaps a few harder recipes. Remind them of trip logistics to consider (we’ll be leaving early on Sunday morning...). Provide a sheet of paper with headings “Ingredients” and “Equipment” so that they can make a list, and another sheet with Saturday - Breakfast, Saturday-Lunch, Saturday-Dinner, etc. for their meal plans. Now, they can do this! They will jump into arguing over what to cook, figuring out how much they need to buy, and so on.

If you do this regularly (develop a “tradition”), pretty soon you’ll find they start making modifications to the recipes. Good cooking jobs or ideas will be talked about & praised. After that happens, have an ongoing “best new recipe” contest between patrols, with winners added to the recipe book. Scaffolding. They do the work. They learn how to do the work better on their own by actually doing it & learning from it. You provide the structure. You provide “hints.” After a while, they reach the point where they can provide the structure themselves. Then you have them teach younger scouts and a “tradition” is born.

Developing boy leadership and scaffolding troop “traditions” takes time and *repetition*. Don’t get frustrated, and don’t break down and just do it yourself. Keep working at providing the structure and opportunities for them to learn through experience. They will learn. And once they’ve got it all “down,” it will become something that’s normal - just a part of troop “tradition.” (Then they’ll go off to college and leave you with a new bunch to teach. Sigh.)

Including boys in decisions

Often on an outing or even at a meeting, there will be choices which come up. Should we take the long, interesting hike or the short, quick route to the camp? Is the weather too bad for us to continue? Are we doing a campfire tonight?

The boy leadership needs to be involved in these decisions. Sometimes they may make a decision on their own, and the SPL will come to you and say, “Mr. S., we’ve decided that we need to sleep in tomorrow, so can we push back the...” This is great! Most times, you’ll provide the structure. Do this

by getting the people together who need to be involved in the decision (just SPL? SPL and PLs?) and laying out the options.

Some tips here. First, before you get anybody together, you need to decide who is going to be making the decision. Is it a safety decision? Then the scoutmaster serving as trip leader makes it, in consultation. Is it a preference decision? Then the boys make it. Is it a “goals of the trip” decision? Then the SPL makes it, etc. You need to figure out who is doing the deciding, because when you approach the boys it has to be clear. “I need to make a decision here, and I want your input,” or “We have a couple of options, what do you want to do?” or even “could you find out if the guys want to do this?” Once you’ve set the ground rules, there’s no changing. If you made it their decision and they did something you didn’t want, tough. You have to live with it without complaint.

Second, if you’re serving as trip leader, check with the other scoutmasters just as you would with the boys, but not at the same time. Get the adults’ opinion first, then go to the scouts if appropriate. Mixing adults & scouts in decision making is not a good idea because the adults will tend to force the decision. Parents who are “single trippers” and don’t understand all the issues should be consulted “on the side” so they feel included, but they really aren’t part of the process.

Remember, even if you’re the one making a particular decision, you will normally include the boys. They need to be involved in the process, and learn the rationale and method by which you’re deciding, so that they can learn how to decide things themselves. Share your thoughts and your reasons (they’d better be good!), but don’t get drawn into an argument. Be confident and definite.

There are exceptions, of course. Quick safety decisions sometimes need to be made (they can be discussed later), and occasionally certain boys just aren’t going to be able to see the reasons. An example is when younger scouts are tired. They often can’t tell they are tired or grumpy, so having them participate in a “is it time to go to bed?” decision is foolish. Older boys will see it in themselves and others, though, and should be included.

The debriefing

If boys are going to get the full learning benefit from the leadership decisions they’ve made (both good and bad), then they need an opportunity to think about how well their decision worked. It’s important that you give them the chance to reflect in this way, so that they can “put things together” and grow.

One of the best ways to do this is a debriefing. A debriefing occurs immediately after an event - a hike, a trip, sometimes even right after a simple incident. The event must still be “fresh” in everyone’s mind - doing a debriefing a week later is no good. Do it as close as possible to the event. For a trip debriefing, use the last night of a long trip. For a day trip, get together at the cars before you leave.

In a debriefing, you ask a simple question “How did it go?” Everybody who wants to gets a chance to speak and share their thoughts. No arguments, and *no judgements from you* or from others. Just sharing assessments. Most of the time you’ll be surprised - the boys will be harder on themselves than you would be. You also might be surprised if they point out your faults. That’s good, don’t be defensive. Like them, your goal is to learn something.

A debriefing does not need to be long. Let it go until everyone's had their say but don't let things get repetitive. Scoutmasters who are participating should normally sit quietly. If they offer an insight, it should be brief and either positive or non-critical. If you interrupt or critique, they'll never discuss things openly or honestly with you again.

The trip leader's job is to save his opinion until the end. Finish by summarizing what the others have said, and put it into a bigger context if there is one ... a principle or principles to be remembered. Give the adults' assessment. Conclude on an up beat, with either a "good job" statement or an acknowledgment of "this is hard, way harder than most guys your age can handle. You're improving, keep at it."

Debriefings should almost always be done with everyone, but you might have to be careful if you've got talkative parents just dying to dive in. A separate adult debriefing with just scoutmasters (& parents) can also be useful from time to time.

Discipline

You've volunteered as a scoutmaster to do something worthwhile for youth. To help them, to be their friend, to enjoy the outdoors. You want to be liked. You are going to be abused. Go watch "Kindergarten Cop." The smallest of determined kids can and will take out the biggest of men.

Unless you've got a few years of successful classroom teaching experience behind you, one of the biggest things you are going to have to learn, and learn fast, is how to manage a group of adolescent boys. If you're a parent, you might figure this will be easier. Nope. After all, you've only had to deal with one or two adolescents at a time, and they were totally dependent on you. It's a different game with 20 boys who don't know you from beans.

Management and discipline is a scoutmaster job. Older boys will slowly come to assist in minor things, but all the guys will look to you for tone and example. They *want* and *expect* you to handle discipline, even the ones who are misbehaving. Especially the ones who are misbehaving! If you're ineffective in this regard, the troop is going to go into a tailspin right quick.

There are some basic rules to handling scout discipline. We list them here in only the vaguest of orders. After you run into difficulty, come back and read these again. And again. Remember, there's a key to each boy, and different age groups need to be handled differently, as we mentioned above.

Rule 1: You cannot try to be the friend of a scout. They have friends already, they don't need you. They want a scoutmaster. It may happen down the road that they will become friends with you, but only if they first respect you.

Rule 2: Respect is their property. You cannot demand it, they have to give it, and only when they feel you have earned it. You earn it by caring, by being honest, by always being true to your word, by respecting them, and by holding them accountable.

Rule 3: It's true that though you can't demand respect, you can demand obedience. This is kind of like China in Tiannamen square; as an adult, you always have enough firepower to quash resistance. Doing so destroys respect and foments rebellion unless exercised with great restraint and care.

Rule 4: It is the sworn duty of every child to challenge every rule and boundary, and to push every adult. Treat this as though they are asking a question: “Do you care?” He said go to bed, but I’m going to stay up anyway and be loud. Does he care? How often they challenge you depends on your response, and in part on the temperament of the boy.

Rule 5: The sooner you respond to misbehavior, the less you have to do to correct it. If Bill starts to talk in the middle of a presentation on first aid, all you might need to do is go stand next to Bill, or catch his eye. If you let it go for a while, you’ll have to touch him gently, or call his name. If you let it go for longer, Bill & all his neighbors will be talking. You’ll have to stop what’s going on and address them seriously as a group. If you let it go longer than that, the meeting will be coming apart, and only the most serious of interventions with the help of other scoutmasters will get things refocused. The moral: respond early and gently.

Rule 6: In order to respond early, you must always be paying attention to the boys - to their moods and attitudes. Don’t get too caught up in what you’re doing.

Rule 7: Always respond to attitude, never respond simply to actions. Sometimes you’ll notice that a kid is displaying a bad attitude, but really hasn’t done anything “against the rules.” You *must* correct the kid. Sometimes a kid is doing something “against the rules,” but is doing it with good humor and everything is safe. You might let this go.

Remember, we’re not into teaching boys about law. Schools make that mistake all the time. We’re trying to teach them about values and good judgement. If your response is “you broke rule X, therefore you get punishment Y,” then it’s just law – no reason, no justification. It teaches them “make sure you do something they haven’t thought of a rule for yet.” If your response is, “Hey, you know better” or “think about what would happen if... that’s why we don’t do that” then you teach them how to think and decide for themselves.

Rule 8: PIP and RIP. Praise in Public, Reprimand in Private. Always. If you have to talk to a boy about his (bad) behavior, pull him aside, away from his friends. This shows him respect - you don’t embarrass him in front of his friends. It also “divides and conquers” by removing him from his source of support and reinforcement. If you want to talk to a boy about his (good) behavior, make sure you do it in front of friends or adults. It makes the boy feel special, and it helps his friends to see what to do to earn similar recognition.

Rule 9: As soon as you correct a boy for anything, *watch for the response*. Every boy, on being corrected, is faced with a decision: accept the correction, or blow it off. You need to always be alert for this decision. It will usually come just moments after your correction (like when you turn your back). If the boy accepts, then it’s over. You should never even mention the incident again. If he blows you off, you must respond *immediately*. This is a direct challenge to you and your authority. Your response is to go two “steps” higher in response. Example: Bill is talking. You catch his eye and shake your head. He immediately turns and continues talking. You must now go over, touch him gently and say, “Bill, come on.” (skipping the “stand close” step) If he settles down, then later talks again, you’re back to the stern look. If instead you immediately hear him talking, you must now separate the boys (skip the stern talking to both step).

Rule 10: For every stick, there needs to be a carrot. If you correct a boy and he accepts the correction, the next thing you must do is find a way to “pull him back in” and give him praise. This

can't be fake or artificial - kids see right through that. It must be honest, and it must be soon. Ex. Bill is talking, you quiet him down; shortly after, you ask "Bill, what are the signs of a heart attack?" Ask this *only* if you're sure he knows them. When he answers correctly, "Alright! Exactly. Like Bill says, what you need to look for is..." Bill got corrected for talking; Bill got praised and credited for his knowledge when he paid attention. What's Bill going to do more often, do you suppose? The last thing you did (the one he remembers) was say he was a smart guy. What's he going to think of you?

Rule 11: Never threaten. If you do make a "threat" - "Do that again, Joe, and I will..." it is an irrevocable and binding contract. Once you say it, and Joe does it, every boy in the troop will be watching to see what you do next. Does he mean what he says, or is the scoutmaster a LIAR? If you don't follow through, you are a liar, and not to be trusted. Always mean what you say, and never make a threat you aren't willing to follow through on.

Leading by example

You'll hear it all the time - "It's great that the kids have a role model." Guess what? That's you!

While active discipline is very much a part of the day-to-day job of scouting, our real goal as scoutmasters (particularly in a Catholic troop) is to help each boy develop into a good young man, capable of making good choices and demonstrating good behaviors on his own. We've only succeeded when good moral rules and manners are internalized and become part of "who a boy is."

In this endeavor, your actions as a scoutmaster are key, and matter far more than anything you say. You have an obligation to be constantly aware of the example you are providing, even when you're wet, tired, and annoyed. You should never smoke in front of boys, and must try to avoid foul (& prejudiced) language. More importantly, though, you should model the behaviors you want to produce in them. If you stand around yelling and barking orders, they will aspire to reach a rank where they can stand around yelling at underlings. If you berate them in public, they will berate others. If you pick up trash and encourage them, they will pick up trash; if you order them to pick up trash they will learn to order others without assisting themselves. If you are helpful and courteous, they will be helpful and courteous.

"Walking the walk," in this way is much harder than it seems. Just walking around summer camp you'll see plenty of bad examples bombarding the boys. Adults rudely screaming across a crowded dining hall for a boy to be courteous and remove his cap (or just yanking it off his head). Some courtesy! Folks using rules, both real and fictional, to avoid being helpful or accommodating. Keep an eye on yourself and on your fellow scoutmasters. It's always appropriate to gently remind another Troop 8 leader when they start to forget the rule of example, and you'll find you have to use such reminders frequently with youth leaders.

Keep working on your example, and ask yourself constantly "what is my action teaching these boys?" Almost nothing else you do matters as much in scouting.

The death penalty

Every community has its felony cases - those things which are so damaging to the community that they require the offender to be at least temporarily removed from the community, both to impress upon the sinner the seriousness of his act and to give the community a chance to recover.

You will run across the occasional serious offense. Drugs at a campout. Deliberate, vicious beatings of younger boys. Gross violations of common sense and safety. Theft of others' belongings. We don't have many of these in Troop 8, but they have come up occasionally. How you deal with serious offenses will more than anything determine the character and happiness of the troop for the following year.

The rule is simple. If you catch a boy doing something serious, then chances are it has been going on for some time, and the other boys know it. They will be watching closely to see if justice prevails, or if it's OK to do nasty things because you can get away with a slap on the wrist.

When you discover something potentially bad, or the attitude of kids suggests it's going on, your first job is to investigate. *Separate* the boys in question. Don't let them "get a story" together. Talk to each seriously and individually. Start with the weakest link - the one you caught red-handed, the one you're closest to, the boy most easily intimidated. Intimidate. Push. Demand the truth. Set up the situation so that if the truth doesn't come out, nobody gets away with anything - *everybody* gets punished, even the innocent (like the whole troop has to leave a fun activity). Even if you don't know the culprit, the boys will, and the pressure will be enormous.

Once you've gotten to the truth, you must deal with the boy. Let him stew for a while. This is good for the kid, it makes it a "bigger deal" in his mind and impresses on him the import of the situation. It also gives you time to figure out what you want to do. Decide, then call the parents. A serious violation requires "prison" - removal from the community. The boy goes home, and is excluded from scouting events until he (and possibly the parents) meet your conditions for re-entry.

After you have removed the boy, you must speak with the rest of the troop. This is your chance to turn something bad into a very important lesson. Pick a time and a spot when you'll have their total attention. Neither you nor any other scoutmaster should discuss anything with them before that. No leaks. At the meeting, tell them the facts, straight out and honest. Criminal trials are public record - there's no confidentiality here. Explain what happened, what poor choices were made. Explain the principles (not the rules) which make this action bad. Explain the consequences. Ask for questions, but if anyone gives you a half-assed question or comment, be immediately stern. Don't let questions go on for more than a few minutes, and *never* get in an argument about punishment. Leave things dangling when appropriate - "Will Bill be allowed back in the troop?" "That depends. Bill and his parents will need to meet with me later this week, and we'll see." Dismiss the meeting immediately afterward, so that they have time to think about it and talk about it amongst themselves - don't go right into some other program. After the meeting, expect that a few kids who weren't involved at all will come up and want to chat about things. Listen but be brief. Later, expect that a few boys who were closer to the action might catch you privately to talk. Make yourself available so that they can approach you, and spend more time with them.

A note about siblings

As happens in most troops, Troop 8 will frequently have a few sets of brothers active in the troop at the same time. Because of the nature of sibling relationships, this will require a bit of attention on your part as a scoutmaster to ensure things work well for both boys.

If there's a single rule to dealing with brothers, it is that you absolutely *must* treat them as individuals. Even if there are marked similarities in their looks, interests, and behavior, they won't think so.

It's remarkably easy to violate this rule. Sending just one mailing to a household is one - which boy is going to receive it? Is he likely to share? Every other boy in the troop gets his own newsletter, why not a sibling? As scoutmasters, we must also fight to avoid the natural tendency to set our expectations of a younger brother based on the older. Kids get this all the time from parents and teachers, and most resent it deeply. *Never* refer to a boy's older brother while addressing him, and avoid troop nicknames like "Little McGary."

As a second rule, brothers should always be separated in troop structure and on troop trips. They should never be tentmates, patrolmates, or canoeing partners, and should not ride together on long car trips. Older brothers should almost never be assigned to teach a skill to a younger brother's patrol. In families with sibling rivalry, they'll needle and prod each other until things degenerate. In cases without rivalry, the younger boy will become (or continue to be) dependent on the older for assistance and for his "place" in the troop.

Many parents split boys between different troops for some of these reasons, and all will be grateful for your efforts to recognize each individually (and for keeping them apart!).

A special note for fathers

Troop 8 has been blessed in recent years by the volunteer efforts of a number of men without kids of their own, who have been able to give a great deal of time.

If you are a parent scoutmaster, you should be sure to look over the section on "dealing with your spouse." There are also a few special notes which apply to you here.

- Always remember, you're a parent to just one boy, not to the whole group. The rest of the boys don't know you from Adam, and can't be expected to treat you like their parent. They aren't dependent on you, they don't have a long history of your care and concern. The things you expect automatically of your kid Joey they won't know or care anything about. You have to earn their respect.

- Some boys will respect you because you're Joey's dad, and they are friends with Joey. The extent to which you rely on this, you hurt your son. His reputation is being used to defend you.

On the other hand, if the boys come to respect you, then Joey will benefit as well (Hey, Joey, your dad is cool!").

- If you act like a dad on scout events, paying more attention to your son than to other boys (or treating him differently), then you will never be a scoutmaster. After a while, this will embarrass your

son. Act like a scoutmaster, paying attention to whichever boy needs it at the moment & treating your son like “one of the gang.” This way you’ll have the respect of all the boys, including your son.

- Remember, it’s OK if your son doesn’t like scouting as much as you do or chooses to drop out. His choice. Don’t get caught becoming the scouting version of the “Little League dad.”

Working with parents

As a scoutmaster, your job involves more than just working with boys. A fair bit of your time will be spent working with and teaching adults along the way. Throughout this text in various areas we discuss some of the parent issues you will run across as a scoutmaster. This section is designed to give you some basic principles and overall considerations.

Parents will be one of your most wonderful assets in working with the boys. They have special insight into their own kids and also have a good working knowledge of their boy's peer group. They have resources (like transportation) that the troop needs, and personal expertise to share either with the boys or with the committee.

As much as you try to get to know the boys, make an effort to get to know the parents. That's difficult sometimes, but always worthwhile. It will help considerably in understanding the boy and in bringing ideas and volunteer resources into the program. Personal touch and concern is appreciated by adults as much as kids. Keeping the parents positively involved at some level may also help keep the boy involved, depending on family dynamic.

Just as the "personal touch" rule is the same for adults as for boys, almost every other rule is too. Some of the parents you encounter you will find to be less mature and reliable than many of your older scouts. They can whine and carry on and plead for special treatment just like a Tenderfoot. They can also come through and be enormously generous. Just like the boys, they will need instruction in Scout Spirit and expedition behavior.

Working with parents you must always keep in mind three tenets: they need as much instruction about the program and outings as the boys, they are naturally more focused on their own son than on the welfare and needs of the troop as a whole, and they are more capable and willing than boys to act independently. These tenets lead to the following guidelines:

- Always hold parents to the same standard and requirements (or higher!) as the boys. They must meet the same equipment checks and pre-trip requirements for outings, the same adherence to the Scout Law, the same level of expedition behavior.

- Expect to have to teach parents the same skills that you have to teach the boys. From canoeing, to skiing, to how Troop 8 deals with day-to-day issues like car trip logistics. You will have to set aside time and a person to teach them. You may have to reassign them or split them up because of ability or personality considerations, just the way you do with the boys. Don't hesitate, just do it!

- Like the boys, they are best taught in their own patrol, with other adults. Rarely should you try to do any real instruction of adults with the boys around. Boys learn more quickly, and this is embarrassing to most adults.

- Adults suffer from age. They aren't as used to learning, they tend to be more frightened, and they sometimes think they "know it all already." They take correction poorly. Consequently, they are more difficult and take a gentle, firm, more patient hand to teach. Be ready for this. Humor helps, and humility on your part helps set a good tone.

- Adults benefit from age. They don't require supervision if you're clear about expectations, and have the experience to get things done much more efficiently than the boys. If you aren't clear about

directions or expectations, though, they are more apt to act independently in unexpected ways (for good or ill).

Because parents tend to focus on just their boy, you will find that the presence of a parent on an outing noticeably changes the troop dynamic. Boys who are normally fine outdoorsmen will sometimes become less involved and whiney, because dad responds. Some boy leaders will latch on to dad, and will stop serving as leaders for their group. Other boys may become rebellious because of dad's intervention and will put everyone on edge. Still others will behave with more confidence and self-control with dad around.

Part of this comes from the natural confusion on both the boy's and the parent's part. Now that we're out here, am I to live by the same rules as at home, or the ones in scouting? Home rules might be stricter or looser, but will certainly be different, because in-town living with a family is very different from camping with peers. Dad's "tone" and attitude toward working with the scoutmasters will be key to the kid's behavior.

This gives us the most difficult of scoutmaster duties. If it is a scout outing, you must establish clearly to both the boys and the parents that the operating ground rules are the *scout* rules. It helps when you hold parents to the same standard. It helps considerably more when you insist that parents stay in the adults' patrol. No interfering with other patrols, no sleeping with boys, no canoeing with boys. This breaks up the 'family clique' – the boy will have fun with his buddies and you'll get a chance to know the parent better. For first year boys, you can be a bit relaxed about this, but not much. Remember, they need to make troop friends, and can't do it spending all their time around dad. For older boys, be sure to explain it in advance to all the parents, and stick to it like gospel.

Most difficult of all will be when behavioral issues arise. This is grim, whether the parent is more permissive or more strict. Here, too, it helps a bit if you make things clear in advance to the parent – the older boys and the scoutmasters handle most discipline, follow our lead.

If dad says the kid can do something that isn't cool with you, grab dad immediately, pull him to the side and explain the situation. Make sure dad corrects his own mistake; don't speak to the boy yourself. What's going on here is that the boy knows the score perfectly well, he's just trying to set his dad up so he can get away with something.

When the parent is stricter, it's even touchier. Here, you have to try to support the parent. If it's problematic, like if dad orders the boy to bed at 7:00pm just because he thinks it's a good bedtime, and everyone is playing capture-the-flag at 8:00, you might need to intervene. Be softshoe. Ask what Joe did wrong that he's being punished. Then turn things around to make it seem like the strictness is excusing Joe from a troop responsibility. "No, Joe was in charge of one group in the game, and is assigned to make hot chocolate & cleanup afterward. We can't let him out of his responsibilities." Use this judiciously, but it works ... strict parents never let their son shirk responsibilities or commitments. Be sure to praise Joe to this parent when you get a chance – a job well done merits some special consideration, which may lighten Joe's load. Putting the two together is great. "Joe is our most experienced and mature navigator. He's got great skills and shows good judgement. I need him to go on the moonlight hike, because he made that commitment and we planned the event counting on his participation." Remember, though, never lie. A last tactic is relating the event to a requirement Joe

needs for a merit badge or rank, and suggesting not getting it will “hold Joe back” or put him behind. Strict parents are all for achievement. Again, use this judiciously.

In all your instructional dealings with parents, be friendly and good-humored. Remember, you’re working with your buddies in the adults’ patrol. Make this camaraderie clear to them, and you’ll get much farther.

Working with Your Spouse

One of the running jokes in Troop 8 is a habit of calling up a fellow scoutmaster's spouse and thanking him or her for letting the scoutmaster "come out and play." More seriously, as any parent can tell you, regular work with kids and/or the time commitment to scouting can put a strain on relationships if not managed appropriately.

It is dangerous for anyone to try and give general advice about so personal a thing as a marriage or other significant relationships... so we won't even try. The first iteration of this section was an attempt to list specific actions that one could do to make sure your spouse felt appreciated during frequent absences, but that in itself makes an assumption (that they mind that you're gone!).

However, there may be times when demands on your time seem inordinate, or especially inconvenient (say around anniversaries). If you ever find yourself in a...delicate...situation regarding time, here are few personal observations I've made about myself and my marriage:

I made sure I knew my motivations, and made sure my spouse knew them as well. A good part of any motivation to be in scouting as an adult is the contribution you are making towards the next generation. Having fun is great, but teaching and guiding youth into adulthood is what it's all about, and hard work is a part of that. For adults with sons in the troop, this is usually a little easier for a spouse to understand and accept. For others, it's important that you convey this sense of moral purpose to your spouse; you must talk about helping kids, their growth, and your successes & failures with him/her. Scouting must be more than a "fishing trip with the guys." My spouse always understood this part of why I was involved.

I started to pick and choose my commitments carefully. My overzealous early years lead to a lot of commitments that were of marginal value in terms of my contributions to the Troop. You and the Troop leadership need to work this through realistically to get the most bang for your time and commitment.

If in doubt, a few surprise flowers or other gestures always work wonders. My spouse appreciated surprise flowers arranged to be delivered in the middle of an outing. This was especially true when we hadn't specifically discussed any tension related to separation . . .trying to *buy* good feelings during a time of tension has never worked well for me.

Remember, most of us have "been there." Check with fellow scoutmasters when you need ideas or suggestions.

The Troop Committee

The Troop Committee (also known as the “Parents’ Committee”) meets once a month, by tradition on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 8:00pm. In some scout troops the committee is a special group of adults, who may even be elected or appointed by the head of the chartered organization (church). For us, the tradition has always been that the committee is open to and consists of all the parents of the boys.

The Troop Committee’s job is to provide all of the “adult level” support that it takes to keep a program like Troop 8’s running smoothly. While the boys run the troop program with the assistance of the scoutmasters, the committee backs us up and supports us.

In Troop 8, the committee also exercises an oversight capacity on troop operations. Major “capital” equipment expenditures (like new tents) require committee approval, and the committee also is responsible for voting on new scoutmasters and passing the recommendation on to the pastor. There are no particular “quorum” rules for the committee, but normal practice is not to conduct this sort of business if the parents’ meeting is particularly under-attended that evening.

Committee meetings are organized and run by the troop Committee Chairman. At least one of the scoutmasters should attend each meeting. Usually the sitting scoutmaster-in-chief attends, along with any other scoutmasters with business to pass along (like the Venture program scoutmaster) or interest in attending. As a scoutmaster, it’s a good idea to try to make these whenever possible – it’s a great way to get to know some of the parents, do “parent education,” and allow them to get to know you. Remember, they’ve got to be comfortable sending their kids out into the woods with you!

Typically, the parents who attend committee meetings are the dedicated, generous volunteer-types who are a wonderful resource.

Parents’ Volunteer Positions

As a scoutmaster, you are not alone! Remember, your job is to work with boys, to get to know them, to share with them, to teach... Everything else that you find you “have” to do takes away from the job that you really are needed for.

The surefire prescription for scoutmaster burnout is to try to do everything yourself. As a leader, you know this intellectually, but you’ll find practicing it is difficult. At the last minute, you’ve got to do things or they won’t get done. Before that, well, sure other people could do it, but you “want it done right.” You can do it “better, faster.” “It will take as long to explain it.”

Come on, get real. Remember... your job is working with the boys. You need to have enough time (and patience!) for them. The more that you can get others to do, the better job you will do. Oh, the parents will screw it up sometimes, and it really will take time for you to explain things. But they’ll learn, and get better.

To help prevent burnout, we regularly rotate responsibilities and positions among the active scoutmasters. We do this based on each person’s interests and needs. The person who serves as “trip leader” changes from outing to outing. The person who serves as “scoutmaster in chief” routinely

switches from year to year. Sure, it takes a bit of time for the new guy to learn, but then after a while you've got 3 or 4 experienced scoutmasters to help out, plus the ideas each has contributed along the way.

Our other resource is the Troop Committee, whose role is to help the scoutmasters. Most of the time, though, they don't know how. They'd love to assist, but camping's usually not their thing. So think of the extra things you do that keep you from spending more time with the boys, then establish a volunteer position to handle those things for you. Everybody will be happier - you will, the boys will, and the volunteers will because they get to help with something they care about.

Over the years, we've set up some positions. Here's how they work:

The Committee Chair: Runs the parents meeting, and handles behind-the-scenes administrative chores. Handles the liaison with the parish - meeting room arrangements, service projects, Scout Sunday, keys, parish bulletin announcements ... anything that has to do with St. Thomas. Serves as mediator in dealing with more serious parent problems. In charge of recruiting and organizing all the other parent volunteers.

Fund Raising Chairs: Usually one or two per event. They're in charge of all the coordination and planning for a particular fundraising event, like the Pancake Breakfast. The events run without the scoutmasters - you'll be told what you and the boys are needed for, and when to show up.

Troop Treasurer: Handles all the money. Receives receipts and your billing sheets, takes care of billing families and making payments. Also handles financial aid matters confidentially. A critical person!

Advancement Chair: Is responsible for all troop advancement records. Receives your advancement report forms and files them with the Council. Keeps copies of all records for verification. Maintains the official troop roster of adults and scouts. Prints lists & labels. Arranges for parent volunteers when you need a Board of Review. Procures all awards from Council for a Court of Honor, and makes up appropriate lists, cards, etc.

Transportation Coordinator: Arranges for volunteer drivers and vehicles for all troop outings. Files Tour Permit forms for all outings with the Council office, and gets them to you when necessary (summer camp & camporees). This person is your hero!

Troop Equipment: An experienced outdoors person who comes on occasional campouts. This adult works with the scoutmasters and scout Quartermaster on organizing and maintaining troop equipment. Helping make sure it's clean and in proper order, developing systems for the Quartermaster to use to keep things organized, purchasing new and replacement equipment, etc. At times, this post has been occupied by a scoutmaster, but that's not good. A scoutmaster should be with the boys.

Telephoning: One or more parents who run the parent telephone network. These are used to get notices or changes out to the parents, and to remind them of upcoming events. This includes assisting any of the other people, like the Fund Raising chairs. It also involves calling all the parents each

month to remind them about Troop Committee meetings, so we get an OK turnout.

Secretary: Takes care of the parents' meeting minutes and the by-mail information system to the parents.

Newsletter Publisher: Works with the scout newsletter editor, scouts, and scoutmaster to publish and mail the scout monthly newsletter.

Mother of Senior Patrol Leader: Supervises and coordinates pot luck events like courts of honor, including the food, supplies, and food setup.

Summer camp coordinator: Handles all the summer camp bureaucracy - deadlines for deposits, receiving deposit checks from families, calling families, distributing and collecting medical forms, etc.

Parent merit badge counselors: You identify and train. They serve at your discretion, so if they don't work out, you just stop using them. Wonderful for the "in-town" badges, like many of those required for Eagle.

In the past we've also had one or two parents to help with trip logistics, reservations, etc. This really didn't work out, because the scoutmaster serving as trip leader still had to explain each item and get information back, and things were different for each outing. It ended up not saving us any work.

Your job as a scoutmaster is to maintain this system, USE it, and add to it, so that you have time to spend with the boys. In maintaining it, you need to identify any "weak links" - people that aren't working out in that position, and work with the Committee Chair to restructure or make a change so that the position will again be helpful to you. Don't worry about hurting people's feelings. That's the Committee Chair's job. Besides, nobody ever cried over being relieved of responsibility.

The Great Sauk Trail Council

The local council is the “corporate entity” that is the Boy Scouts of America in this area. The voting members in the council are each of the Chartered Organizations (in our case, St. Thomas Church) who vote through their chartered organization representative at the annual meeting in January. They select an Executive Board, who generally makes all major decisions.

For day-to-day operations, the Council employs a number of paid “professionals,” to handle council operations. These range from the Chief Executive down through a number of district executives and special program executives. These people also hire the hourly workers who handle registration and advancement records, the Scout Shop, etc. All of these folks can be found over in the council office on Huron Parkway north of Washtenaw.

The council is divided into a number of districts for the purpose of administrative management. Troop 8 is in the Washtenong district (covering Washtenaw county), one of the largest districts in the council.

In addition to the paid council staff, there are also a number of BSA volunteers at the district and council level. These include the district chairmen, district advancement chairmen, round-table leaders, camp coordinators and a host of others. If you find a council person who is helpful or who puts together a good program, you can bet it’s a volunteer.

Don’t expect much

The Council Service Center provides uniforms, books, and other support material of varying quality. The council also keeps advancement records and is involved in arranging some events, like fall and spring camporees.

In general, you should not expect very much by way of service to the program from the Council. The “professional” staff tend toward a rather myopic institutional or corporate view of the BSA where service to kids and troops is far from central, and plays a subservient role to other managerial considerations. Indeed, you’ll typically hear from the executives only when they want us to sell popcorn, recharter, or give money - things that help the corporate “bottom line” on which they are evaluated.

Troop 8 does not sell popcorn because we’ve found it to be an absolutely terrible fundraiser for us. That was a committee decision years ago, so the answer when they call is “No.” We do allow a “Friends of Scouting” solicitation, but only for 20 minutes at parents’ meeting. Sometimes they’ll want to do it at a boy event like a court of honor, which is totally inappropriate and must be refused.

Practically, Troop 8 pretty much operates “on our own” using BSA materials when they’re good and our own otherwise. Don’t depend on the Council for anything, as performance is spotty at best. Keep copies of advancement records, be prepared to have your own events ready if you attend a camporee (in case they don’t provide any), etc. We do all of our scoutmaster and boy leader training in-house and avoid the Council sessions. We also handle a number of services for our boys which would be better handled on a council level - arranging equipment discounts, generating outing information, running an affordable rental program for x-country skis and backpacks that is affordable, etc.

There are a few bright lights ... as a rule, the women who work as paid staff at the council office are friendly and helpful. You will find that Mary Ann the “registrar” has a particularly good attitude. They will be forced by management on occasion to try to saddle you with some goofy bureaucratic requirement, like presenting advancement forms at the same time you buy badges for a Court of Honor. Don’t put up with this, or any other Council paperwork headache. Be gentle and good-natured, but firm. Remember that their paperwork only helps them, not us or the boys, so don’t let it stress you.

Troop 8 does have a tradition of providing Council-like services to other troops when we have the means (hey, perhaps the “professionals” will take a hint...). Things like arranging airport campouts for other troops, helping with recruiting or program setup, teaching first-aid, etc. As you have time and “free hands,” be sure to try to keep helping in this way... many troops need the assistance.

The Catholic Church

Troop 8 is chartered to the Roman Catholic Church of St. Thomas the Apostle. We welcome both scouts and scoutmasters of other faiths who are willing to support our mission to youth. Especially welcome are folks from other Christian denominations, as we work and pray together for the eventual reunification of Christ's Church on Earth.

This section is designed to provide some basic information on aspects of Catholicism you may encounter while serving as a scoutmaster; it by no means is even the slightest scratch on the surface of this 2000 year old faith. If you're interested in more of substance, please talk to one of the Catholic scoutmasters or parish staff.

Mass

In Troop 8, we ask all boys to join us in Catholic church services ("mass") when out with us on a Sunday. This is a requirement for all Catholics, based on the commandment to "keep holy the sabbath." Under Catholic canon law, all Catholics are obliged to attend mass on Sunday each week; to deliberately refrain from doing so is seriously sinful. Catholics are not permitted to fulfill their obligation by attending services of a denomination that does not validly practice the Eucharist - the consecration of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Catholics are thus limited to services at Catholic or Orthodox churches. By contrast, most Protestant denominations recognize any Christian service as fulfilling the obligation of the commandment.

Because the Catholics, both adult and scout, must go, and most of the others must also attend church, everybody goes to the Catholic services. It's important for scouts to share together their reverence for God and respect for each other. It is the source of rich and meaningful discussion among the older boys. It's also one of the few things the parish *requires* of us, which it also requires of all students in the elementary school and high school.

Occasionally when two services are easily available (as at a scout camp), we'll split up the crew and go separate ways if we have the adults to do it. Once in a while we have left a non-Catholic adult in camp to start preparing dinner, and perhaps even two adults with one or two boys when necessary. Standard scouting rules apply for this - if any boys stay, there must be two adults, and only as many as are needed to perform the "special service" should remain behind.

Often on trips we'll go to church on Saturday evening rather than Sunday. Most parishes celebrate a "vigil" mass after 4:00pm on Saturday which "counts" for Sunday. Masses Sunday evening also "count" - St. Mary's student parish in Ann Arbor has a 5pm and 7pm Sunday service which may occasionally be used.

Communion

For Catholics, the communion bread and wine really is the "body and blood" - the essence of Christ himself. Non-Catholics who do not share in the Catholic understanding of the sacrament should be respectful and refrain from partaking of communion. It is OK, however, to go up in the communion procession and cross your arms across your chest (touching each hand to opposite shoulder). The

person distributing communion will give you a blessing instead. (Sometimes, they may not understand this signal; shake your head “no” and say “just a blessing”). We all pray for the day when Christians are again part of one communion.

Non-Catholics otherwise should feel free to participate in all other aspects of the mass, all the prayers & songs, etc. It is polite to “follow along” with others in terms of when to sit, kneel, and stand. Persons from non-Christian traditions who do not recognize communion may choose to sit quietly rather than kneel for the consecration and communion.

If you have to put together a crew for “Scout Sunday” or some other church event, be aware of these other norms:

- Only a commissioned Eucharistic Minister may help distribute communion (must be confirmed Catholic who has been trained)
- Only Catholic boys who have been trained & commissioned can serve as “altar boys”
- In general, the persons bringing up the “gifts” of bread and wine during the offertory should be Catholics who have made their first communion.
- Any baptized Christian who shares a belief in the Bible may serve as lector or reader.

Dispensation

There are always exceptions. When travelling in an area where getting to mass poses an undue hardship (like while on a Venture backpacking trip), the requirement can be waived (“dispensed with”) by the bishop. Whether a formal dispensation is really needed under such circumstances is a matter for theologians & personal conscience; *but* please understand that some families in Troop 8 are part of a very conservative Catholic tradition. It will be important to them, and they will ask. Talk to Fr. Roger or call the bishop’s office in Lansing (Diocese of Lansing). In any event, try to do something appropriate on Sunday when you’re out in the field.

Catholic Religious Awards

Two religious awards are available for Catholic scouts. The first, Ad Altare Dei, is designed for scouts through 8th/9th grade, but can be earned by any scout. It is very difficult, demanding a solid grasp of basic Catholic theology across a wide area - indeed more than most adult Catholics would be able to answer. The booklet is more than four times the size of any other religious award text. Ad Altare Dei must be counseled by a Catholic religious education instructor certified by the Diocese of Lansing, with an endorsement specific to counseling the Ad Altare Dei. St. Thomas/Gabriel Richard students might be able to work with a teacher, or Larry McGinnis (St. Thomas youth director) should be able to put other boys in touch with someone. Our last recipient was Yvo Moldanado, who as a high school student worked for over a year on this award.

The second award, designed for high school students, is the Pope Pius XII medal. While this award demands a more sophisticated level of understanding, the requirements for earning it involve more independent study and group discussion. Because of the group discussion element and the relative sophistication of the theology, this award is a difficult one to arrange - you need several boys (and

preferably several girls as well) to participate. The discussion leader needs to be a secondary (high school) religious education instructor certified by the Diocese, but there is no special endorsement required. Earning the award involves an extended oral interview with a panel of educators, clergy, and former recipients in Lansing.

As you can see, these awards are quite difficult, all the more so because of the need to find qualified counselors. Best bet is to encourage “serious” scouts who are in the 8th grade confirmation program to continue to pursue the Ad Altare Dei award through Larry McGinnis.

Religious awards aren’t exciting or cool, and the work is daunting. Keep encouraging kids, and make a big deal over the few who succeed. The Diocese is very good at this - official dinners with the bishop in Lansing, presentation of awards at high mass at the cathedral, etc.

How do you identify a boy who might be interested? Just keep your eyes open. The ones who actually try to sincerely pray at church, or sing the songs, or who in their conversations mention God and religion as a believer, or who listen to Christian music... these are the boys who are coming to believe on their own, and might be willing to work on an award.

Religious Awards for Non-Catholics

The Council keeps a list of the assorted religious awards available to other religious denominations. Just as for Catholic scouts, our job is to identify boys who may be interested, then get them the appropriate materials and encouragement. Usually their parents can help in finding an appropriate counselor in their church.

Some of the religious award materials are “generic Protestant,” and families or counselors may feel a need to change or supplement the materials to better serve their particular religious tradition. *This is OK*, so long as the counselor is comfortable with it. The requirements should stay about the same in terms of level of understanding and amount of work required.

For all religious awards, the whole troop should turn out for the award ceremony, which should be celebrated in the congregation of the scout receiving the award. These are big achievements, with a lot of effort behind them. Make them something special.

Adding New Adult Leaders

There's a rule in Troop 8 scouting: The more, the merrier! Working with boys in the outdoors is fun! Share the fun with your friends, neighbors and other new folks!

Nothing's better than another adult friend in scouting, and another set of hands with talents to share. Looking for and adding new scoutmasters is important to everyone's enjoyment of the program and to "spreading the load." At the same time, few things are as awful as a poor scoutmaster, or adding on someone who you find later just doesn't "work and play well" with other scoutmasters.

Finding and keeping good, new scoutmasters is among the most important of troop operations.

Recruiting Scoutmasters

One of the saddest things to hear about is the death of a troop. The pattern is always the same. One especially dynamic scoutmaster did everything for a number of years. He finally retired, there was a mad scramble to find a "temporary" replacement who gets thrust into the position without really wanting it or being prepared. Programs collapse. Kids leave. Troop folds.

You can never have too many scoutmasters. The major reason boys join and stay in scouting is that it provides their first real adult friends - adults who are *their* friend, not their parents' friend. To a young man, this is the neatest thing in the world - another adult out there cares about me, trusts me, works with me as a friend and partner, shares good times and bad with me, does cool things with me, listens to me. The outings are fun, but they just provide venue. As you read the upcoming sections on boys and the value of scouting to boys, adult contact will be emphasized again and again.

One scoutmaster can't show the needed level of interest to 30 boys. As a rule, one very active scoutmaster (a single person/older person with time to spend), can maintain adequate personal contact with 8-10 boys. Maybe a few more, but only if the person is truly exceptional and gives 20 - 30 hours per week. Less active scoutmasters or folks with more extensive outside time commitments (parents with kids not in scouting) can keep 3-5 boys.

The number of scoutmasters you have working actively with the boys will determine the size of the troop. Period. With one very active scoutmaster, you will have a troop of 8-10 active boys (with a few extra "hangers-on" on the roster). With four very active scoutmasters, you'll have 40 active boys. Because numbers of boys greatly affects the recruitment and retention of scouts, as well as the level of activity of your program, number of scoutmasters is critical.

How do you find scoutmasters? The first rule is that you must *always* be out looking. Don't make the mistake of waiting until numbers are falling and people are leaving. The reality is that your potential volunteers don't live by *your* needs or schedule. You have to be there recruiting them when *they* are ready to volunteer - and you never know when that is!

Your best contacts are friends. Your friends, friends of parents in the troop. Twice a year, remind the parents at a committee meeting to give you the names of people they think might make good volunteers - coaches, teachers, cousins, whatever. Approach these people, invite them, welcome them, ask them to just come on a few outings or to help out at a meeting. Always do this in person, low key,

no pressure. You don't know if they'll work out yet, and they don't want to leap right into a huge commitment. The goal is to get them out with the boys, doing things. That's what we have to offer.

Your next best contacts are Troop 8 alumni. If they're back in town after college, or stay in town, invite them out! These guys are great. They have the skills, they know and enjoy the program, and they're usually good at working with younger guys. Interest and ability are almost always there ... they just need to find the time. You need to find them. Keep in touch, send them a once-a-year-at-Christmas mailing, write them when they graduate.

Next, advertise. Especially in-parish, like in the parish bulletin. This is really the job of the Committee Chair, but you'll have to remind him. An ad should run for 3 weeks straight (nobody ever calls the first time they see something), and should be run at least 3 times per year. Time the ad to coincide with the start of school semesters. This is not just to attract university students, but also for the many adult academics and college staff members who will start jobs in town or have their time free up at semesters. Run one in September, one in January, and one in late April/early May. Put the same ad in St. Mary's bulletin. *DON'T say you're looking for a scoutmaster!* Even the best scoutmaster in the world won't jump blindly into that position. Advertise for *assistant* scoutmasters, extra adult help or anything that sounds reasonable and unthreatening. Make it clear that you're looking for *extra* volunteers in an already active program. The goal is to get them to call you, then get them on an outing with boys. You (and they) can then start to figure out what the best role for them is. If at all possible, have them try to recruit a friend shortly after they join. That way you'll add more people, and they'll keep each other interested by talking scout stuff away from the troop.

Let the council know you're looking. Repeatedly. Constantly. What you want is for them to give you the name and number of anyone who calls in with an interest in working with boys. If someone bothered to call the council, you know they care and are really interested. Grab them! The council won't.

Once you get someone to come out, get them working with kids right away - in something that they know well and are comfortable with. Help them to feel "Hey, I can do this ... and it's kind of neat." Most adults, even parents, can't handle a group of rambunctious middle school boys who are strangers, so avoid putting a potential recruit in that position right off the bat. Give them one or two "good" kids to go over a requirement with at a meeting. Have them help with a Board of Review (be sure to brief them first so that they contribute!). On a first outing, encourage them to help with the "cool" stuff - axe yard and fire building, but not with dinner cleanup where behavior could be worse (and where they need to know and understand the personality of the kids involved).

Find some time, like after a meeting, to get the potential recruit together with a few of the other adult leaders informally. The "Casey's Run" is a good choice. Use this opportunity to get to know the person, his or her background and interests, and help them get to know you. Be honest about the troop, but be upbeat! Don't play on the negatives.

After that, watch and see.... with any luck, you might gain another scoutmaster. If not, that's OK too. Remember, if you get one out of three, you're doing well. On average, only one out of three potential scoutmaster contacts will make it "all the way" onto the roster.

Qualifications and Screening of Potential Adult Leaders

Few things that we do in the troop affect kids as much as changes or additions to the troop adult leadership. It is vitally important that this be taken seriously, with a mode of formality that does not typify other troop decisions. If you give this book to potential scoutmaster recruits, you might consider removing this section first. We don't want them to feel like they're being constantly "evaluated" while they're with us, even though that's part of what is going on.

The real qualifications for a scoutmaster are as stated in the first chapter:

- 1) The person must want to work with young boys and men.
- 2) The person must enjoy being in the outdoors.
- 3) The person must demonstrate a willingness to learn - from everybody, including young people!
- 4) The person must be supportive of the mission of St. Thomas Catholic Church.
- 5) The person must be able and willing to give freely of his or her time.

with one addition:

- 6) The person must exhibit sound judgement and ethics.

Previous scouting experience, outdoor skills, or anything else are strictly minor secondary considerations, because the relationship with the troop will not work if any of the top 6 are not present.

The only way to competently evaluate these qualifications, which ***you must do*** to be fair to the scouts, is to observe the person in action - working with boys, working with the scoutmasters, being in the outdoors. This is the job of the scoutmasters, who will be able to observe the candidate "in the field." It is also a job for the boys, which they will do naturally. As scoutmaster, you need to be sure to talk to them - the younger ones indirectly, and the older troop leadership scouts directly. The insights they give you will always be honest, sincere, and helpful. Most valuable are parents who participate and observe the person on an outing. Be sure to talk to them afterwards!

When the scoutmaster staff is convinced someone (1) works well with the boys, (2) is good to have on outings, (3) is good to work with, (4) supports the program, (5) puts in the time, and (6) shows good judgement, then it's time to fill out an application and go to the Troop Committee. Not before. For some folks, that might be in a month or two; for others, you might wait six months or longer. Be *sure* - you owe that to the boys and their families.

Only when the scoutmasters make a recommendation should the Troop Committee take up the cause. This may mean you have to stall them or explain the procedure, as parent turnover on the committee is relatively high, and there is often an urge to "add on a scoutmaster." We *require* the committee to do a reference check (at least two references) on any person not familiar to the troop or the parish. Be sure this gets done! Some of us have known personally scoutmasters who were convicted of child molesting. Sadly, it is a "perfect" position for a person so inclined. Be thorough, and do the checks yourself if the Committee Chair does not.

After the Troop Committee votes to approve a new scoutmaster, the Committee Chairman takes the paperwork to the pastor to be approved, and then registers the new leader at the BSA council office. Once all this is done, you get to tell the person that they're "official."

You'll find over time that about 2/3 of your potential scoutmaster recruits don't work out. Almost always, they will show up off and on for a few weeks, then fade away. It may happen down the road, though, that you get a hard case - someone you try to work with for several months and it's clear that it just isn't working... but they keep coming! This would be rare (it hasn't happened in our time), but possible. Don't be afraid to make the hard call. You owe it to the boys and to the person. Sit down with the individual privately, explain that things are not working out, point them toward volunteer positions in other organizations. When you have that conversation, don't get involved in negotiations, promises, or arguments. Be compassionate but firm. *It's over.* The person is not welcome back.

Troop Finances

Troop equipment, awards for boys, food, expenses for outings... Running a successful and active scouting program takes a considerable outlay of financial resources, in addition to the time and effort of volunteers.

Troop 8 has a very well-developed “money handling” system designed to streamline financial operations. It is coordinated by a very special volunteer - the troop treasurer.

Billing & Accounts

We run a lot of activities in Troop 8, most of which involve some expense. In an average month, a whole mess of transactions take place. As a scoutmaster, this will drive you absolutely off the deep end tracking \$5 here and there. Some kids and parents will go out of their way to hand you checks at the most inconvenient of times, while others forget, and others ball the check up into a spitwad.

Troop 8 has one of the nicest systems going, doing its best to remove the headache of financial tracking from the scoutmasters. Keep this system running! On a regular basis, a few parents (the responsible ones who come to committee meetings) will try to change this, insisting that everyone pay “up front” weeks in advance, or that you publish final costs at least two months ahead of time. What they don’t understand is that most of our parents (the ones who *don’t* attend committee meetings) aren’t like them. Things are forgotten, checks come late, kids lose them, and it’s difficult to pin down exact costs in advance of outings. Remember, in a troop of 40 boys that runs more than 30 outings a year, if a boy forgets only 10% of the time you’ll have to track down 120 items. Any scoutmaster knows that the real clueless percentage is over 30% (kids & parents), which means 500 or so tracking operations for the scoutmasters. No way.

The troop system involves a troop treasurer (parent), who maintains a “running account” for each family in the troop. Each scout is charged \$15 per season dues (fall semester, spring semester, and summer semester), which go toward our fees to the Council and toward awards & administrative expenses like mailings. Every payment (including receipts for food bought) that a scout or family makes goes into the account; every expense for an outing gets charged to the account. Periodically, but at least once per season, the treasurer sends out bills to families, who pay the troop treasurer directly.

This system serves several purposes. First, it makes the accounting clear and easy for families, and eliminates the “kid factor” in delivering money and payments. Parents get bills, and pay them along with their other bills for the month. Second, it relieves the scoutmasters of financial duties so that we can do other things, and keeps us from being the “bad guys” on money matters. Third, it makes it possible for families who are having financial difficulties to decline payment quietly and confidentially, instead of putting a boy in the position of having to say in front of his peers “I can’t pay” when the scoutmaster asks for the check.

Here’s how the system works for the scoutmasters. Expenses for an outing are paid by a scoutmaster or by troop check. All the expenses are paid at once - no headache of having to collect money from twenty rambunctious kids. At the end of the outing, the scoutmaster in charge of the outing sits down with a troop roster and checks off who was present at the outing. Scouts who cancel at the last minute are normally charged for the outing, particularly when food, transportation, and equipment/tickets

have been reserved for them. On the roster, the scoutmaster marks any special expenses that only apply to some scouts (like rental skis), and the total expenses of the event. If you're feeling nice or it's a complicated billing, break down the expenses and total the amount for each kid to save the treasurer the hassle. When you're done, this sheet goes to the treasurer, who handles the billing and reimbursement. Easy! Simple! The only catch is that your end needs to be done *immediately* after an outing, before you forget anything and before the treasurer sends the next billing.

If a parent has a reimbursement, like a receipt for food bought for an outing, they simply send the receipt in to the treasurer marked with the name and date of the outing (and their name!). It's important that the treasurer have a patrol list if an outing's food was purchased separately by patrols. The amount of the receipt is then credited to that family's account as a "payment."

While this is a great system, like any system there are some drawbacks. One of these is cash flow. Payments and deposits go out well in advance of outings, while billings go out well after an outing is completed. This generally means that the troop is always in a zero-cash position with lots of outstanding receivables. It also generally means that we as scoutmasters effectively "float" an ongoing no-interest loan to the troop because of the delay between paying an outing expense and receiving reimbursement.

The second drawback is accountability. Families tend to be more accountable and responsible when they have put money down in advance, and less apt to cancel participation in a trip. At the same time, if a kid needs a deposit, he's got to talk to his parents and tell them about the trip, assuring all family communication is taken care of.

To address these issues, the system was changed a bit in 1995 so that boys are expected to bring a deposit check to the meeting a week in advance of the trip. The amount of the deposit should be published in the newsletter, and should be the troop leadership's (PLC, newsletter crew, or scoutmaster's) best guess as to the total base cost for the trip (not counting things like ski rentals, which not all scouts would be getting).

This new system assisted but did not totally alleviate the cash flow issues. It temporarily helped in accountability, although in most cases reservations are secured longer than a week in advance. Unfortunately, it soon turned into just as much of a problem the other way, because fewer boys or families would commit to outings (the number of "maybes" increased). This, coupled with the headache of dealing with checks, forgetful kids, and forgetful parents went a long way to increasing the workload for the scoutmasters. It also substantially increased the embarrassment of kids with financial need. Some aspects, though, like publishing the estimated cost in advance, were very helpful for kids and families.

As you work with the system, review it occasionally and make modifications you feel might be helpful. Be especially careful to maintain a good communications "system" with the troop treasurer. Remember that the less you have to do as a scoutmaster, the more time you'll have to spend with the boys.

Billing Traditions

Kids are not billed for gasoline used in cars on a trip. The expectation is that parents will share in the driving burden. For scoutmasters, it's just part of what we do.

Scoutmasters are not billed for mundane expenses - food, camping fees, etc. Scoutmasters are billed for expenses specific to them - canoe rental, ski rentals or lift tickets, etc.

When cooking in patrols (the adults patrol), scoutmasters do not bill the troop for food expenses.

Scoutmasters (or parent participants) are not charged for summer camp, if the camp even charges adult fees. At other sites where a discount is given for group leaders (ski lift tickets are an example), the discount is shared among the scoutmasters present.

Parents who participate in an event are billed like scouts most of the time. On some trips, particularly where a parent is serving as a "required" adult leader under BSA rules, they are billed like scoutmasters. This is determined by the scoutmaster who is serving as trip leader.

Financial Aid

Troop 8 serves a set of families with relatively diverse economic resources. Some boys come from "housing project" neighborhoods while others are relatively well-to-do. These boys are in patrols together as "teammates" and need to be able to participate in outings together - whether they be inexpensive carcamping trips or high adventure expeditions. For boys to be kept away for lack of fiscal resources is embarrassing to the boys and damaging to the whole troop.

It is the long-standing policy of Troop 8 and St. Thomas the Apostle Parish that no boy should ever be denied participation in an outing for inability to pay.

In support of this policy we use monies from our fundraising efforts and at times solicit additional donations to cover fees for families having difficulty.

As a scoutmaster, you need to have a feel for how this system works. First, to be successful, it must be handled as quietly and confidentially as possible. Our general rule is that if a family receives a bill from the troop treasurer that they cannot afford, they simply pay what they can and send a short note back to the treasurer. The remaining balance is dropped. This is handled completely confidentially.

Occasionally, particularly for smaller expenses, the scoutmasters themselves will simply cover expenses when they are aware of a boy's tenuous financial position. Such a "vanished" expense never even makes it into the troop billing system.

Whichever method is used, it is vitally important never to put the boy in the position of having to ask for special consideration (especially in front of his peers), or in any way make the scouting experience different because of his family's finances.

Despite our explanation of the Troop policy, what frequently occurs is that families who feel they cannot afford outings will simply keep their son home. Remember our ongoing need to educate parents! As a scoutmaster, you should always "keep an ear to the ground" for these cases, and approach

the parents confidentially. Explain how important it is for the troop to get their son out on trips because of his contributions to the team, and re-explain the financial aid policy.

Some families have a “pay to play” policy with their boys, where the boy is expected to pay a portion of the outing. This is *not* the same thing as poor financial circumstances, but is an appropriate teaching device used by those parents. We always support parents in this endeavor. Do keep an eye on this, though ... in extreme cases, where a boy is slowly “dropping out” or near to violating the 50-50 rule, you may need to suggest (gently) an accommodation by the parents, explaining that the alternate may be an end to their son’s scouting activities. You might recommend a “work-study” exchange of labor for the troop or the church to earn “credit” toward outing fees.

Equipment purchase

The major non-outing expense of the troop is troop equipment. We maintain a set of tents for the boys, cook equipment for each patrol, and some gear for loan or rent. A lot of stuff. Some of this gear includes consumable items like propane that aren’t charged to a specific campout.

For ordinary equipment expenditures (like propane, tent stakes, etc.) , the routine is for the troop quartermaster, the adult in charge of equipment, or a scoutmaster to just go out and buy it. Save the receipt and turn it in to the treasurer for reimbursement.

For small capital expenditures (new lantern, new pots, etc.), the routine is pretty much the same, except that whoever’s doing the purchasing has to have talked to the scoutmasters. This is to make sure that whatever is bought will “work” with the program, and to help ensure that we don’t miss any “deals” that one of the adults might know about.

Large capital expenditures (new tent, rental backpack, etc.) require the approval of the Troop Committee. A large expense also includes multiple single purchases that add up - thus buying all new cookware for every patrol would be an item for the committee. Usually these are discussed at a committee meeting, prices and suppliers are investigated, and the purchase is approved at a later meeting. The committee may sometimes have to consider financing, additional fundraising, or other methods to handle the expense of the acquisition.

Fundraisers

The troop holds several fundraisers each year, to raise monies for troop equipment, operating expenses (like awards & patches), and financial aid money for scouts. It is expected that all parents and boys will participate. Fund raisers are organized on the adult/parent committee level, and run by them. Each fundraiser is coordinated by a parent (or parents) who act as the “director” of that event. This volunteer makes arrangements with outside agencies, recruits and assigns other helpers, and generally handles the whole ball of wax. Scoutmasters participate as coordinators of the boys, but don’t run the show.

The longest-running fundraiser is the troop Pancake & Sausage Breakfast, held every spring. The committee keeps a full set of notes on how to run this, what size crowd to expect, etc. Each year after

the event it is updated with new information. As a scoutmaster, all you've got to do is make sure they get and keep updating this information, and that they set a date and start planning by January.

For the last few years, we have also volunteered to assist with the Dominos Christmas lights display. This has been quite a successful fundraiser with relatively little effort. It usually involves only parents and older boys.

The Venture Program

The Venture Program is a special “pull out” program, which takes certain boys from the troop to participate in special events and outings of a more challenging nature. These outings are exciting, often longer than the average scout outing, and require of the participants a much higher degree of skill and responsibility than the regular scout program. Venture outings include such things as extended backpacking trips, caving, rock climbing, aggressive mountain biking or long-distance road biking, backcountry skiing, big-lake sailboat racing, whitewater kayaking, or sea kayaking on the open ocean, to name but a few.

In character, the Venture program differs from regular scouting only in that it takes scouting to its logical conclusion for older boys. Adult participants, while they may serve as instructors in special skills, do not serve as leaders. They are, rather, simply expedition members along with the boys. Scout leadership and judgement become a matter of fact, not principle. The program is based on the curriculum of the National Outdoor Leadership School, designed to teach and prepare solid outdoor leaders.

Joining Requirements

A great deal is expected of a Venture scout. He has to be able to take care of all his own personal camping needs without help or supervision - cooking, cleaning, hiking, staying warm, staying dry, selecting sites, etc. He has to be able to work cooperatively with patrol mates in stressful conditions demanding careful attention to safety. He has to demonstrate and maintain good “expedition behavior” - always keeping a helpful and friendly eye on his companions, not falling into moodiness or selfishness. He has to show initiative, and he has to take instruction well.

The “paper” requirements for joining the Venture Crew are to be 13 years old and 1st class rank or above. The real requirement is that the scout has to secure the approval of the Venture Scoutmaster by demonstrating his ability to meet the above expectations regularly on troop campouts. That doesn’t mean the kid has to be perfect, but on the day-to-day skills and expedition behavior he should be solid. The “magic” requirements are that

1. He be pro-active - you see him step in and just “do” unwanted tasks without being asked, and without bragging about it afterward (“Well I did all the dishes last night!”).
2. He not be negative. This is the death of a Venture program - the bad apple. The kid who complains, the kid who teases or annoys others to distraction, or pouts, or blames others.
3. He doesn’t give up easily. When learning a new skill is difficult, he keeps trying cheerfully, even when others are doing better.
4. He noticeably thinks of more than just himself. He gives up things he wants to let others have a turn, he tries to help or cheer up others when they’re “down.”
5. He listens to the scoutmasters and to the older scouts. He can take correction without going into a blue funk, he pays attention and tries hard to learn.

To meet approval for Venture Crew, there must be very little of #2 above, lots of #5, and some of each of the others. As a scoutmaster, you'll know it when you see it - it'll be that "aha! experience" that leaves you saying, "Wow, that was nice." Watch for it. The person should be a help and never a headache on a regular campout.

The Venture Scoutmaster's permission requirement was put in way back when we had a bunch of 1st class guys who weren't qualified. These days, the troop tries to tie the Scout Spirit requirement for 1st class to the expedition behavior requirement for Venture participation. This is a good thing, but permission is still required.

By tradition, Venture activities are "by invitation." A scout doesn't apply, and begging to get in guarantees he doesn't come. A boy might ask politely, that's OK. As scoutmaster, your answer should *always* be either, "No, not yet, but work on..." or "I don't know, I'll think about it." Remember, any kid you have doubts about should *not* be invited. There is no "benefit of the doubt" here - Venture activities are safe, but the margin of safety depends on the integrity and judgement of each member of the crew. You must guard that safety.

There is a "probation" or trial period for a new candidate. During this time, a boy who you think might be ready is invited to some skills sessions - maybe rock climbing knots and belays, or a bicycle repair session. If that goes OK, you keep inviting him to other skill sessions, and then to a day outing. At the same time, you "use" him for harder tasks (and nuisance tasks) on regular troop outings to see how he handles it.

After all this, you figure out if it's going OK. You check with the older (scout) members of the Venture Crew to see how they feel - they are often as good or better a judge of character than you are. After all, they have to work with the guy. If things are cool, he gets his "Venture" strip and is told that he's welcome to Venture events without any further invitation, as long as he meets pre-trip requirements.

Usually once a kid is "in" that's it, provided you did your job properly up front. If you blew it, you'll have to deal with it, even up to "probation" or "suspension" from the crew. This is very difficult on you and on the boy. It should never happen. Do your job and be discriminating at the front end.

By now, every boy in the troop understands the requirements for the Venture program, and of course they all want to get in. There is no better motivation for a scout than setting a "high bar" to jump in order to get what he wants. Our requirements for Venture participation have led kids to actually work hard at changing the way they behave, or changing how hard they try to really *learn* "requirements." It's great. Once they're in, the excitement and camaraderie of the crew keeps them involved in scouting to a much older age than average. In this way, the Venture program contributes strongly to the whole Troop 8 program - by motivating non crew-members and keeping crew members.

The Program Outline

Weekend camping never gives kids enough time in the field to get good at camping. It's true. You arrive Friday night and stay up too late. You run around Saturday, collapse exhausted, and leave the dishes dirty. You get up on Sunday, have a bagel, and go home. If you actually had to stay in the field

on Sunday, though, you'd just be starting into a more reasonable pattern of actually "living" in the wilderness.

Venture trips are exciting, fun, and new! Kids love them for that reason. They are also more demanding than anything they've been through before - physically, mentally, emotionally. They have to rely on each other more for skills, and judgement, and help. They should, in the course of the program, master backcountry living and travel skills, and develop a solid level of experience in advanced activities. The goal is to get them to the point where they are capable backcountry travellers *on their own*.

To do this, you need *long* trips, and lots of pre-trip skills development. The usual schedule is a 2-3 week adventure trip in August, and possibly a 1-week winter trip over Christmas vacation.

The program (and destination) for the summer trip are set by the Venture crew in September, at the get-together to share slides, photos & memories of the August trip just completed. It needs to be decided then or shortly afterward, because the "lead time" on such trips is enormous. Options need to be investigated beginning in October and November, with plans coming into place by December or January.

Some ideas for "big" trips:

Philmont or other scout high adventure area. Be careful, though - many of these are only 1 week programs, which is too short.

Whitewater kayaking

Sea kayaking

X-country biking

Fixed-camp rock climbing.

Fixed-camp extended caving.

Long-trip canoeing

Long-trip sailing

SCUBA diving

Rocky Mountain alpine and glacier

Winter:

Backcountry ski camping

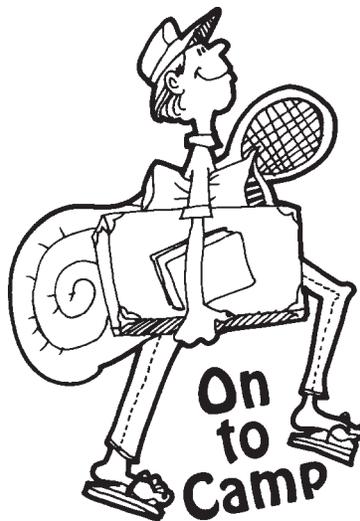
Backcountry snowshoe camping

Troop 8 Austria

Troop Leadership

A Boy Scout troop is not run by the adults or by the scoutmasters, though these have a significant role to play in troop support and operations. The real leadership of the troop is the boy leadership. It is the boys who generate our best ideas, who plan with a unique eye to what kids want, and who get to experience both the frustration and satisfaction of “making it happen.”

As always, the boys need a structure within which to operate. This chapter is the scoutmasters’ guide to the troop leadership structure, with special attention to the parts you’ll need to “lubricate and repair” from time to time. Working with the boy leadership takes a lot of time, but is really quite a gas - these are, after all, your best and most committed scouts.



Troop Leadership - PLCs, TLCs and Other Acronyms

A Boy Scout troop is run by and for the boys. This should be your mantra. If a boy is ever going to make it to Eagle Scout - where he needs to put together a large community service project from scratch - he's going to need lots of practice in organizing and leading the boys of the troop.

Historically our best ideas and events have come not from adults, but from boys. Things like Whirly Ball fun nights, HAM radio licensing, whitewater boating, caving, mountain biking, and aggressive downhill ski programs were ideas generated (and implemented) by the boys. Give them credit, give them leadership. But remember - scaffold! Give them a structure to work in as well.

You'll need to know the positions of troop leadership. The "head of all the boys" is the Senior Patrol Leader. He's the president, chairman, and CEO. This position is elected by the troop. The SPL has an assistant, the ASPL, who serves as "vice president," and president when the SPL isn't available. Typically, the SPL works with the Patrol Leaders, and the ASPL works with the appointed special positions (cabinet?), like the Quartermaster and Scribe.

Each patrol of boys - boys who you have put together in a group according to a combination of their requests and your wisdom - elects a Patrol Leader (PL) to serve as their leader and their "representative to congress." The Patrol Leader appoints an assistant (APL) to help him out and serve when he isn't available.

The SPL also appoints a number of boys to serve in special troop positions - newsletter editor, quartermaster, scribe, librarian, troop guide, etc. These boys are senior scouts whose interest and personality lends them to that position. As a scoutmaster, the SPL and PLs have to discuss their appointments with you first, before the appointment is confirmed. Make sure you do this! (see elections)

In addition to these boys, as scoutmaster you have the ability to appoint one or more Junior Assistant Scoutmasters (JASM). These are older, very reliable boys (usually Eagles or close) who have already contributed a substantial amount of time as SPL and other troop position and are tired of it. They operate outside the regular boy leadership as a mini-scoutmaster under your direction. Obviously, this is a high honor not to be bestowed lightly; once given, a boy will never return to the "regular" boy leadership.

All these boy leaders form a council that generates ideas, plans events, and otherwise runs the troop. Troop 8 makes a distinction between two leadership councils. The Patrol Leader's Council (PLC) consists of the Senior Patrol Leader (SPL), the ASPL, all of the Patrol Leaders, any Junior Assistant Scoutmaster (JASM), and any other boy *by invitation* of the SPL. The Troop Leader's Council (TLC) is a bigger group, consisting of the PLC plus all the appointed troop positions and the Assistant Patrol Leaders (APLs). Think of the TLC as the "big body," like the full congress, and the PLC as a smaller "working committee."

How it works - big planning

At the beginning of the scouting year (September), the whole Troop Leader's Council gets together on a weekend day for a major planning session. This session should happen somewhere special, and it must happen *after* and not the same weekend as any Junior Leadership Training.

The TLC brainstorms ideas, consolidates them, and comes up with the whole scout program for the entire year. Heady stuff. Of course, this is not down to the last detail, but it includes the major themes, the intended weekend outings & pre-trips, and perhaps tentative dates.

Usually the TLC will be more detailed about fall & winter events, and then choose to get back together in November or early January to generate more plans for spring and summer. This is fine, and helps keep the September meeting from getting too long. Just be aware of lead time issues. Some planning for the whole year must happen in September.

The TLC or the SPL may then appoint small workgroups of TLC scouts and adults to "look into" outings or projects proposed by the council. For example, two boys and an adult might be assigned to research & schedule a series of fun nights, or investigate possible ski trips. These workgroups will report back to the PLC with their findings the following month. Presto, you've got your program for the scouting year.

Remember, as you set up a TLC - scaffolding! You have to get with the SPL well in advance and establish an agenda. You'll need food, breaks, and perhaps something fun to do afterward. You'll need calendars for each boy that they can write on, pencils, paper, resource materials for ideas. A big chalkboard is highly recommended, so that everyone can "see" what they're talking about. Rules for discussion and "who's got the floor" have to be set by the SPL, as well as ways of making sure every boy contributes (usually not hard).

Plan well, and then go with the flow. Never interrupt a group "on a roll" because it's your planned break time. Never keep a "dead" group working because it's not your planned break time.

To help support the SPL, there is a set of Troop 8 meeting "hand signals" used to unobtrusively call the SPLs attention back to the plan. Scoutmasters also use these among ourselves at parent meetings. They include:

Get things moving : One hand, index finger extended, rotated like a bicycle wheel. The faster the spin, the more emphatic the message. Use to signal "let's get rolling."

Focus: Two hands, palms facing w/fingers together and pointed in same direction. Move hands together until about one inch apart & hold there. Use to signal a need for focus - the conversation is "running away," and needs to get back on track.

Time: Tap the wristwatch with the index finger. Used to indicate things are running too long or the leader needs to watch the time.

Break: Both hands in fists, as though holding a stick. Make like bending & breaking the stick. Used to indicate it's time for a meeting break.

Let him talk: One hand, palm out toward person, moved down until palm near flat. Used to signal person to "hold on, let the other person talk" when they are trying to interrupt.

Cut the discussion: One hand, cutting motion across throat. Used to indicate time to stop the discussion and move to a decision.

Thumb twiddle (adults only) : Two hands, twiddling thumbs. Used to get an adult to let the kids handle it without interfering.

Make sure the SPL understands the Troop 8 meeting hand signals. This allows you to guide the meeting through the SPL. Also, be sure the scoutmasters in attendance recognize the “thumb twiddle” signal.

Follow-up

After the main TLC, your first job as scoutmasters is to make sure that the smaller “workgroups” get started right away. You’ll have to push this, with one scoutmaster assigned to each workgroup to help get it going and to push it along so that it makes the one month deadline.

After the TLC, the smaller Patrol Leader’s Council (PLC) handles more of the detail planning for outings and meetings. They get together once a month for about two hours, and look at the events for the coming few months. They lock down dates, make decisions on whether something will run, and decide on topics for the scout meetings. The PLC determines the final calendar.

The PLC also has a role in giving you feedback and handling the “shepherd” operations of the troop. A small amount of time should be devoted to any comments, ideas, or problems the Patrol Leaders have been having, and any attendance problems from members of their patrol. These boys often see things first, before the scoutmasters recognize them; they can also assist with follow-up.

PLC meetings are ordinarily held Sunday evening before the parents’ committee meeting, so that things are coordinated, and the newsletter is published following the PLC (with information from the PLC). The scoutmaster in charge of PLCs (usually the Scoutmaster-in-chief) should get together with the SPL at least two days in advance to write up the agenda. Patrol leaders should know that if they can’t make it, it’s their job to send their APL in their place, or someone else from their patrol. You need to have a “critical mass” of boys present. The SPL will normally invite one or two others - usually the quartermaster and newsletter editor, since they need to be “in” on what’s going on. Others with special announcements (e.g. Eagle Projects) should come too, but be scheduled to speak early on so they don’t have to stay for the whole meeting. Free pizza is *de rigeur*, but should normally be saved ‘til the end, as the food and pop “defocuses” the meeting.

Spreading the word

Though the newsletter is the chief information dissemination mechanism, try to get your PLs to “pass the word” along to their patrols. This helps their patrol understand how things get done - their patrol leader does it, and he knows the answers! It’s best if he can be enthusiastic about it. Remember, this requires coaching & scaffolding. Give him a short reminder on paper to share with his patrol at the next meeting. Set goals, like the PL who gets the greatest percentage of his patrol on the ski trip wins a prize.

Setting Up Patrols

A patrol is a group of boys who are going to work, live, cook, and camp together for a full year. They are a way of breaking this big group of boys into smaller, more workable units. Each patrol has its own set of camping equipment, and elects its own representative to the troop planning committees.

In Troop 8, we ordinarily set patrols up for a full year. Patrols are put together in June, when we admit new scouts from webelos and the old “first year” patrol graduates into the regular troop structure.

Taking requests

Because patrols need to live and work together, it’s important that boys be put in patrols with their friends. Ordinarily, they will be quite good at choosing partners with whom they will get along. Unfortunately, just letting the boys choose up patrols is always a bit awkward. Just like choosing teams for a game, there’s always someone left until the end, with some hard feelings.

The best way to choose patrols is to have boys fill out their “requests” on a piece of paper at a troop meeting. They can list up to three people whom they want to be in a patrol with, and may also choose one person who they don’t want to patrol with if they know they just won’t be able to get along. These requests are collected by the SPL for consideration. Make no promises about honoring them!

Choosing patrols

The SPL and one or two scoutmasters get together privately and go over the requests, thinking carefully about setting up patrols with a “good mix” of boys. Here are some things which should be considered:

- Keep friends together. Remember, that’s one of the big reasons boys stay in scouting. Keep tent partners together especially.
- Be careful about mixing up ages. Remember, older boys don’t like to work with younger ones unless they are at least 3 years younger. Most of the time, the patrol will be together for skill instruction, so they should be at about the same level in scouting.
- Think about who the potential Patrol Leader might be. Don’t set up a patrol entirely with chiefs or entirely with indians.
- Think about personalities! You want the crew to get along, so avoid likely personality conflicts. At the same time, you want there to be enough variety in personality to make it fun.
- Think about attendance. You want to make sure each patrol will have enough boys on every outing. Don’t put all the “part time” attendees together. Put some of your “always comes” boys in each patrol.
- Patrol size. Don’t make them too small! We’ve found 8 is a minimum, 10 is nicer, while 12 is a maximum. Remember, you’ll probably lose a couple boys during the year, and you’ll have 40 - 70% attendance from the rest. You always want at least four boys from a patrol on an outing.

Once you have decided on the patrols, make many lists so you don't forget! Next, assign at least one (and preferably two) scoutmasters to each patrol. It will be their job to serve as the adult coordinators and "first contacts" for those boys. Think about personalities here, too! Be sure to match adults with an age range and group of boys they will enjoy. A first-year patrol needs a patient, zany, high-energy scoutmaster who can handle the short attention spans. An older-boy scoutmaster needs to be a skilled and sophisticated outdoorsman.

Getting patrols running

After putting together the new patrols, always remember that just because you have the names on a list doesn't mean that it's "real." A patrol doesn't become a patrol until the boys get together, work together, and identify themselves as being part of that group.

Your job is to make that happen. Fast. Nothing's worse than having a boy come to you in September still not knowing what patrol he's in. So as soon as you've assigned patrols, your next few meetings (and maybe an outing) should be strictly segregated by patrol. Do problem-solving games, name games, patrol contests. Try to set things up so the boys start to think of themselves as real members of a patrol!

All this new-patrol orientation has to happen before you conduct patrol leader elections for that group, which should happen at or before summer camp. So you've got your work cut out for you!

Troop Elections

The troop is run by the scouts - or more specifically by their elected representatives. The boys elect a Senior Patrol Leader (who must be field rank) and Patrol Leaders. The SPL and PLs appoint their assistants, since they have to work together closely. The SPL also recruits and appoints other troop positions - Quartermaster, Scribe, Newsletter Editor, etc.

The principle of “scaffolding” applies to elections as well as to any other aspect of troop leadership. Whoever the kids vote for gets the position, no question. But the scoutmasters must do everything they can to help boys understand and use their democratic power wisely.

The first way this is done is that *we* decide when there’s going to be an election. If things are going well, and everyone’s happily doing their job and learning something, then the troop can go for up to a year without a general election. If things aren’t going well, or some boys aren’t doing their job, then wait. Wait until their patrol figures out what’s happening, and identifies the source of the problem. Help this along - “Didn’t your patrol leader call you? He was supposed to.” Everyone learns important lessons this way.

Socrates once said that the failure of democracy is that any man who wants a position shouldn’t get one. Boys will, if allowed to, treat the election process as a joke. Even if they are not treating it as a joke, they will usually vote for the loudest, pushiest person. Your best candidates, understanding the responsibility and being humble, won’t even run.

This phenomena you must attack on all fronts. Immediately before an election, a scoutmaster must give a brief, forceful talk about the seriousness of the election, and how the patrol/troop will rely on the person’s knowledge and hard work. Make it sound like being elected means work (it does) and if the person they elect doesn’t do it, things will get screwed up (they will), and the boys will both lose out and have to do more work themselves (they will). Remind them to vote for the best person, not the loudest campaigner

Most important, you have to get the good kids to run! This requires advance planning and the personal touch. As scoutmasters, you have to recruit candidates actively. Grab them privately, “Hey Joe, you’ve done a lot of good stuff and have some great ideas for the troop. You really should run...” Praise them publicly in front of their electorate for things they’ve done that have been cool.

Once you’ve done the setup and you know you’ve got several good candidates lined up, then hold elections.

Appointed positions

Although the SPL and PLs get to appoint assistants and other troop positions, *never* let them do this on their own and without approval. Explain to them immediately after the election, or even before, that you will need to talk with them before they make any appointments.

Scouts will make assistant appointments for the most confused of reasons. When you meet, you should play Socrates, and help them work through the kind of person they need in an assistant and who might be good. If they have a choice in mind already, make them explain the reasons for it (whether you think the choice is good or bad). This is an opportunity to teach how to make important deci-

sions... use it! In the end, it is their choice, though it's always subject to your approval. You should never have to say "No" if you do your job right in the discussion.

Remember, as part of the appointment process you may need to be involved in recruiting the assistants, particularly the troop positions. Some may be shy or reluctant, and your SPL might not be the best at making the "sell." Help him out.

Junior Leader Training

Once you've got a bunch of newly-elected patrol leaders, assistants and the like, what do you do with them? The first thing that you don't do is expect them to magically "jump right in." Remember the scaffolding principle - you have to provide the structure and the training. With a newly-elected bunch, you're starting from scratch. That's right, from scratch. All that work you did training the last PLC is totally undone; it's time to begin again with a new group.

The way you do this is a Junior Leader Training (JLT) excursion. This needs to be a special outing, just for the troop leadership. They need to get to know each other, figure out how to work together and figure out how to work with the scoutmasters. It should be a full day; an overnight is nicest.

A JLT excursion is not a business meeting. In the past, we've tried to combine JLT activities with things like the TLC planning session for the year. It's always failed - one or the other gets short-changed (whichever one is second, when they're tired). Don't do it.

The JLT is a special "retreat" for the leadership. It should include a combination of fun, cooperative activities that make people work together and think about leadership, some "this is how we do things" instruction from the scoutmasters, some story-telling and discussion time about the troop, and some relaxed, fun time. Some of our most successful JLT sessions were held at the U of M high and low ropes course; that sort of cooperative problem-solving challenge worked very well.

JLT sessions are planned and hosted by the scoutmasters, including the JASMs. What you hope to come away with is each boy knowing the role he plays in the "big picture," how important it is, and how the other leaders will help and support him (and in turn rely on him to support them). He should leave with ideas for handling specific problems (what to do when his patrol won't clean up, how to lead without being "bossy," good ideas for the troop equipment).

Like everything, in setting up a JLT session, pay attention to details and plan well, but don't overschedule. Volume of data presented is nowhere near as important as developing contacts and attitudes. Your goal is to make a "Team" out of your new junior leaders.

Troop Meetings

Troop meetings are held on Monday nights, from 7:15pm until 9:00pm in the cafeteria of St. Thomas elementary school. There is no particular reason to consider this set in stone; in the recent past we held meetings on Tuesday nights for a few years. We found Monday nights a bit better for the boys and families in terms of scheduling. The times aren't set in stone either.

Scheduling for St. Thomas facilities is handled through the parish manager, currently Sister Diane. Arranging a "regular" meeting like this takes considerable advance notice. For meeting nights, we also reserve the school gymnasium for our use (except in rare cases of high school basketball games or special events). This was much easier to do on Mondays than on Tuesdays, again for scheduling reasons.

Meeting formats and programs are decided by the Patrol Leader's Council, and implemented by them and the adult staff. Meeting formats have changed quite a bit over the years, and continue to change as boys have new ideas. There's no "silver bullet" that we've found for coming up with meetings, but here are some general observations:

- Tradition is a good thing - it provides an "automatic" structure that everyone understands. We have some traditions in terms of an opening, announcements, program, some gym time (which doubles as time to work with individual scouts), and a scoutmaster's minute/closing. More could be established.

- Given the differences between boys based on age group, it is a good thing to split a portion of the meeting up by age, or at least by patrol:

First-year boys need an active, zany, skills-oriented program. They like goofy games.

Second to third-year boys want a focused-skill program with more substance and accomplishment. They want to start working toward merit badges. They see right through goofy games, but like more serious competition.

Older boys don't want to be condescended to by a skills program or goofy games and contests. They like to hang out, perhaps help out, and converse. Older boys are best at helping out boys who are more than three years younger than they are; these boys look up to them, and it feels more like a (good) responsibility to the older boy. When trying to teach others who are close in age, the younger boys don't want to be taught by a "near peer" and behavior issues can overwhelm them.

- All the boys like and very much want personal adult attention.

- Planning meetings is a huge task. You must account for every minute for three age groups, and put together a "lesson plan" or plans. In our past experience, we've generally found that this is not a task for scouts on their own. They can determine the "what," and can be given responsibilities for sections (if properly scaffolded), but they can't do the whole program. What's more, a lot of the PLC's time is given to troop planning already; adding another 2 hours per week per boy is deadly.

- The meetings we've liked best were planned and guided by adult instructors. These were chosen according to the program plans for the night. The adults incorporated a well-directed scout role in the meeting activities.

- The meetings that have been most useless were ones where planning didn't happen, and boys were put in positions of "here, you lead it" with inappropriate support and scaffolding. My favorite foolishness is "OK, now, patrol meetings!" when the patrol leader's haven't been primed with anything to discuss.

- At any given meeting, you can expect attendance between 40% and 70%. This ain't great, especially since it includes the patrol leaders. You have to figure attendance in to your planning ... multi-week programs usually fall apart because of attendance issues (a scout comes one week, not the next, then comes but has missed the material, then doesn't come for two weeks...). Make each night a separate, self-contained small unit.

- Scoutmasters need to have their sh** together and not be talking on the side when the boys are asking for the group's attention. There's a sense in which we feel we're "above the law" in this regard. It sets a terrible example, and is quite simply rude and disruptive.

- Use the Sign. Support the Sign. Never try to talk over and above a group of boys. Wait for them to quiet. Give them a stern look. Approach them and gently put a hand on their shoulder to settle them down. *Never* shout "The Sign's Up!" as a means of quieting boys, and admonish any older boys who use this "technique."

- Having a scoutmaster assigned and dedicated to each patrol works well. It's been great for the 1st year guys and should be expanded. This would give some meaning to patrol meetings and patrol identity/activity.

- If boys are up in the gym, an adult **MUST** be up with them supervising at all times. No exceptions. Boys can either be in the cafeteria or gym, but nowhere else in the St. Thomas building.

- The game materials in the cafeteria belong to the St. Thomas ESP program and may not be touched or used.

- You must always have other options for boys. If the only thing you plan is "meal planning for the weekend campout" it is guaranteed that most of the boys who show up won't be going on the campout and could care less about meal planning. If it's First Aid Merit Badge, think about what you're going to do with the guys who have it already (and remember the rule - they should normally only teach boys at least 3 years younger).

- Kids sit in school all day. Be different. **DO** things. But plan them well, with goals and one-meeting units.

- It is much easier to scatter than to collect. Once you've collected their attention, don't squander it! Use it! Make sure they know what the plan is for the *whole* evening, and that they have all the instructions they'll need. Repeat them. Twice. Once the announcements section of the meeting "breaks up," if they don't know what's up (or if you forgot something), it's too late.

- Most adults will observe a scout meeting and think it's "out of control," or "wild." Hey, these are middle-schoolers, and it isn't school (besides, if they visited school classrooms, they'd think those were "out of control" too!). It's OK for kids to be energetic and a little nuts, as long as you've got their interest, their attention when you need it, and something to share.

- Remember the need for “personal adult contact” is at the heart of every boy’s interest in scouting. As you plan the meeting programs, allocate time for this. Gym time helps, so does pre-opening time and extra time after the closing. Planning is especially helpful, because it frees you from running around at the last-minute in a frantic attempt to handle logistics. Rotating big group instruction among the scoutmasters can help. Do what it takes to have “unassigned” time to spend with the boys.

Advancement nights

These started as an idea out of the PLC about a year ago, recognizing that so much was going on at meetings that it was difficult to get a scoutmaster to “sign off” on requirements, to have Boards of Review, or to work on requirements you might have missed. It was also a plea for more “personal adult contact time.”

To address these concerns, we started doing “Advancement Nights” - one a month, or at very least one every month and a half to two months. These worked really well - lots of boys got through requirements, some got through reviews, and many used the time for personal adult contact time and skills instruction. They deserve to be a permanent part of the program.

Fun Nights

Years ago, the troop had a standing policy of not having a meeting on a Monday following a campout. As the program became more active, with more campouts, this impinged too much on the meeting time. Instead, the tradition has become that on a meeting following a campout, we do some other outing activity - a movie trip, an ice skating trip, Whirly Ball, whatever.

These “fun nights” have been a marvelous thing and a Troop 8 hallmark. The boys love them, and work to come up with new ones all the time. It appeals to the DOing something urge in them.

I’ll be honest, despite the origins of the tradition, it has seemed like doing them on the Monday night after a campout is a bit strange. It stretches our energies as adults in terms of logistics and enthusiasm, and makes our program “bunch up” on these intense weekends. It does, however, have the advantage of involving the boys who missed the campout, but I still wonder if it wouldn’t be better to split these up, by scheduling fun nights after “off” weekends. Of course, then we’d be planning a regular meeting after an outing, and that might be more work. Oh, well.

Plan for one fun night a month, whatever your feelings about timing. Don’t be a slave to the Monday night meeting time. We’ve done successful Wednesday night ice skating, Thursday night haunted barn trips, and Friday night Tigers’ games.

Fun night ideas from the past can be found in the Troop 8 Underground Outings Guide.

The Scoutmaster’s Minute

Although we spend a most of our time teaching specific skills, planning outings or handling rank advancement, we need to keep in mind that such things are just a means to an end and not an end in themselves. The goal of scouting is not to develop good knot-tiers, it is to develop capable and

character-filled men. On a daily basis, it's to develop boys who have the knowledge and the courage of conviction to make good decisions for themselves and the community.

One of your best opportunities to teach this is the Scoutmaster's Minute. As William Bennett and other "moral educators" argue, one of the main ways we teach morals and provide a "bigger context" for decision-making is by story-telling. Boys love stories, especially true tales about people. The essence of story-telling, though, is not biography - it is weaving a theme and a meaning into the facts presented, a "moral" the listener takes with him.

The Scoutmaster's Minute is a brief 2-4 minute tale presented by a scoutmaster just before the close of a regular troop meeting. The timing should always be such that it keeps this position of honor, with no announcements inserted afterward to "cheapen" the minute. This way, the last thing the boys go home with from the meeting is the scoutmaster's tale - they'll think about it, talk about it, remember it when going to sleep. It's therefore one of the most important and meaningful things you can do as a scoutmaster to affect the tone of the troop and the framework with which boys make their decisions.

Each scoutmaster will develop his or her own style of Scoutmaster's Minutes, but some rules of good theater are in order:

- Keep it short, with only ONE theme or major point, and everything focused on that point.
- Use a real story which is interesting to boys and which will hold their attention.
- Practice your presentation. Your body language and voice should indicate that you are sharing an exciting story. Begin strong, and let the change in your stance and tone of voice indicate you are beginning.
- The boys will remember and check on your tales. Never, ever lie. Don't exaggerate or alter facts. If you do and they figure it out (which they will!), your credibility will be shot. You will never again be able to give an effective scoutmaster's minute. Good decisions and morals can't be built on lies.
- Never use the minute to deal with troop problems or discipline. The last thing you want is the boys to go home on a "downer." Never use the minute to single out guys for mistakes they've made or bad things they've done, unless you continue with wonderful things they've accomplished (and the point is how much they have grown).
- Connect the action and the choices in the story to a principle you want the boys to leave with. The point of the story is, after all, to give them principles which they can use to govern their own choices. This is your one chance to talk about morals. Don't be shy.
- Don't squander the impact by explaining everything. Kids aren't dumb, they get the point - and you want them to think about it. Hit 'em with it - BANG! Then shut up.
- Don't apologize for morals or excuse them as opinion, and don't make the mistake of confusing rules (including laws) for morals and principles. Never talk about rules - kids get these all the time from schools and parents.

- Watch the body language of the boys for feedback, and pay attention to what happens afterward (do they leave thinking and talking about your story?). Learn from your observations what techniques and stories work best.
- There are a number of “collections” of scoutmasters’ minutes published in BSA literature or on the Net. Shy away from these; most are weak, some are simply trite. Like a lot of the official BSA stuff, it’s geared to an audience a bit too young for troop use.

The Scout Newsletter and Publishing Empire

One of the hardest tasks you have in the troop is getting information into the hands of boys and families. It seems like no matter what you do or try, somebody always comes up late and says “Were we supposed to.... I didn’t hear about that.” Like any serious problem, the way to deal with it is to come up with ideas, stick to them, and establish a “tradition.” Traditions get passed by word-of-mouth, and they come to be expected by parents and boys alike.

In Troop 8, the source of information has come to be the Troop 8 Notes, a newsletter published by the scouts for the scouts. Historically, this started as a little scoutmaster’s blurb in the mail to try another information channel, then was taken over by the boys. They’ve done such a good job on it over the years that it has come to be known as the “traditional” best place to find out about scout events.

Timing is critical, and takes considerable effort on the part of the boys and the adult publisher. The newsletter is put together with information obtained at the monthly PLC, but needs to get “in the mail” during the week following the PLC. Therefore, other elements (the long-range calendar, special articles or songs by boys or scoutmasters, etc.) need to be in earlier. As a scout-run endeavor, the quality of the newsletter goes up and down, and a fair bit of adult “scaffolding” is required at all times.

The scout newsletter is *always* mailed, because handing it out at meetings is a sure way to guarantee it will get lost before it makes it home. The scout newsletter is *always* addressed and intended for the scouts, not the parents. The scout newsletter is always mailed to *each* boy in the troop, even if there are two boys in the same household. Each boy is just as important and deserves his own copy.

The adult publisher has some responsibility for controlling content of the newsletter. Remember, though, this is scouting. Boys need to be allowed to make their own mistakes. Usually all that’s needed is a gentle “are you sure about putting that in?” Remember, kid humor is often lost on adults (and vice versa), so some latitude is required. At the same time, kids’ sense for what is “inappropriate” may not be as well-developed as it should be.

Most troop families plan their family calendar about a month and a half in advance. Experience has shown that if you don’t put details of an event in the newsletter and get it to homes at least 2.5 weeks before the event, your attendance will be reduced for that event by over 60%. Experience has shown that for a campout or overnight event, or a fun night on a non-Monday, if you don’t put details in the long-range calendar section of the newsletter for the previous month, attendance will be reduced by 25% or more.

Other event notification methods

People are also notified about events through the parents’ meeting minutes. These tend to come out more slowly, but are good for long-range calendar items. Make sure they’re accurate!

Scouts are reminded about upcoming events during the announcement section of scout meetings. This helps, but it *never* works by itself.

Scouts can be told about events and changes to events via the scout phone tree. This works better than meeting announcements, but is a royal pain for your patrol leaders. It's also usually a sign of poor planning on someone's part. Don't do this often.

Other Publications

The demographics in Troop 8 are based on our draw from the Ann Arbor community and particularly from St. Thomas. Our boys tend to be the bright, creative, high-achieving sort.

This historically has led to a wealth of interest and ideas that have made their way into the troop program - things like Amateur Radio, digital photographic editing, model rocketry and several others. As scoutmaster, be on the lookout for these things! Nothing is more fun than adding a new program element.

The boys of Troop 8, in addition to running the newsletter, maintain and update several other publishing projects under the "Underground" publishing network. The theme is to be humorous and deadly honest - the sorts of things which don't appear in "professional" and slick BSA publications. The favorite of these is the **Underground Song & Quote Book**.

Remember, scaffolding! Boys have great ideas and the wherewithal to accomplish them, but they need some help and support getting started and following through. This kind of "fun" but educational, leadership-building work is exactly what we're about. The more varied things we do, the better.

By troop tradition, the newsletter editor is also the editor-in-chief and prime mover of the assorted publishing projects. It is customary to have one or more other boys work as heads and assistant heads of a particular project.

Other Special Troop 8 Activities

Amateur Radio

Some years ago, scout Patrick Maguire (now an Eagle Scout and scoutmaster) started the troop into radio through his interest in Citizen Band (CB), and his habit of bringing and hooking up multiple car-to-car CB radios on trips.

Pat progressed into Amateur (HAM) radio, and pulled a number of boys in along with him. Amateur radio requires the operator to obtain a radio station license, but allows for FM, high-power transmission much better suited to the scouting environment. Amateur radio in the troop is normally limited to local voice communication, but can include morse code, HF “long distance” communication, computer packet radio, satellite communication, and a variety of other interesting and exciting areas.

There are five levels of Amateur radio license issued by the FCC. For local voice communication, a scout needs to complete the first two levels - Novice and Technician. There is no morse code requirement for obtaining the Technician license, though it limits the rights of the licensee to local communication if he doesn't take the morse code test.

The Novice written test consists of 50 multiple-choice questions on regulations and radio theory; the Technician test is 25 multiple-choice questions primarily on electronics. Tests are administered by designated examiners once a month in Ann Arbor, and also at assorted conventions. The proprietors of Purchase Radio & Supply on Hoover Street can put you in touch with members of the local amateur radio club, ARROW, that administers tests locally.

We've found that many 7th and 8th graders are capable of passing the tests, though it takes some work. Usually, this will involve most of the requirements for electricity and electronics merit badges, along with (perhaps) the radio merit badge. Often, before a test date, a group of licensed scouts & adults gets together with the test-takers for a “Ham cram” session.

A scout who passes the test gets his own radio station ID, or “call sign.” Just as for commercial television and radio stations, he must operate under FCC rules and pause occasionally for “station identification.” Scouts and adults who are not licensed may not use the radios unless a licensed scout or adult is actually with them (the FCC rule is that they must have immediate access to cutting the person off if they screw up).

Troop 8 generally uses the 70cm and 2m radio frequency bands for communication. In town, we use “repeaters” to communicate, with the first choice being 443.50MHz and the second being 146.96MHz. On road trips or for short-range in-town communication, we use the Troop 8 simplex frequencies of 446.55MHz (1st choice) or 146.55MHz (2nd choice).

Photography/Slide Show

One of the Troop 8 traditions of the last few years has been our photographic slide show. This is compiled from pictures taken at scout events throughout the year, and put together for in-troop viewing usually twice a year (winter and spring). The slide show is also used for recruiting and for an opening sequence for courts of honor. Naturally, different slides are selected for each, and the most funny and wild are saved for in-troop viewing alone.

There's a rule about photography: posed pictures suck. A good slide show can only be maintained by photographers who catch people "in action." The only way to do this is for the photographer to not be a part of the action himself, but to be an observer, set up to catch things as they happen. For this reason, scouts and scoutmasters are generally not good troop photographers - they're usually right in the thick of things. If you're going to get good shots, you have to be totally free of troop responsibilities and not a part of the activity itself.

Generally, we've tended to shoot slide film, because processing is so much less expensive than print film. Slide film is less forgiving for exposures, though, and often parents, boys, and other scoutmasters might shoot print film. It is possible to "cross-shoot" prints into slides fairly easily, or vice versa, if you have appropriate equipment.

Troop 8 Web Site

This one's new in 1996. A group of scouts and scouters started and maintain a Troop 8 "World Wide Web" site on the internet. It's an ongoing concern, with boys and adults adding and modifying what we publish for the world on a regular basis. Our goal, of course, is to have one of the best sites around, but also to provide good material for scouts to learn about internet publishing.

Like the newsletter, a scoutmaster should regularly look in on the web site to be sure the things being published are appropriate and meet a decent standard of quality. The bigger reason to look in on it though is to be able to complement and praise the guys who are doing the work!

As of this writing, the site is maintained at <http://www.nd.edu/~rgeier/Scouting/exile.html>, but it may move between systems in the future according to what the troop can arrange. Be sure that St. Thomas and all the other scout links are notified of any move, so that they can update their pages.

Service Projects

Scouting is in part a service organization, and developing an ethic of community service is very important to the program. “Service hours” are required for all ranks above Tenderfoot.

Most of our service projects come through the work of boys who are organizing Eagle projects. These community service efforts require the assistance of a large number of boys, and are both “fun” and a nice way to help out a troopmate.

In addition to Eagle projects, the scoutmasters will regularly be approached by community organizations or parents who are seeking our assistance. This might include the parish of St. Thomas, for a yearly “spring cleanup” which is a Troop tradition, or other events.

Tempting as it may be for the scoutmasters or the Parents’ Committee to commit Troop 8 to these endeavors, you must remember that neither you nor the parents have any right to make commitments for other people’s time. It is the boys who are being asked to serve, and therefore it is the boys and the boy leadership who should decide on whether to participate. Remember, scouting is about teaching decision-making, leadership, and respect for others. Show the boys the appropriate respect by letting them make (and learn from) the decision.

When receiving a request, then, you must be very firm. Get all the information, and insist that it has to go to the Patrol Leaders’ Council to be considered. Have the SPL present the request as part of the agenda to be discussed, and let the boys decide. Remember to scaffold, though. A good word about scouts helping the community is appropriate.

You will find that many of these outside groups and even parents don’t have any idea of the large number of events we already have scheduled, and will give only two weeks notice or provide only one possible date which the PLC has already scheduled for an event. Don’t let this bother you. Explain the situation, and tell the group, “No.” Always remember that our first duty is to the scouting program; that means that Eagle projects and already scheduled and “locked in” scout events have priority.

Scout phone tree

The scout phone tree is used to notify scouts of a change in plans, or to get important information that you forgot to get at a meeting, etc. Generally, it is your emergency cavalry, to rescue you and the PLC from a big logistics screwup. Hey, it happens. But if you discover you're using the phone tree more than once every two months, then it's time to get with the PLC and improve the planning process. The phone tree is a real pain for the boys, and because it occasionally misses people it's really bad PR for the troop.

The Master Forms Appendix contains a phone tree procedure sheet for the boys and the scoutmasters. Remember, scaffolding! New boy leaders need to be taught how this works, then actually "practice" the tree at least once before you can begin to rely on it.

Recruiting and Retaining Boys

As a scoutmaster, your job is to work with scouts. You may wonder from time to time things like “Where do these boys come from?” or “How did we end up with this crazy kid?” At other times, when things are going well, you might think to yourself, “What is it that makes such neat kids stay in the troop, given all the other things they are or could be doing?”

We’ve been doing recruiting of boys and watching kids come and go for a few years now, and think we’ve got a pretty good handle on it. As a scoutmaster, one of your most important duties will be recruiting new boys and families, and “pulling them in” (some might say “sucking them in”) to the troop. Unlike many troop operations, which fall to the boy leaders or to the parents, this one is nothing but scoutmaster.

Even more critical to the life and health of the troop is “keeping” boys involved and active. Scout retention is an ongoing responsibility of the scoutmaster staff. Don’t you love having more things to do? This one, though, is really worth it.

JOIN
US!



Recruiting

In order to do fun things in a scout program, you need scouts! This section is meant to give you a feel for recruiting kids into the program, particularly new boys who will be transferring in from Webelo packs.

The first thing to remember about recruiting is that you need to do it! When you read the section on retention, you'll find out that you can expect to lose about half of your recruits in the first year and a half. In addition, our older boys have told us clearly that to keep them in the troop, there must be a group of same-age peers to share outings and experiences with. The only way to do this is to recruit enough boys so that there'll be a core group left, even after normal attrition over the years.

In the past, we had settled with recruiting four or five boys from Pack 8. After a year, they were down to 2-3. That means on any given outing you'd have 1 or 2. Boys are social animals; they want and need to have friends around. With these numbers the remaining boys will complain, come less frequently, and eventually drop out. We've lost whole years and had big age gaps in the past because we let this happen.

You're target recruiting class needs to be 10-12 boys or more, depending on the total number of boys in the troop you can retain based on the number of active scoutmasters. This sounds frightening, having 12 or more sixth grade nutcases running around - AARRGHH! You won't be the only one frightened; the Troop Committee will wring its hands and moan and worry about transportation and finances and supervision. Ignore your fears, and ignore theirs. After all, parents volunteer in the same percentage, regardless of total numbers. Increasing the numbers increases the volunteers proportionately, so you'll always have "just barely" enough. Besides, scouting runs on boys, not adults. You need numbers of boys for outings and meetings to work. Later on you need them for leadership. Our worst leadership problems have come from having recruiting classes that were too small. So think big!

Attracting kids

Your best source of information on what attracts boys to the program are the boys. Talk to them, listen to them. Why did they join? Why didn't their friends join?

Over the years, we've compiled some basic tips from boys, from parents, and from our own observations. Here are some ideas:

- Webelos and Cub Scouts are usually boring programs that parents make kids attend and that boys are dying to get out of. As you make your pitch to the boys, make it clear that Boy Scouting is not like Webelos. You don't have to say it outright, but make it clear.

- Hollywood tells us that kids don't identify with adults, nor do they identify with boys their own age. They identify with boys 2-3 years older than they are - what they hope to be and can actually see themselves being soon. Most movies targeted to the 12-14 year old audience use actors who are 15-17. That means you need to have 8th and 9th grade scouts who are "cool" involved in your recruiting. Often they don't quite have the skills to do a "presentation" - presentations need to be snappy and exciting - but they should assist with presentations and be given plenty of opportunities to give the

“pitch” informally. Adults try to push goofy stuff on boys all the time, so kids are wary. Other, older boys, though, they trust and respect.

- Boy Scouts at St. Thomas and elsewhere is often considered very uncool. This is a hard hurdle to overcome. For heaven’s sake, don’t push uniforms! Figure out who the “ring leader” is for a group - the cool kid or kids at school. The St. Thomas school office or teachers can help you with this for the St. Thomas students; den leaders & parents can fill you in on others. Make a special personal appeal to these boys. If you get them, they’ll pull in others.

- Don’t forget to keep in touch with the parents. For the most part, parents are a much easier sell than the boys. What they want to see is a well-run, organized program. If they’ve been a webelo leader, what they also want to see is someone besides them running it. Most webelos moms and dads are burned out dealing with the munchkins. Pitch the need for help, but recognize even the people who will eventually become your best parent volunteers will be afraid of “another commitment.” Pull them in after their kid is in and happy. Shortly after, but after.

- Fifth grade boys hardly ever get mail of their own. Mail is exciting. Fifth grade boys never get phonecalls from adults. That’s really exciting. Send them mail, and make it personal. A letter after they visit, then the newsletter, then a phonecall inviting them to a fun night, then application stuff, etc.

- Boys are shy around strangers, and scared of older boys (even though they want to be like them). Every contact with them should be friendly and welcoming, with an effort to get them involved and doing something. When they’re doing something, they’re in control and feel part of the effort (as opposed to standing around nervously wondering what to do next). You know you’re not doing a good job if they’re just “hanging out” with each other or their parents. To pull reluctant kids in, get the “cool kid” to do it and then he’ll pull most of the others in. Go after the remaining non-participants with a less-intimidating project, or just a conversation.

- For the reasons outlined above, bring new scouts in gradually so they get to know and be comfortable with people. First, a meeting with their parents along. Then a fun-night or two. Then a day trip or two. Then the crossover overnight campout with their parents. Remember, these kids don’t know you or the boys. The only times they’ve camped dad was along. Provide time for them to gradually get to know you and the troop.

- Always be patient and positive. Listen to their stories, no matter how goofy or ordinary. Nothing is cooler to a kid than having an adult or older boy actually listen to them and say their tale is fresh.

- Nothing succeeds like success. If you run a strong program that your boys love and that your parents appreciate, the word will spread. If you don’t, no amount of recruiting will help.

Nuts and Bolts

There seems to be no coherent timetable on scout recruiting between troops and packs. You’ll find some packs closing up shop in November, while others work through the summer. Don’t let it bother you.

The Troop 8 rule is that recruiting begins in February. “Crossover” is usually held in May. The biggy, though, is that no boy officially becomes a Boy Scout member of the troop until after they have

graduated from the 5th grade. This is a long-standing Troop policy. I know, I know... what about Arrow of Light kids who are supposed to be able to join in the 4th grade or ... Forget it. What are you going to do with two 4th graders? or kids who straggle in one at a time with no friends for support? Bring everyone in at once. Do it at the time when you're reformulating patrols for the rest of the troop, when you're ready to provide the new scouts a good program and they're done with school and free to participate fully. Webelos scouts become official "full-fledged" members of Troop 8 when they graduate from 5th grade.

Where to recruit? Webelo packs obviously have kids and parents who are interested in scouting - they are your first target. Pack 8 of course. Then remember that there are about 3 times as many webelo packs as scout troops. Go to the council and get the lists of each for the Ann Arbor area. Next, identify the webelo groups that don't have an affiliated troop - the ones with numbers that don't match any troop number. Lots of these folks want to continue in scouting, they just don't know where.

Webelo dens have to visit at least two scout troops to qualify for some award. Send letters to the den leaders of all the unaffiliated webelos; explain that you understand their problem and would be happy to help "get their kids excited" about scouting. Invite them to call you to arrange a visit to a troop meeting. A sample letter is included in the "Master Forms" appendix.

At the troop meeting, remember that the intimidation factor of a bunch of 7th graders running around is huge - for both the webelos and their parents. We hit on a scheme that works great a few years ago. Have the boys stay with the troop for the opening and announcements; then as scout activities get started, pull them and their parents off somewhere else for the troop recruiting slide show. The slide show is run by an adult and a couple of older boys. This is special treatment - they'll like that. It's also a controlled environment, which is not as frightening.

The slide show and the presentation give parents an idea of what we do, but focuses on kids. The emphasis is that identification thing - this is what we do, and you can be doing this. It's cool. Don't worry, we teach you how. The photos are of older boys doing awesome stuff. "Imagine that - it could be you!" Kids have great imaginations, especially when provided with pictures. You want them to see themselves in the picture.

A well-done slide show and presentation should get the kids excited enough to overcome their fear and ask questions. Get this to happen! By asking questions themselves they are involved, in control, and becoming comfortable. Talk to them as you would an adult with limited vocabulary. Never talk down to them. Questions should be fielded especially by the older boys who are assisting.

Make sure you get a name, address, and phone number for every kid. At the end of the presentation after they have left, quickly jot notes next to each name. "Asked lots of questions," "Really liked boating," "Told a bear story." You'll use these notes to personalize your follow-up letters to these boys.

Send out follow-up letters to the boys so that they arrive around the end of the week. Long enough apart that it's a "separate event" for the boy, short enough that the still remembers the meeting. Put them on the newsletter list and get things rolling. Send a follow-up letter to the parents at the same time, so that they know what to expect. Let them know who to call with questions or information.

From here on out, you slowly integrate the webelos into troop activities through a progression of “WEBELOS WELCOME” events throughout the spring. Remember, these first impressions are key. Assign boys to act as their friends and guides. Make sure logistics are perfect. Be certain that they are welcome and that there’s something for them to do, and make sure that they *succeed* at it. A basketball game against older boys is *not* the way to go. If any competition at all is used, mix the ages and be sure all the older scouts are pre-instructed to direct a lot of plays to their webelo teammates. Each scoutmaster should go out of his way to notice something good about each boy and mention it. Prime the scouts to do the same.

At a well-attended regular meeting during webelo season, you need to give the “A Scout is Friendly” scoutmaster minute. This reminds them of what they felt like coming to a strange troop, how hard it can be for some boys, how much the new webelos will need their help, and how you know that they can see past all the annoying things the webelos will do and still be helpful and friendly. Never make this (or any Scoutmaster’s Minute) seem like a chore or an order. It is a call of noble scouts to voluntary service. They’ll respond.

Recruiting visits to schools

In the past, we have tried to take the slide show “on the road” by visiting schools while classes were in session. It was usually not difficult for us to arrange a half-hour program, particularly if we coordinated with a Girl Scout group so that the girls had something to do while we talked to the boys.

The results of such trips were very disappointing, and led us to conclude that they really weren’t worth it. There are several reasons for this, we’d guess. First, we’d run into the generally “uncool” reputation scouting has in the youth population. Even kids who may have been interested were turned off by their peers. We reinforced this notion by making scouting a “school thing” - like a movie in history class. They weren’t being tested on it so it really wasn’t important, and the literature we handed out ended in the trash or in a locker somewhere. The parents were never involved. Put simply, it just didn’t work.

Scouting is an out of school activity, something you go to that’s special. That’s what we’re trying to sell, and we can’t do it by trying to sell it during class time in the schools.

Recruiting older boys

The only effective way to recruit older boys that we’ve found is one-on-one invitations, either by an adult or (more frequently) by a friend who is a member of the troop.

Older boys entering scouting for the first time pose a number of challenges that we’ve never quite been able to handle right. They expect to be treated like “old boys,” except that their lack of outdoor skills and their rank in scouting makes it difficult for them to fit in at that level. See the section on “Retention” for more details.

For these reasons, active recruiting of older boys is generally not worth pursuing, save for “refugees” from a dying troop.

The Webelo Crossover Campout

The “crossover” campout is a Saturday-Sunday event where webelos “graduate” into Boy Scouting. A few years ago the district stopped holding crossovers at Munhocke and left the troops to their own devices. We began holding ours at the Ann Arbor airport and offering free plane rides to get people to come out. It has worked very well over the years, but requires considerable planning effort.

First, some words about the crossover event in general, no matter where it is held. For webelos who are attending, this is their last webelo campout. That means for them it is held under the webelo rules - each boy must be accompanied by a parent or other adult, and they should camp in their own tents. Again, the reason for this is to ease the transition; being out with strangers and older boys is scary, but it's OK - they've been out with dad before. This is also a scouting rule.

The crossover campout is not a long weekend. It's a one-night deal, with the webelos arriving Saturday afternoon and leaving after breakfast Sunday morning. Scouts should be there and set up well in advance, so that you're not running around dealing with scout issues or setup while the webelos are arriving. Scouts will also stay a bit later on Sunday to handle the take-down.

We provide the food. Remember, we're dealing with younger kids here, who will tend to be very finicky eaters. Don't get fancy, or you'll leave a bad impression. Simple American fare, with a few choices. Be sure you check on dietary restrictions with the parents in advance, and have something different for those boys who need it.

We provide the program. Logistics is everything. Make sure there's always something going on or about to. Plan the campfire program and crossover ceremony in advance and secure materials - this should be high drama.

The actual crossover ceremony traditionally involves crossing over a “bridge” of sorts from the webelo side to the scout side, where the scoutmaster greets the boy. Sometimes we've done the bridge, sometimes not; most of the times it has seemed a bit awkward. The salient point is that every boy gets his moment of glory - being singled out and greeted by name. More important in Troop 8 tradition than the bridge are the administration of the Scout Oath to the group (usually in fire and candlelight to add to the solemn, mysterious mood), the changing of the shoulder epaulettes from blue to red, and the awarding of the scout pin (see special awards).

Remember, nothing is lousier than a poorly run ceremony. Figure out where everyone is going to stand, who is going to do what, etc. well in advance. Practice it with the troop. Make sure you explain the elements of the ceremony to the assembled crowd as you are doing them. “Now, we will be removing your blue cub scout shoulder loops, and dressing you in the red loops of brave scouts.” Make sure you have enough pins and red epaulettes, with some to spare. Make sure that you tell webelos and their parents that they must wear beige scout shirts - NOT the blue cub scout uniform which doesn't have epaulettes!

After the ceremony, cook s'mores and have a great campfire!

New Scout Signup

Around the time of the webelo crossover for incoming cub scouts, or at any time for other recruits, the new boys are given our “New Scouts Packet.” The new scouts packet consists of a whole bunch of paper information and forms. As many of these need to be shared with parents, you should either mail the packet or give it to a boy at a time when he will see his parents shortly thereafter (like at the end of a meeting). Included in the new scouts packet are:

- Scouting Application (Brown council form)
- Uniform Guide (from council)
- Activity Participation Authorization (Troop 8 permission slip)
- Cover Letter (if mailed)
- Joining Requirements sheet
- Notes on Religion Explanation
- Troop 8 Medical History Form
- Equipment Guide
- Troop Resources Survey for parents (from council)
- Recent Newsletter (unless they’ve been receiving it)
- Troop Roster

It should also include the name and phone number of the scoutmaster handling new scouts.

When handing out the packet, instructions should be given to bring it all back at one time. Nothing is more difficult than tracking down missing pieces when things come in piecemeal.

As the paperwork comes in, it gets “checked off” for a boy, then distributed as follows:

- Application - to the Advancement Chairman who will register the boy at the council office and add name and address information to the roster.
- Medical history - to the scoutmaster in charge of medical stuff, whose job it is to read these, check back with parents on any unusual conditions, and brief the rest of the scoutmasters.
- Permission slip - to the scoutmaster in charge of medical stuff, who copies any special medical condition information onto the back, along with insurance carrier information. He then puts the permission slip in the “blue bag” of permission slips kept in the troop room.
- Resource survey - these should go to the Committee Chairman, for the purpose of identifying potential adult volunteers. The committee chairman should compile these and share the information with the scoutmasters and the transportation coordinators.

Joining Requirements

The joining requirements for Troop 8 are detailed on a sheet in the new scout’s packet. Basically, they are graduation from 5th grade, plus the requirements for Scout rank, plus the paperwork, plus a scoutmaster conference with the parents called a “New Parents Conference” (see below). All of the requirements must be complete before the boy earns his Scout badge; only the permission slip and the

medical form must be in for the scout to participate in a day event; the application must be in for an overnight. Don't let the Scout badge drag on, though. If not earned in the first three months, no more meetings and outings! This is a deadline to force you and the parents to get together for the new parents' meeting, which is usually the last thing. Don't put it off!

At the scoutmaster conference for the Scout badge, the one thing required by Troop 8 tradition is working through what the Scout Oath and Law mean "in real life," then having the boy "take the oath." This should be serious and solemn - a man giving his solemn oath is serious business.

Orientation Campouts

A new boy's first overnight experience with the troop is at the crossover, where dad or mom are present and the boy is treated as an "honored guest" who does not do any work. If the boy is going to fit in to our camping program comfortably, he needs a chance to "learn the ropes" of troop patrol camping. This is best done as a new scouts' patrol, where the scoutmasters can devote all their attention to the new boys and older scouts aren't around to intimidate.

Orientation campouts should be scheduled before summer camp, so the new guys get a chance to be out with the troop leaders before spending a whole week with the troop. They're the one campout where we usually discourage parents from attending, so that the boy gets a genuine experience of "real" scout camping without relying on mom or dad. This lets us identify kids who might have a homesickness or other problem before week-long summer camp.

An orientation campout is usually a one-night overnight, starting Saturday morning and going 'til sometime on Sunday. Emphasis is on basic camp skills - putting up and taking down tents, cooking & stoves, Totin' Chip and Fireman Chit, knots for setting up a dining fly, basic hiking, etc. Remember the age group: short attention span, zany high energy that can crash quickly. Plan lots of short sessions and fun time, plus some rest time. Crooked Lake, with a Silver lake swimming option, is a good spot, so is Kensington.

Above all, you want these guys to come away from this one with good experiences and a positive attitude.

New Parent Conferences

At various places throughout this text we talk about the importance of working with parents and the occasional difficulties that crop up. Virtually all the difficulties relate to a lack of information on the parents' part about rules and "standard operating procedures." Just like educating scouts about the program, educating parents needs to be an ongoing process. As a scoutmaster, you will find it is a longer process and one you are apt to forget about, because you see the parents only infrequently (if at all) unless you go out of your way.

Just as we do a few "orientation campouts" for new boys during the summer before summer camp, it's important to do a first "orientation meeting" with new parents. Parents will be curious and will want to know things, but will almost never try to set up a meeting. That makes it your job as scoutmaster. The Troop 8 policy is that no boy is fully admitted into the troop unless their parents have been through this orientation meeting. Oh, we'll let the boy come to some meetings and outings if we have

the rest of the paperwork, but if it's been a couple months you need to push (and ultimately, if you can't get a meeting together, the boy has to stop coming).

We used to do new parent orientations individually. This was a lot of work, and we got completely swamped by new recruits one year. So we've switched to doing a whole group of parents at a time. We've discovered this to be a good thing for the most part - questions from one parent help others and lead to more discussion, and we don't have to make 50 visits to homes. The one caution is to be careful to mix some St. Thomas webelo parents in to any group, just in case a non-St. Thomas family goes ape over taking kids to mass or saying the Lord's prayer or something. We've had it happen.

You'll still need to do some individual conferences for parents who can't make a bigger meeting. It's easy to let these slip through the cracks, but you'll have problems later (or at least nowhere near the support you would have had). Make sure you get them done right away.

There are (guess what?) a few rules about conducting these orientation meetings. First, don't waste people's time. If your first meeting goes too long, you'll never get them to come to a Parents' Committee meeting or anything else again. One hour absolute maximum, no matter what! You should be able to finish in 45 minutes. Second, tell them straight. Don't mince words or be apologetic. Describe our program and beliefs as they are. You owe that to the parents. It's their choice to allow their son to participate or not, and they deserve honesty and integrity on your part. No, your daughter can't attend. Yes, you are very welcome as a non-Catholic - a large minority of St. Thomas school children are non-Catholic - as long as you can accept our mission as a Catholic troop. No, the BSA as a whole does not allow atheists or anarchists... scouts must honestly take the Oath to do duty to God and country. Yes, dads are always welcome on trips, as long as they live with our rules. Yes, moms are just as welcome, but should consider their son's feelings on the matter. So should dads. If you settle these issues honestly and firmly now, you'll save considerable grief later.

The following is a detailed outline of topics to be "uncovered" at a parents' orientation. The points emphasized naturally reflect our experiences working with parents and what points are important to get across early on. Remember, don't go into long stories or other soliloquies. They won't remember, and they'll forget the important points.

New Parent Conference - topic outline

Preparation

- Room - find somewhere nice and cozy. A house or the Parish Center.
- Arrange for coffee and light snacks.
- If it's been finished, have a Parent Handbook for each participant.
- Name tags!
- Check the medical forms for any questions you may need to ask privately.
- Have Committee Chair there for very brief word and to recruit volunteers.
- Have a scout book, "done up" uniform, ditty bag, etc. there to show (or purchase).

Welcome

Greet each parent personally, offer refreshments. After seated, introduce yourself, explain reason for meeting (to give info, answer questions) and timetable.

Structure of Scouting

A. Franchising program that licenses to Community Organization.

Explain how BSA licenses program to community organizations, but it's the chartering organization that actually owns and operates the troop and determines its rules and leaders.

B. Our Chartering Organization, St. Thomas Church

1. Part of St. Thomas Youth Program.

Explain that Troop 8 is owned & operated by St. Thomas as one part of the church's service to youth, which also includes the St. Thomas elementary school, the teen youth group, the religious education program, girl scout troop, etc.

2. Head of troop is pastor of St. Thomas; he must approve all leaders.

You might note that this is a scouting requirement which is true of all troops, not special just for us.

3. As part of St. Thomas, have certain requirements - occl. prayers, take to church on Sunday, a moral environment consistent with Catholic Christianity.

This is the "biggie" you're working up to. The purpose is to explain that as a branch of St. Thomas, the Troop must support the church's mission. That includes occasional prayers at meetings (the "Our Father"), taking all the boys to Catholic mass on Sunday, and providing a sound moral environment. These are the same requirements placed on the other St. Thomas youth programs like the elementary school. It's important that you be clear about this and not "waffle." Be sure to read the full explanation under Troop Organization over before the meeting.

4. Non-Catholics very welcome if they can live with (3).

All the St. Thomas youth programs, including the elementary school and the troop, have a substantial number of non-Catholics, including Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others. They are welcome! They are important to all kids' learning & sharing! We don't proselytize or "push" Catholicism. We do encourage boys to participate in their own faiths, including helping them earn religious awards in their denomination.

C. Troop Committee - "Board of Directors" - open to ALL parents.

Troop 8 is somewhat different in that the troop committee is open to all parents. Their role is to oversee troop, recommend leaders, and especially provide support and organizational assistance. They meet the 2nd Wednesday of each month. Save the Committee Chair's talk 'til the end.

D. Scoutmasters

Goal here is to put the parents at ease over the adults who will be working with their boys. Introduce the scoutmasters present and give a brief biography of all the scoutmasters, present or not.

E. Real people who run the troop are the BOYS.

This is your segue into the next section.

Boy Leadership

A. Patrols

Introduce patrol concept - a "team" of boys that works together on a campout. Explain that their kids will be in the "new scouts" patrol for the first year.

B. Patrol Leaders, SPL, and the Patrol Leader's Council.

Briefly explain that boy leaders are elected, and the elected leaders form a boy council.

C. Everything comes from PLC.

Explain how it's the PLC that generates ideas and runs the scout program, while the scoutmasters guide and assist and the troop committee provides support. Explain how this develops real leadership and responsibility.

D. Different than Webelos, and will take getting used to!

1. The Committee or the Scoutmasters won't decide anything (big) without PLC involvement.

The boys make decisions; we don't decide things for them.

2. Scoutmasters and older boys will call and will not speak to you... will speak to your son.

Boys are given responsibility directly & can't pass it off on their parents.

3. If you call, we will ask you to have your son call his Patrol Leader for the information.

4. The scout newsletter will be sent to your son, not to you. If you steal it, we will tell him to yell at you.

5. You may not sign off ANY requirements for your son the way you did in cubs. But older, field rank boys can.

This is a big change that most parents don't understand at first and should be emphasized.

6. This will take getting used to

Explain how our emphasis on giving the boy responsibility might seem awkward at first. Parents might feel "out of the loop," (solution: talk to your son!) and might think things seem disorganized occasionally (they are, because the boys run things and often need to learn by experience).

E. We still need parent involvement, but involvement is going to be different.

1. Support

Biggie! Things like transportation, merit badge counselors, committee volunteers. First step toward high school - boy takes care of himself, but school needs parent help to run.

2. On outings, part of adult patrol & not allowed to "bother" kid patrol or work with just your boy.

Biggie number 2! This is your best opportunity to explain that we don't run father-son campouts, but that adults who come out work with all the boys as part of the adults' patrol. Be good-natured and humorous in your explanation, but get the point across.

3. As patrol members, adults must meet same expedition requirements (at least!) as scouts.

Biggie number 3! Your chance to explain that we don't cut any breaks to adults on equipment or experience checkouts. Say this up front and you'll reduce your problems later on. Again, be humorous, but get point across.

Expectations

- A. Scouting is a team sport, same as soccer, etc.
 - 1. Patrolmates rely on each other.
 - 2. Nothing worse than team with too few players, the team captain is a no-show, or guys that come to the game but not to practice.
 - 3. These things are worse in scouting, because the boy suffers too, by not learning a skill he'll need - like missing school and having to make up.

Your job here is to try to impress on the parents that scouting is the SAME kind of commitment as soccer teams and the like, and break down the notion that most have of using scouting as an "extra" when there isn't a sport game or practice for the boy that weekend.
- B. Troop 50-50 Rule as a minimum or terminated.

Explain the 50-50 rule as the MINIMUM to stay part of the scouting "team."
- C. Team members can't come late, can't leave in the middle of the game.

Explain that late arrivals or early departures from events are not allowed. Emphasize that they're not fair to the other boys who must then do the "hard" jobs of setup and cleanup. Explain that logistics for such things are a headache.

Outings

- A. Event notification
 - 1. Scout newsletter.

This means of notification is put out by the scouts and mailed to the scouts. It's reliability depends on the scouts who are producing it at the time. It tends to be most reliable and complete for the short-range events.
 - 2. Parent meeting minutes.

These are put out by the troop secretary after the parents' meeting. The reliability depends on the adult secretary at the time. It tends to be more long-range than the boys' newsletter, but to have less detail.
 - 3. Scout meeting.

Important information on upcoming events (including time changes, etc.) is given at the start of each scout meeting. It's important that boys make the meeting on time for this information!
 - 4. Phone tree.

Sometimes when things get messed up, a boy will be called. This "phone tree" is run by the patrol leaders and will advise of last minute changes, etc.
- B. Signing up
 - 1. 2 week in advance signup
 - 2. Week in advance deposit

Explain sign-up procedure. Emphasize the importance of commitments, and the problems of both "no-shows" and "show-ups." Explain the procedure if a boy misses the signup meeting but wants to come (call Patrol leader). Emphasize that no-shows will be billed even if no deposit (if we paid money to secure place).
- C. Weather.

Most parents are used to things being cancelled if the weather is bad. Emphasize that we generally go, no matter what, unless campout is listed as FAIR WEATHER ONLY. The boys get used to it, and are wonderful bad-weather campers.
- D. Menu & Food purchase.

Explain the patrol food purchase routine. Patrols choose menu, one boy sent to purchase. Parent goes WITH boy to buy, OK for parent to make adjustments (eliminate pop-tarts, control cost, etc.). Submit the receipt promptly for credit.
- E. No personal food, pop, or electronics allowed. Please don't send.

- F. Boy will need some money for meals on car trips, camp trading post, incidentals.
- G. Policy of returning kids directly home.

Explain that we always return the kids directly home, unless explicitly specified otherwise. This saves waiting around for hours at the church. Emphasize that boy needs to be able to get in house, or he'll be going home with scoutmaster.

Financial

- A. Troop policy on boys and finances.

Explain the financial aid policy. Be direct and blunt. It's more important to the team to have the boy there than to worry about the money. If boy doesn't come, hurts more than a few \$ - his friends and patrol mates don't have his support, and the boy doesn't learn skills we want him to have. Aid is full, always confidential, and quiet. Friends, former scouts, other parents give donations to support.

- B. Billing system & account.

Explain the quarterly billing system & semester dues of \$15. Emphasize how this saves the scoutmasters and parents the headache of dealing with money constantly. Explain that if they can't pay, just write on bill and return.

- C. Fund raisers.

These support our equipment, awards, and financial aid. All parents and boys are expected to participate in each troop fund raiser. Dominos in fall, pancake breakfast in winter.

Equipment

- A. Review Equipment sheet in new scout packet.

Call attention to required equipment: uniform, book, ditty bag, sleeping bag and stuff sack, etc. Comment on the need for good outdoor clothing.

- B. Caveat Emptor

Warn parents away from Council shop, and emphasize talking to scoutmaster before big purchases because we're very strict about equipment. Explain that we're very willing to go to shop with them, etc.

- C. Troop Buying Deals

Mention Bivouac discount night, Campmor order, etc.

Advancement

- A. Scout Handbook.

Explain it's importance, and that a scout should bring it to each meeting. Use book during explanations below.

- B. Rank advancement

- 1. Explain purpose

Rank advancement describes how a boy is growing in skill and leadership.

- 2. Regular ranks

Explain requirements for regular ranks, how they're fulfilled "in the field" but signed off at a meeting. Explain that boys can work on all three ranks simultaneously. Emphasize basic skills.

- 3. Reviews

Explain how to earn a rank, boy has a scoutmaster conference and board of review. Observe how this is great preparation for interviews - experience talking to a group of adults about something a scout knows well.

- 4. Field ranks

Explain the difference with regular ranks, how the emphasis is not on small skills but on expertise in certain areas (merit badges) and on leadership and service.

C. Merit Badges

Skills area of scouting advancement. Boys become “experts” in certain areas under guidance of adult expert. Explain required versus elective merit badges, and how many badges are earned just through regular participation in the troop program.

D. Paperwork

Explain the need for parents to keep award cards as documentation, and explain the merit badge “partial” blue cards. Emphasize that we’re always looking for counselors.

Courts of Honor

Award ceremonies held three times a year, and all boys are expected to attend (especially since they’ll usually be getting something!). Organized at adults’ level, with parents providing potluck.

Committee Chair

The Committee Chair should be given time at the end to talk briefly about the committee and to recruit volunteers.

Remember: Wait or ask for questions after each major section. Answer directly, with short explanation if appropriate. And keep things moving! If this meeting is a “dud” or goes on too long, they’ll never come to a committee meeting!

Retention

Once you've recruited a bunch of boys to join the troop, you want to hold on to them! After all, you've invested a fair bit of time, energy, and money in getting them on board and trained. You need that to "pay off" for you in older boy leadership to help you run the program.

All of us hate to see boys leave. Rarely, however, do troops spend any time actually paying attention to "kids at risk" of leaving, and few have any ongoing process for trying to retain boys. This is far more important than recruiting! Not getting a new boy is a loss of potential, for sure, but losing an old boy is a real loss of talent and resources. This section describes what we've come to find over the years, and how we try to deal with it.

Statistically, we know that less than 2% of the boys in scouting nationally make it to Eagle; in Troop 8 we're running about 15-20%. Even so, we in Troop 8 expect to lose around half of our boys in the first year, and some more around 8th/9th grade. That pattern is reflected in scout troops around the country; indeed, it is a pattern which is shared by a large number of youth programs outside of scouting.

Before we continue, let's take a moment to shoot a turkey. The BSA some years ago ran some statistics on their national database and discovered that most boys who dropped out did so before reaching 1st Class rank (big surprise, since most leave in year one). Most of the boys who made it to 1st Class continued on in scouting. Therefore, said the wisdom of National, if we want to keep more boys in scouting, we should make it easier & faster for them to make it to 1st Class! First Class in the first year! Eureka!

While an "interesting" (ab)use of statistics, the 1st-Class-in-a-year program has little to do with the retention of scouts. First Class scouts don't stay in the program because they've made 1st Class. What's really happening is that the scouts who have gotten "into" scouting - the ones who enjoy it and work at it and make it to 1st Class - are the ones who stay in. The key is in getting them invested in the program, not getting them to 1st Class; in fact, cheapening the award by making it easier to achieve is definitely NOT the way to go. The best Troop 8 scouts ordinarily take two years to make 1st Class, and that's good.

Why do boys leave? There are two sets of reasons. The first are the "good" reasons for a boy to quit scouting. These exist! When you see them in operation, don't fight it! In fact, help the boy and his family to make the right choice. Some examples of good reasons to quit:

Good Reason #1 : The boy does not like camping.

Believe it or not, there are plenty of boys like this out there. For years they've been in cub scouts and webelos, and they might have camped only once. Suddenly, they find themselves in a group which is living outdoors every other weekend. It's not fun. It's uncomfortable. It's dirty. There's no bathroom. There are bugs. They'd rather be doing anything else.

As a scoutmaster, don't fight this. Come on, what good is it forcing a kid who hates camping to be in an outings program? There are lots of other youth opportunities out there. Let him go. If the parents keep pushing, use the 50-50 rule (see below) to bring it to an end (these kids never come close to making half the campouts).

Good Reason #2 : The boy is involved in 12 teams, 2 plays, 4 clubs ... but he “really wants to stay” in scouting.

Because of the demographics of the Ann Arbor community, we see this one a lot. Some kids are more overscheduled than most adults.

There are a lot of worthwhile activities for boys in the area to choose from. Scouting is just one activity, with no more or less worth than any of the others. But boys need to be *really* involved in *one or two* activities in order to be important, to be leaders & contributors. It doesn't matter what the activity is, but they have to choose. They can't ever be a leader if they're hopping from one activity to the next, making no substantial commitment to any of them.

When you come across a boy like this, and scouting is a lower priority than soccer, or chess club, or... let them go! Help them and their parents by suggesting that maybe now is not a good time for scouting... maybe in a year if other interests fade. In the end, drop the boy with the 50-50 rule. Even though you won't see it, he will breathe a sigh of relief.

What's worse is when you come across an overscheduled boy who likes scouting most, but mom & dad keep signing him up for competitive teams or other activities which conflict with our program (and then make him go to these others because it will “hurt the team” if he doesn't). More often, boys are like kids in candy shops - they may like scouting best, but they like lots of other things and can't make a choice. Often mom & dad don't place adequate limits. Sometimes you can talk to the parents, but tread very softly, there's can be a bit of ego involved. Try to help the boy talk to his parents & express his feelings. Give frequent reminders of the 50-50 rule to help “force” a decision (though in this case, be somewhat lenient in its enforcement).

Other activities are also the reason you'll lose a bunch in 9th grade. Once they hit high school, there's a wealth of wonderful things to be involved in (including girls!). Scouting starts to take a back seat. And that's OK.

Good Reason #3: You want him out.

The only other “good” reason to lose a scout is when it becomes the only option you have left for dealing with an ongoing and serious behavioral issue. Surgery is painful but it saves the rest of the body. If a kid is having a bad effect on the whole program, and you've tried everything, you have a responsibility to the other boys to cut bait.

Now, the bad reasons for losing boys - the ones that shouldn't happen, because the boy would be better off staying in. These are the reasons that you can and should do something about.

- They have no friends the same age in the troop. Only the most independent of Americans can begin to handle this (foreign cultures are typically far better at dealing with “aloneness”). You are almost guaranteed to lose boys who are in this position.

- Boy Scouts is “boring.” Translate this as “I'm not involved the way I want to be,” “I need something more challenging,” or “we keep doing things I'm really not interested in.”

- Just drifted away. Hasn't been to a meeting recently. Came on one campout but haven't seen on others. Shows up every now and again.

- Homesickness. Some first year boys just aren't at the maturity level to handle being out with the guys on their own.
- Pissed Off Parents. Something the troop or the scoutmasters did or didn't do really got the dander up; sometimes, it may be a manifestation of "overprotective parent syndrome" that keeps a kid from going on any of the more challenging outings.
- Bad incident for kid (usually with inadequate follow-up by the scoutmasters). This could be an older scout bully, or a really miserable camping trip. Kids remember these, and they are hard to get over if not handled properly.
- Money. The family thinks scouting is too expensive.

The "antidotes" to losing boys for one of these "bad" reasons are found in the most valuable things that scouting should be providing for these same boys - the things that our older scouts talk about (or at least imply) all the time. Here they are:

- A scout stays in scouting because that's where a bunch of his friends are, and it's one of the things he does with his friends. The only way you can make this happen is to be sure during the recruitment process that you get a lot of boys - enough so that there are always a lot of same-age boys around to be friends with. You especially should try to get and keep a "critical mass" of 5-6 boys from the same school. That way they'll spend half the week in school after every campout talking about scouting. If you've got enough boys, it feeds on itself. Recruit them and they will help you to keep them.
- A sense of accomplishment. Scouts want to feel like they are good at something, especially something cool that no one else can do. They thrive on praise, on teaching others, on bragging in school, on scaring their parents out of their minds.

The boys aren't stupid, either. They know the difference between real accomplishment and adult fakery. While they might go along with adult fakery for a while (especially if bribed), they will never be proud of it.

Make sure you keep rank advancement and merit badges a real challenge, so that the accomplishment means something. Make sure that you praise them and recognize them when they have done something well, but only if it's real. Don't fall for the PC notion of praising constantly so as to increase self esteem.

- Run lots of outings and events. If you talk to any scout over the age of 19, he doesn't really remember the meetings. He remembers and will talk at length about the outings, though. Do cool things, and do different things, so that there'll still be something going on for a boy who doesn't like skiing. The success or failure of your retention efforts and the troop as a whole depends more on the outing program than anything except...
- The biggest benefit to scouts - the coolest for them and the one their parents praise - is personal, one on one, adult friendships. As scoutmaster, you are the first adult in their life who is their friend first - not their parents' friend, not their teacher. All children have a need for personal attention from a number of adults - think of it as a quota of 10,000 hours of personal adult contact time before they hit 18. Their families will fill a good part of this (hopefully), some more than others. But family is never

enough. They need you - your interest and attention. Not to be “buddies,” but to care. Scouts who stay are staying because they are getting that attention.

Usually, a scout will identify and “hook up” with one scoutmaster, based on compatible personality, interest, availability, and luck. One scoutmaster, though, can’t possibly give all the boys in the troop the attention they need. In fact one “full time” scoutmaster who comes on most every outing and to most meetings, can support maybe 8-10 scouts. One or two more if truly outstanding. Most “part-time” scoutmasters with families can support half that number if they work hard. So take your dedicated, always-there scoutmasters, multiply by 8 ... that’s the number of active boys you will have. If you have more boys than that in the troop, the excess will slowly drift away.

Shepherd Meetings

The lives of adolescent boys are an interesting roller-coaster ride. At any given moment, a whole bunch of guys in the troop will be “up” and a few will be “down,” and you can never quite predict who will be which. One thing you can predict, though, is that at some point even your best, most level-headed, responsible, and enthusiastic scout will hit the scouting doldrums. When he does, you need to be there. If you’re not, if he can’t find that one-on-one adult attention, he’ll slowly slip out of the program.

The thing of it is, we’ve got a lot of other things to do! Plan outings, run meetings, counsel merit badges. We’re busy! And in our busyness, between work and our commitments to the details of the scouting program, we can forget the more important things.

For this reason, the most active scoutmasters get together every couple of months over beers or over lunch just to talk about kids. All other agenda items get set aside, except the usual friendly scoutmaster camaraderie. These meetings are very informal in nature, and can be short or long depending on the day. We have come to call them our “Shepherd Meetings,” where we try to identify and figure out how to get after our “lost sheep.” They are perhaps one of the single most important things we do.

At a Shepherd Meeting, the chief activity is “running the list.” Everybody gets a current troop roster, and we start at “A” and work down, or at “Z” and work up. Anything that anyone has to share about a kid gets brought up. Sometimes this takes 10 seconds - “Great, no problems,” sometimes much longer.

The first purpose is to share information, so that everyone knows what’s going on. Sometimes we hear things (gee, Billy’s parents are getting divorced) that others need to be aware of. Sometimes there’s just a fun anecdote to laugh about.

The second purpose is to think about whether we could be doing any more for a kid. “You know, he seems really interested in photography... is there something we could get him involved in?” “Gee, it would be nice to see him take a leadership role in something...”

The third purpose is to identify and discuss the guys that have recently seemed out-of-sorts, or absent. “We haven’t seen George at all the last month. Anyone know what’s up?”

For each of the boys who deserve some follow-up, we come up with a few ideas, a plan, or perhaps just a “let’s look into it.” In any event, *one scoutmaster* is assigned to do the follow-up with that kid. It should usually be the scoutmaster with whom that boy has made the “best connection.” If the follow-up is an informal chat with a parent, it should be the scoutmaster who knows the parents best. If the follow-up is formal, it should be the person who can best pull that off (usually the sitting scoutmaster-in-chief). The idea is to match our skills and personalities to a boy’s needs, and to spread the load.

As a scoutmaster, there is almost nothing as important as your *timely* follow-up after a Shepherd’s Meeting. Remember, the biggest thing boys are in scouting for is adult contact. By the time you notice problems at a meeting, things have already been going on for quite a while. Get to the boy *that week*. Be relaxed, be low key, be whatever you have to be to draw the boy back in.

Your follow-up with a kid is not a one-shot. If it is, you’re a fake and should go do something else. One-shots are worse than nothing at all, because they get a kid’s interest and hope up only to disappoint him again. You need to stay on him and keep checking up for a few weeks, a few months... maybe longer. Whatever level of attention is needed. You need to let him know by your *actions* (words are cheap) that you really care.

As you work with Troop 8 over the years, you will come to view your “good shepherd” interventions as your most successful and important work with these young people. You’ll see in their growth and enthusiasm a lot more than just a good job of scout retention. You’ll find after a bit a happy, thriving troop. More than that, you’ll know that you made a difference in some lives that will last.

Enjoy this and be thankful for it, because here of all places you are participating in the work of *the Good Shepherd*.

The Fifty-Fifty Rule

Several years ago, the Patrol Leaders were starting to get frustrated by low turnouts at events. They came to discover that though there were quite a few scouts “on the roster,” a fair number of them only showed up occasionally. This frustrated them for three reasons: one, it meant that we sometimes had too few people for an outing; two, it meant that patrol camping got shafted, since a patrol might “evaporate” on a particular outing because it has too few people to really act as a patrol; three, the guys who showed up only once in a while didn’t know anything, since they hadn’t been around to learn what they needed. As a result, they held others back.

This was a pretty astute observation on the part of the boys. Their solution was also noteworthy for its guts and ingenuity. Scouting, they said, is a team effort. If you keep cutting practice or missing games, you are shortchanging your teammates and costing us money in postage. Therefore, in any six-month period, you must attend 50% of the troop meetings and 50% of the outing days. “Fun nights” or events count as half an outing day. If you don’t do at least this much, you are dropped from the troop roster. See ‘ya. Bye.

From an adult perspective, this was a great idea, and was quickly approved as official troop policy by the Parents’ Committee. A kid who is making it to less than half of the events is a kid you are losing anyway - he’s not really benefiting from the program. He costs you money in mailings and screws up your program planning. You either need to suck him back in, or help he and his parents make the

choice to focus on other activities besides scouting. The 50-50 rule helps you do both. You can say, "Hey look, we need to see Joey out more or he's going to be dropped..." as an inducement to help families make decisions. You can also give a decent burial to a kid who really has dropped, but is holding on only in name (because he can't quite make a decision, or his parents want him in but he doesn't, or...)

Generally, the way the enforcement works is like this. At a shepherd's meeting it will come up that a boy is getting below the 50-50 line. While the scoutmasters work to pull him back in (or decide not to because basketball is more important to him), they refer him to the SPL. The SPL sends a "warning letter." Similarly, the scoutmasters might refer to the SPL a kid who is clearly below the 50-50 line for a 6 month period, along with any special information they might have. The SPL then sends the boy a termination letter. Note that execution of the 50-50 rule is the SPL's call - he can choose to "commute the sentence" or delay the execution if he so chooses. The SPL can also choose to take action without a referral from the scoutmasters, though he should talk to the scoutmasters before firing. Generally, guys who are dropped are well below the 50-50 level.

Remember that boys (and scouters, for that matter) tend to be reluctant to make "big" decisions like this. You'll have to help. Avoid the attitude that you hate to lose a kid, or you want to "give a kid a chance." You're fooling yourself. A boy who is well below the 50-50 line you've *already lost*. This process just forces you to deal with what is already a fact.

Remember, too, that nothing says that down the road a guy can't sign back up. All it takes is a scoutmaster conference convincing you that now he'll have the time to make the commitment, and he's back in.

The Exit Interview

Sometimes, boys just quit. Occasionally, it will take you by surprise. When this comes up, tell the boy that in order to quit, Troop 8 requires an "exit interview" - a scoutmaster conference before he leaves.

At an exit interview, *don't* try to talk a boy out of it. Nothing's worse than becoming a whining adult trying to interfere with a hard decision a kid has made. *Don't* be judgmental or argumentative. The purpose of an exit interview is to gather information for the troop. Why is this boy leaving? What caused it? Is there anything we could have done better that would have made a difference? Is there a problem in the troop we're not aware of? Thank the boy for his time and his contributions to the troop.

Generally we don't do exit interviews with boys who are terminated by the 50-50 rule, since there has been some contact with them along the way as part of the shepherd process.

Outings & Trips

Keep the outing in Scouting! If there is any single thing that readily identifies a strong or weak troop, it is the richness or paucity of their outdoors program. Boys want to do exciting things, not talk about them! Imagine what your life would be like if all you ever did was attend committee meetings at work. Blech!

Troop 8 has been blessed through the years with an extremely active outdoors program. This generally runs quite well, even with the considerable involvement of inexperienced scout leadership. Because success can lead one to become complacent, let's be clear: there is an *enormous* amount of work required for even the simplest of outings. Most of that work must be handled by, or at least coordinated by, the scoutmasters. It's fun work, but there's a lot of it.



By tradition, for each event or outing we designate one scoutmaster as the “trip leader.” He’s the guy in charge for that trip. That doesn’t mean he does everything (all the scoutmasters help out), but he is the chief coordinator both before and during the outing. We rotate the “trip leader” title around from trip to trip to spread the load, and to match each person’s experience and schedule to the trips we’re doing.

If there is a lesson to be learned about outings, it’s the 7 P’s. Prior Proper Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance. “Winging” an outing lands you in a category somewhere between disorganized slob and dangerous idiot. The more you have in place by way of “tradition” or “standard procedure,” however, the less you’ll need to re-invent each trip. This reduces your overall workload considerably. If equipment is always handled a certain way, if hiking procedures are standard and so on, those are fewer things you have to worry about (aside from occasional reminders). This section discusses outing logistics and the Troop 8 “standard procedures” which have been developed over the years.

Selling the Program

What could be easier, you think, than getting boys to come out for an outings program?

Perhaps in the past, scoutmasters didn't really need to worry about "getting kids out" for trips. There wasn't much else exciting for boys to do, after all. Times have changed. Our boys in Ann Arbor have to choose from a cornucopia of activities: school extracurriculars, sports (both school and rec. league), art and music programs, other camps, family trips, TV, video games, and home computers. All of these are fun and worthwhile; all of them take time.

While scouts have lots of things to choose from, they also share in the "fear of the unknown" which is part of the common heritage of humanity. The unknown for them is the activity they've never tried (fishing, backpacking, skiing...). As adults, we often forget what a big step it is for a boy to face something totally new. "Will I be any good at it?" "It's scary, maybe dangerous." Even Venture-crew scouts face this fear. One of our current Eagle scouts and a skiing merit badge counselor recalls his first ski trip with the troop - and his nearly overwhelming fear that he would break a leg.

In light of both the competition and the trepidation, it's not enough to just publish an event list and then expect kids to show up in droves. If you try such an approach, be prepared for low turnouts and lots of cancelled events. The published list is an important first step to help scouts & families plan, but convincing boys to be active in scouting demands an ongoing sales job. While scout leaders may help with this, the role of chief salesmen falls to the scoutmasters.

The Group Pitch

Part of the combined sales approach to pitching an event is to generate enthusiasm and excitement among patrol members or the whole troop. Boys feed off each other for their cues and interests, so the more you get "the group" excited the more boys will turn out.

First step to the "group pitch" is the scout newsletter. Dry, just-the-facts event descriptions aren't going to pique anybody's interests. Work with the newsletter crew to include longer event descriptions, or perhaps even short event "tales" or articles.

More important than the newsletter is the troop meeting sales job. Boys at the meeting are looking for two things: "Can I do it?" (meaning, "I'm a bit unsure") and "Will it be fun?" You answer these questions by providing information and encouragement (complete event descriptions, an understanding on what they'll really need to do and you're assessment that they can handle it), and by conveying excitement and enthusiasm. If the SPL does the announcements, he'll need lots of coaching in this (or you may need to have someone else with a better speaking presence make the pitch). Be prepared to "back up" the SPL if things need an extra "kick."

For bigger or more important events (summer camp, big trips), consider passing out extra materials at meetings - brochures, stickers, etc. These help the cause by giving them something to review at home, or to put on their school notebook to daydream about during Mrs. Soporific's class. Short, boy-focused video or slide presentations can also be useful.

The Personal Touch

Remember one of our “first principles” - boys are involved in scouting because of the positive, personal adult contact they receive. More even than the adventure of an outing, they look for this contact.

Your personal encouragement or “invitation” to an outing is a key technique in outings promotion. It is especially good at overcoming fear and hesitation, since it allows you to say directly, “Hey, you can do it! In fact, *we need you.*” But working with adults is also fun, especially when a boy knows that the adult thinks highly of him.

Obviously, you can’t possibly do the personal invitation for every boy in the troop. In fact, most of the personal invitations tend to be directed toward boys who deserve some follow-up after the last shepherd’s meeting. But even a friendly, “Hey, are you coming out on this trip?” during a meeting works wonders, and if the answer is an unshakable “No” (like it’s mom’s birthday), your response should always be to recommend the *next* trip.

Consider making personal invitations to patrol leaders and to “in” kids - the folks other boys will follow. Such boys tend to generate their own sales pitch once they’ve decided to go, and drag friends with them.

Pre-trip Whining

Pre-trip “whining” was a phenomenon we first noticed with Venture trip plans. It shows up among boys from the PLC and planning level on down. You’ll begin to hear comments about a trip being too long, too expensive, at a bad time, ... just about any reasonable excuse that an adolescent (or parent!) can think up.

Pre-trip whining is a scout’s normal way of expressing pre-trip fear of the unknown. If you’re not sure whether you can handle it, it’s psychologically much easier to try to avoid it by making excuses or by focusing on those things which will be sacrificed for the trip. Nobody is immune to the tendency. Pre-trip whining is greatly increased when a trip is not yet “for sure,” when the itinerary is not perceived to be fixed, or anytime when the scoutmaster trip leader seems hesitant or unsure.

As a trip leader, you need to recognize such pre-trip whining for what it is. The appropriate response is firm information, confidence, encouragement, and enthusiasm. Sure, any trip involves a bit of sacrifice. Pre-trip whining is a scout’s way of saying “is it really going to be worth it?” and a warning to you that you need to do a better sales job. Make the sale, and all but the real objections (like genuine family financial difficulty) will disappear. If you take the pre-trip whining at face value, though, you’ll never run a major trip.

Trip Logistics and Planning

As the old saying goes, “the devil is in the details.” Your job as scoutmaster is to “sweat the details.” Remember the principle of scaffolding - kids need a structure within which to operate, and our job is to provide the structure. If we blow it, the boy leadership won’t know how to proceed, the younger boys will feel “at sea” (or will fill the vacuum with their own particular brand of unplanned chaos), and the adults get that “out of control, things falling apart” feeling. Ugh.

For even the simplest of outings or meetings to go well, a genuinely enormous amount of planning for “all the little details” has to take place. Missing any one little detail can bring things to a screeching halt. Here are a few examples from troop history:

- You arrive at the canoe livery with 30 people in tow, only to discover they won’t take credit cards or a troop check. You don’t have cash. Nobody does, because it’s a water trip; they didn’t want to bring their wallets.
- You set the stove up only to find you didn’t bring the right fittings to connect it to the propane tank. Believe me, it’s impossible to buy them in most towns!
- You forget to tell the boys to meet at the campfire before the group splits up, and then spend the next two hours trying to round everyone up.
- The tiniest things can wreak havoc: You set up a beautiful court of honor, instruct the boys to march in, salute the flag, and sit down. But you forget to arrange exactly where each is to sit. Then you watch with great grief as they bumble around, push each other, and climb over each other, while the smallest, most sensitive kid is left without a seat.

There’s more to an event than just getting the stuff together and going; you have to also figure out exactly what you’re going to be doing (with backup options) for every hour of every day. Where will you be camping? What’s available near the camp for fun & adventure? What are you going to do in the camp for fun and adventure? What are you going to eat? When will you be eating? When will you be getting up, going to bed, cooking? What equipment will you need? Who will be running which events, and are they prepared? What will you need the patrol leaders to do? What kind of things will you need to teach, and who will teach them, and when? How will you handle transportation? What are your emergency plans?

Sound daunting? It is. But you absolutely must do it, and not allow yourself to try to “throw things together” at the last minute. If you don’t “sweat the details”, you’ll find yourself on every outing spending all of your time dealing with logistics headaches... “Oh we forgot the marshmallows, have to go buy some.” “Nuts, we have to shuttle a car and we’ve got no one to do it.” And if you’re being stretched by “normal” events, what’s going to happen when something unforeseen occurs? You’ll be overwhelmed, morale will collapse, and kids might even get hurt.

Remember, as a scoutmaster, you need to be spending your time with the boys, not with the stove. You want a chance to do some skiing yourself, and to spend some time serving as troop photographer. You’ll be able to do this only when the outing is running smoothly - when all the logistics are perfect. If you find you often don’t have time to enjoy yourself and the boys at scout events, then you have a planning problem.

How to fix the problem? Be aware of your own personality, and the personalities and skills of your fellow adult leaders. A relatively small subset of the population (particularly the male population) are good “detail” people. Identify them and use them. They are great to assign as “trip leaders” or at least trip co-leaders.

In Troop 8 tradition, one scoutmaster is assigned as the “trip leader.” BSA policy requires this person to be at least 21, which is generally a good idea. Nothing stops you, though, from using a younger scoutmaster as primary trip coordinator - essentially “trip leader” without the title or final judgement authority.

The adult trip leader for a particular event must have the following characteristics:

- He must be experienced in the activity, so that he knows what skills need to be taught, how long things will take, what the risks are.
- He must be experienced with the level of boys that will be going, so he knows what to expect in terms of interests, behaviors, and attention span.
- He should be or become familiar with the area - attractions, terrain, resources & requirements, how to get there without getting lost, where to camp, etc.
- He must be willing to sweat the details.

If one person doesn't meet all of these characteristics, then there needs to be a planning team, making sure that there's a person on the team who meets each of the requirements. These must be folks who work well together. They must be clear amongst themselves who has responsibility for what. Most of the time, even with only one designated trip leader, the other scoutmasters going “help out” be agreeing to handle aspects of the outing - food, equipment, maps, etc.

Such scoutmaster cooperation is great, provided the communication is working. In Troop 8 scoutmaster tradition, we have a rule to help reduce communications snafus and “dropped balls.” The game is “who owns the problem?” When discussing something that needs to be done, never move on to another topic until someone says clearly, “I own the problem,” and can repeat back the exact “problem” that they own. Ex: “Food for the weekend is my problem.” They have to *say* it; nods or smiles don't cut it.

Planning Lead Time

Detail planning for an event begins the moment the event is decided upon. Remember, it's virtually impossible to do anything well on short notice. Most events have specific “lead times” - the amount of time before the event that you *must* start working on it in order for the event to come off well. Here's a rule for Troop 8: Because of the “busy-ness” of our families and boys, the lead time for any troop event other than a meeting is *at least* one month. In order to get folks to show up in sufficient numbers, the event date must be “set in stone” and published in the troop newsletter so that the newsletter is received 2-3 weeks before the event. Minimum. For weekend events, the date should be fixed and it should appear in two newsletters - first as a “looking ahead,” then as a regular calendar event. *If you depart from this*, for any reason or last-minute change, *you will lose half or more of your potential participants*. You'll also appear to be a disorganized slob to the kids and families. For many events,

like canoe trips involving livery arrangements, lead times can be even longer. Check out the **Troop 8 Underground Outings Guide** for more information.

Once the PLC puts an event on the calendar, therefore, the scoutmaster serving as trip leader for that event has to take out a calendar and start “backing up” from the event, figuring out what preparations need to be done when. “OK, if the event is on the 27th, then final equipment check needs to be the week before, so preliminary equipment check must be the week before that and we’ll need a meeting to discuss equipment the week before that. Food will need to be repackaged the week before so it must be purchased on the...” This “lead time planning calendar” is gospel! These “pre-events” *must* happen for the trip to work. For that reason, when dealing with scouts or with other adults, *pad the figures*. Keep the real ones (absolute minimums for a no-hitch trip) for yourself, but add in extra time for things you forgot and for the screw-ups of others. Older PLC scouts (particularly those getting near Eagle projects) can & should help with this lead time planning process.

The trip leader should be careful not to burn himself out by putting all the stuff for a trip together himself. There are lots of other people out there, especially scouts, who will help get the job done if asked. The trip leader needs to plan and coordinate. The more you use other people, the better they’ll get, and the less you’ll have to do.

Permission slips

Unlike many troops, Troop 8 does not ask parents to fill out a separate permission slip for every outing. What a headache! We’d be utterly buried in paper!

Instead, we issue one generic, well-worded statement granting permission to go on Troop 8 outings in general. On the back of each, we write special medical conditions and insurance information. These are kept in a small blue nylon bag, along with a pen and a few extras for emergencies. The blue bag should generally be left at a standard place in the troop room.

We keep using these permission slips until they get wet, they get eaten by a hungry scout, whatever. When that happens, we go through an effort to get parents to sign new ones. Usually this happens once a year.

Just for your information, the permission slip really is not helpful in securing medical treatment. As a minor, medical professionals assume “implied consent” for any scout in terms of rendering service. They’re going to do what they need to do, with or without the permission slip, or wait for the parents if the situation is not emergent. The slip is mostly your proof against a kidnapping charge.

Trip signup

Signup for trips happens at meetings. If a scout is not at a meeting, he should call his patrol leader in order to sign up, and his patrol leader should pass the word along to the trip leader. It would be great to get the patrol leaders to call their patrol members if they miss a meeting. That’s something we should work on.

For most events, scouts must commit to going by signing up at the meeting two weeks before the event. At the meeting one week before the event, they must sign up again and bring a check for the trip deposit (if any). If they cancel at the last minute, they lose their deposit. Just because a boy hasn't paid a deposit yet does not mean that a family is free to cancel without repercussions. Often the troop makes a financial commitment based on his signing up (like we put down non-refundable reservation money two weeks in advance). If the scout cancelled under these circumstances, he would be billed for the amount we lost in pre-paying his reservation.

This system can drive you nuts, particularly because of meeting absenteeism or "maybe" signups. Try to keep it under control by being strict, but not too rigid. You want kids to come out. Remember that often the kid isn't the whole problem. Sometimes the parents haven't decided yet, or mom forgot to write the check. You can't hold a boy responsible for something he isn't responsible for. However, be sure to grab each kid and talk to them every time they screw up the system, so that they at least know what's expected. You might need to call the parents, too.

Special Requests

You will from time to time get special requests from boys or parents. "Billy has to get picked up early on Sunday." "John can't come Saturday because of a soccer game, can he come out Saturday evening?"

These kinds of special requests add considerably to your logistics burden. In many cases, they can really destroy a trip. We have, for example, sat and waited with the whole troop over three hours for parents who had made special pickup arrangements from summer camp and then not showed on time. Worse, early departures raise the spectre of a boy having all the fun and none of the "clean up" duties.

The standard Troop 8 rule is simple: *Nobody comes late, nobody leaves early*. The second rule is that everybody goes with troop transportation.

As a scoutmaster, you will still get requests on a regular basis. Remember that what you do for one, you must do for all – and that means you'll be deluged with requests. Often the requests relate not to the kids, but to the parents on the trip, who want to get back early for a dinner party or other engagement.

Each request, of course, should be handled on an individual basis. In practice, however, we've established these guidelines: Never let anyone violate the come late/leave early rule. It's a headache that should be avoided at almost all costs. Once you've established & enforced the rule, you'll also get fewer requests. If you do make an exception for a kid/parent, the exception is only for that family. No other boys can go with them. Remember, *you're* responsible for those other boys, not the parent who is leaving, and those other boys don't deserve to have their experience shortchanged because of another family's needs. That means if someone's got special permission to leave early, you must have enough other drivers.

In handling requests for alternate transportation, consider whether there's really a need. If the need makes sense (like the family is going south on vacation and wants to pick up Bill at summer camp on the way), then be painfully explicit about the ground rules. First, Bill must stay (and finish camp cleanup) until we say he can go. Second, the parent must be there and waiting at the specified time; if

they're not, then Bill is going to be driving with us back to Ann Arbor, because we won't wait. Third, this is a special exception that we usually don't allow (so be grateful, and don't ask us often!).

As an aside, almost every time we've yielded to these requests over the last five years, we have regretted it. Sometimes we've *really* regretted it. If the request comes from a "problem parent" be especially wary. Remember, these rules are official troop policy, approved by the Parents' Committee. Err on the side of enforcement.

On the trip

OK, all the logistics are together, and we're off. Well, not quite. The final job of the trip leader is to get all the other leaders - scoutmasters, patrol leaders, and parents - and "brief them in" on the plan for action, so that everyone knows what to expect. This will prevent folks from "going renegade" on you, and make sure that everyone's on the same frequency, with the same goals for the trip. It will make the patrol leaders feel special and important - they'll be the guys who always know what's going on, and who can get the adults to listen. Usually, each group is briefed separately (scouters, patrol leaders, and parents), though that's not a hard & fast rule. Be cautious about briefing kids with adults, however; most parents aren't used to kids being treated as their peers.

Some parents will occasionally second-guess every plan or want you to explain the rationale for every step (like you haven't just spent three weeks putting this together...). Be patient, but be firm. These are the folks who are most likely to "go renegade" on you and mess up your plans. They also are the ones that are clearly detail-oriented, and might be worth using to help with trip plans in the future.

Once things are in motion, get ready to scrap all your plans. That's right, scrap them all. If you stay lockstep in a given plan, nothing will be fun. Serendipity is a gift from God - if the boys are having a blast, or really learning something, don't stop just because you had planned to stop at 3:00. If something's not working, change it! If something totally unforeseen comes up (a few of the guys really want to see the sunset from the ridge...), use it! The key advantage of good logistics planning is that it ensures you have the resources and information to be flexible. You always have options, and you know what they are.

The hallmark of good logistics is that the event seems to come off effortlessly. The kids and adults know the plan, know the choices, and know what's expected of them. The resources are all in place. You get to spend time with the boys and enjoy the wilderness, and everyone thinks Troop 8 campouts are easy. Hah, that's a laugh, but it's our secret.

Proper Preparation for Trips

Over the years, there has been a considerable amount of research into the factors which bring about serious wilderness emergencies and injury to backcountry users. Failure to pay heed to these factors, even when it does not result in an emergency, will very often result in a miserable experience for the boys. In some cases, the bad experience may sour them on scouting entirely. Troop 8 runs a *lot* of challenging outdoor activities, thus far free from any serious incidents. We have had, though, a few miserable experiences which have caused kids to leave scouting. Our generally good record is a product of rigorous application of the following principles, often in the face of passive or active resistance by scouts & parents.

Aside from the occasional “freak” accident - the boulder falling from a rock face on a clear, windless day - almost all accidents are preventable. Serious accidents happen when several factors come together to place groups in situations beyond what they can successfully handle. These are related to three chief areas:

Equipment : A strong contributing factor to most incidents, particularly cold-weather injuries. A poorly equipped party leaves themselves no flexibility for dealing with contingencies. When environmental factors turn sour, they find themselves without the materiel to be able to adjust. Poor quality equipment in the harsh outdoors often fails and breaks, requiring greater effort by the group or significant changes in plans.

Experience: People die each year in the Grand Canyon from dehydration-related illness, often with full canteens of water. Those without genuine, long-term experience in the backcountry, or experience with groups of kids of scouting age, put the expedition at greater risk. An inexperienced person puts himself at risk, thereby endangering the rest of the group who will have to deal with the problem. Worst are self-proclaimed experts with little real knowledge, who often overestimate their own or their group’s abilities.

Environment: Inexperienced, poorly equipped groups survive in the “near” wilderness - the national parks near roadheads - all the time. Some even have pleasant trips in the backcountry. The recipe that leads to disaster is when environmental factors begin to have an impact. The weather turns sour. The river is more difficult than expected. The bear ripped apart the packs and ate the food. These environmental factors are a normal part of regular backcountry experience. When they begin to crop up, though, they can quickly overwhelm the experience and equipment of ill-prepared groups.

The likelihood of an accident or a just plain miserable experience can be determined by simply adding up the “risk factors” from each of the three categories. This has proved a remarkably accurate predictor of disaster in analyzing wilderness incident reports.

There is a certain synergy to the factors; they tend to feed on each other. Bad weather hits, and the ill-equipped become cold and miserable. Being cold and wet and not having expedition experience, they begin to behave poorly - second-guessing others on the trip, or deciding to “go it on their own” thereby putting themselves and their group at still greater risk. When risk factors start piling up, those who do not understand the principles of good “expedition behavior” can be deadly.

For the safety and well-being of the program, it is vitally important that the scoutmasters be constantly aware of the risk factors and insist on the proper preparation and equipment for *every* partici-

pant: parent, scouter, and scout. This is the job of the *scoutmasters*, who are responsible for the expedition, and it should never be ceded to a boy or parent. So serious is this that as a matter of standing troop policy approved by the troop committee and by the parish (meaning the committee can't override it without the pastor's involvement), NO person who fails to meet the scoutmasters' requirements may participate in an activity.

Equipment

The way to limit equipment "risk factors" is simple: provide equipment lists to participants, and check their equipment and all group gear before departing. This is standard practice for all outdoor education groups.

Equipment lists are developed by carefully thinking about what the normal environmental range will be for the trip, and what the "worst case" could be. Participants should have gear that can easily handle the normal range while surviving the worst case with only mild discomfort. Because of space and weight considerations, preference is always given to multi-use items (like clothing in layers) rather than single-use items (like a heavy parka).

Equipment checkouts should happen as close to the trip as possible, while allowing time for the participant to correct any deficiencies. The goal is to be sure the stuff doesn't "disappear" between the checkout and the trip.

In checking out equipment, the task should fall to an experienced scoutmaster, perhaps assisted by senior scouts. You're looking to make sure that everything is there, and that the items are of good enough quality to "make it" without any problem. This second responsibility is just as important as the first, as broken equipment can be worse than not having it at all. Lots of kids and adults will buy cheap, low-quality goods, or will try to substitute something they already have (like a cotton sweatshirt) for something on the list (a non-cotton insulating layer).

This quality issue is a tough one, since so often parents will go out and buy things like PVC rain ponchos or backpacks or even skis without consulting us. Kids, of course, are delighted by such gifts, and neither parent nor kid wants to hear that the item doesn't meet our quality standards and is not welcome on an outing.

This is where a "hard-nosed" adult has to be firm. Kids will beg, plead, and argue. Parents will beg, plead, and argue. There's a simple rule, straight from Murphy: if when you look at a piece of equipment you think there just might be a problem, then it is all but guaranteed that the piece of equipment will not be adequate. The outdoors is rough on equipment, and kids are rougher; the two together spell trouble. In twelve years of outdoor work, I've occasionally let something slide by the checkout. Without fail, I have always regretted it. Remember, one equipment failure or one cold scout can compromise an entire expedition. Explain that to the parents; it's their son's welfare and safety we're looking out for. Be firm; no piece of equipment is worth putting anyone at risk.

Sometimes, particularly on backpacking trips where weight is a major consideration, you will be faced with the scout and parent who wants to bring too much - the pillow, the twelve changes of socks, etc. This will generate just as much begging, pleading, and arguing as poor equipment, and requires

just as firm a response. Boys will always think that they're strong enough to carry anything, but it will be the group that pays the penalty of having to deal with the boy falling behind, exhausted.

Experience

Limiting the experience risk factor takes even more work than equipment. After all, one of our major goals is to give boys experience and an opportunity to lead, and they certainly don't start at the top of the experience ladder. Remember the principle of scaffolding - each boy should stretch, but within an organized and protective structure.

First, the trip leaders (the scoutmasters) must be fully experienced and ready for any eventuality. This goes a long way toward limiting the risk factors. Second, the trip leaders must work and communicate well together, so that each one's experience is brought into play when needed in a good "expedition dynamic."

Third, if the trip leaders' experience is to be used, the rest of the group, boys and adults, must recognize and assent to their leadership. This means that all members of the group, especially adults who aren't normally on campouts, must be instructed in proper expedition behavior. Many of the worst mountaineering disasters can be traced directly to group members arguing over courses of action or ignoring the most experienced member.

Of course, we do want the boys to participate in this leadership; otherwise we're just another "field trip" organization providing "youth activities." That means that it's critically important to develop the scouts' skills and experience before a trip, so that they themselves are prepared to serve as good expedition members and co-leaders.

In Troop 8, we've come to do this through the "pre-trip" program. This was originally developed in the Venture program as a way of getting prepared for longer Venture trips, and then was adopted by the boys for the regular troop program. The idea is simple: you begin with "easy" outings and meetings designed to teach skills and techniques. These are usually short, 1-day sessions, perhaps done only in "fair weather." You progress to longer trips, requiring them to apply the skills and techniques under supervision. This continues up to a capstone trip or trips, where the scouts will need to apply their skills and experience in challenging conditions, perhaps without direct supervision.

Done well, you'll be amazed at how much the boys learn and grow through such a progression. Here's the rub, though: they can't miss any levels of the system. If a boy doesn't come on the day trips, he can't come on the weekend ones. If he doesn't come on the weekend ones, he can't come on the "big" ones without jeopardizing himself and others through lack of experience. Make sure you have enough "extra" pre-trips so that if a boy can't make one for some reason he's sure to make the next. After that, hold the line. Few things are worse than being on a "second level" trip, and having to hold all the boys back while you re-teach the one kid who didn't bother to come to any of the "first-level" trips. Nothing is worse than a boy who isn't ready for a big trip going along, and holding back his companions while placing himself and others at risk.

Once again, expect much whining and pleading, but be firm. Remember, in the end if they have learned that it's something worth working for, they will be that much prouder when they have achieved it.

Environment

Environmental risk factors cannot be helped. They are just the things with which we must deal in the wilderness. The only thing which can be done to reduce environmental risk factors is to choose not to go into the woods, or into a particular area at a particular time. This should be constantly on the mind of the scoutmaster. Given the environmental conditions, are we (boys and adults) properly equipped and experienced for this trip? If the answer is honestly “no,” or even if it’s “maybe,” or “except for..” then your decision is clear - the trip must be modified or cancelled.

Environmental decisions can also crop up when out on a trip, and must be considered. Are we ready for a second day of canoeing in the sleet? Is the snow pack stable enough to justify skiing it without risk of avalanche?

Scouts should be involved in this sort of environmental assessment and decision-making, so that they will come to understand its importance and the things which should be considered. This is an area where you may discuss with an older scout and ask for an opinion, but the decision always belongs to the scoutmaster who is serving as trip leader.

Mostly, though, if you’ve done your job, no trip should be called off because of environmental factors. A properly equipped and experienced group should have fun dealing with the normal “perils” of the wilderness.

A Word About Adults

By Troop 8 policy, all adults, including new scoutmasters and parents, must meet all of the experience and equipment requirements in order to participate on an outing. This includes equipment check-outs and pre-trip requirements. Enforcing this policy as scoutmaster will perhaps be your biggest challenge. Failure to enforce this policy is guaranteed to be your biggest nightmare.

The reasons this is such a pain is that unlike scouts, most adults are not anxious to learn and are not at all comfortable with authority or correction. Like most scouts, adults often seriously overrate their own ability and experience, particularly when it may involve a situation where you are implying that their kid has the experience to come, but not them. That’s a tough nut for any ego to swallow.

Why bother with being the “bad guy” to well-intentioned parents who want to help out? There’s a rule: truly well-intentioned parents who really want to help out will happily abide by these common-sense requirements. The ones who give you grief or try to “slip by” are the adults who are sure to be a problem on the trip.

In the past six years in Troop 8, on literally hundreds of outings, the only times expedition safety has been compromised, the only times a boy’s health and well-being have been placed in jeopardy have been because of poorly equipped and poorly experienced fathers.

Some points to remember:

- An adult who is a self-proclaimed expert almost never is one.
- An adult who has done “all kinds” of camping did it in a trailer twenty years ago.

- Adults will never admit their kid might be getting better than them at something. But their kid does gym at school, plays competitive soccer all summer, swims, plays basketball, wrestles with the neighbor, climbs trees, rides a bike 10 miles or more a day and camps out with the troop 30 nights a year (or more). As scoutmasters we know that no adult can touch this; only size and experience allow us to even keep up.

- An adult who does not exhibit good expedition behavior or who does not accept the scoutmasters' leadership is going to be a disaster and must always be excluded, *even if the only way to do it is to cancel the trip*. Remember, kids will follow the lead of any adult. If one starts complaining, they will be miserable. If all the adults are professional and competent, they will be determined and confident. More importantly, if an emergency ever occurs, leadership struggles can be literally fatal.

- The reason for pre-trips is not just to teach a skill. The adult may already be a world-class canoeist; if not, canoeing is easy to teach. The real purpose is to learn how Troop 8 works: our rules, procedures, and safety guidelines. This way they can be a better support for the kids and program. Plus, we get a sense for how to work with that person and use his/her skills.

Having said all this, remember: they are adults! We need them! We want them! They should be treated as such. Grant exceptions when you're sure of the person (Bill's been out with us quite a bit, we don't need to check his gear). Don't let them "get their dander up." Be welcoming, gentle, and cajoling ("I'm sure you have done a lot of backpacking. That's great! We could use your knowledge on our pre-trips," or "well, we'll be teaching the boys some paddle strokes, but we really need adults to come out to get used to our procedures, like how we handle trips & safety. That way we can all do a better job for the boys.")

By being fair and consistent in the application of this rule, you'll have wonderful campouts and healthy, productive adult participation. Remember, nobody respects a pushover.

A Telling Example

The following true tale from Troop 8 history illustrates how the three E's can make for a bad experience, even on a "nice, little father-son canoe trip in June."

Several years ago the troop took a Father's Day weekend trip to the Pine River near Cadillac. Two fathers among the joining webelo families were self-described experienced canoeists. Both gave the scoutmaster a hard time about the pre-trip requirements and participated in the minimum number of pre-trips, often staying ahead of the troop and missing instructional sessions.

The weekend of the Pine River trip was marked by cold, wet rain, which began Friday and continued all day Saturday. The rain swelled the Pine from a class I easy whitewater river to a class II river requiring some skill. The rain and chill wind made for moderate hypothermia conditions, especially for smaller boys with no non-cotton clothing. The more challenging river conditions were leading to canoe capsizes, until all but the seasoned veterans were soaked. Wet weather, wind chill, and capsizes led to impatience and aggravation among some of the parents, and the attitude passed to some boys.

At around 11:30 am, one of the "experienced" new fathers mentioned above paddled his canoe into a strainer. Failing to recognize and take proper action at the hazard, the father and his son were

ejected as the canoe capsized and pinned. The boy was briefly trapped underwater before surfacing, terrified.

Shortly after this experience, at the lunch stop a short ways down stream, one of the fathers hitch-hiked to retrieve his car and then shuttled several adults and boys back to camp. The scoutmaster, who had been in the rear assisting boys and other boaters, arrived at lunch to find only half the group present, empty canoes to transport, and no idea if all boys were accounted for.

After the trip, the two boys with the “experienced canoeist” fathers came on few events and soon dropped out.

The story is a good illustration of how the risk factors can add up to a miserable, even dangerous experience. This was to be a nice, father-son canoe weekend on a Michigan river in June. What’s the big deal?

We see here the accident risk factors multiplying and working together. Many of the boys and adults were poorly equipped, with only cotton T-shirts and sweatshirts in a 50° windy rain. Several of the adults overrated both their paddling ability and their experience, and were paired with their similarly inexperienced sons.

It’s possible that neither of these risk factors would have become an issue without the environmental factors: faster than normal river current, cold rain, and the usual river obstacles on the Pine. Environmental factors, however, are uncontrollable, and these weather conditions are not unusual as Troop 8 outings go. Once the risk factors came together, inexperienced adults compounded the problem through poor attitude and judgement, and began acting on their own apart from troop leadership (since the scoutmaster was “bringing up the rear”).

How do we avoid nightmares like this one? Easy. Follow the motto: Be Prepared! On all outings, insist that each of the adults and boys meets your expectations for equipment and experience, and set your expectations high enough so that everyone will be comfortable and safe if Earl does a number on the weather. Especially resist letting other adults talk you into inflated self-assessments of their experience. As scoutmaster, when the going gets tough stay at the center of the action and distribute your experienced members throughout the group; use your experience to *firmly* guide and direct.

Yeah, most of the time it’ll be a nice, sunny June weekend, and parents will come back saying “What’s the big deal?” But that’s OK.

Summary

Guaranteeing the integrity and safety of outings is the duty of the scoutmasters. Be rigorous about equipment and experience requirements, and you will have many enjoyable campouts in even the worst of conditions. Be soft, and you’ll have no end of headaches and problems, or, God forbid, much worse.

Outdoor Clothing and Equipment

This section of the book is designed to give you as scoutmaster a quick overview of what scouts need to be properly outfitted, and the kinds of options which are available. Like everything in this book, it is not designed to replace real experience or to be comprehensive, equipment changes too frequently for that.

THE BIGGEST EQUIPMENT PROBLEM YOU WILL HAVE IS THAT SCOUTS DO NOT HAVE APPROPRIATE OUTDOOR CLOTHING. Did we type that big enough for you? It's true. Parents who will spend \$500 on a great mountain bike won't think to spend \$100 on the clothing the kid needs to enjoy the bike in the best riding weather.

Warm, sunny days of summertime, of course, are never an issue. Shorts and a cotton T-shirt; everyone has these. If it's in the weeds, jeans and a T-shirt with a long sleeves or a windbreaker. The difficulty is that we almost never do anything on warm, sunny days.

First rule: When the weather gets chill, kids cool off *lots* faster than adults. That's because they have more surface area compared to their volume, they have less fat & smaller muscles, and their bodies aren't as good at temperature regulation (why do you think kids often run high fevers?).

Second rule: Adults always forget that kids cool off faster. We and the parents kind of figure that if we're warm, they must be warm. Besides, they're so active! How can they be cold? Because their liver doesn't store as much reserve energy, that's why. A corollary to the second rule is that most parents aren't crazy enough to go camping in the weather we do, so they don't know how cold it can be.

Third rule: Most families own nothing but cotton clothing, and they think that's just great. So they wrap their kids up in sweatshirts & send them out to be miserable in the snow. Remember this from your youth? I sure do.

Cotton is a plant fiber, in case you didn't know. Very soft. Makes comfy clothes. The problem is that plants like to hold on to water. They need it. Cotton fiber holds water when it's wet, and we all know that water on the skin is the best way nature has to cool the body (evaporative cooling). That's why we sweat, and it's why cotton T-shirts are so great in the summertime when we want to be cool.

In the rain, in the woods, cotton causes death. Please repeat. *Cotton causes death.* Cotton, when wet, is a *negative* insulator. Wearing wet cotton is worse than being naked. Repeat. *Wearing wet cotton is worse than being naked.* If a cold kid is wearing a soaked cotton sweatshirt, take it off him! He's better off going bare-chested. As you work on equipment checks in fall & winter, you'll have to beat this truth into boys and parents, who will regularly show up with blue jeans, flannel shirts, 50-50 blends and sweatclothes as "insulating" layers.

What are the alternatives? You will be asked. As you know, outdoor clothing can be expensive, but as you're talking with parents remember that cotton clothing is almost as pricey and often doesn't last nearly as long. I've never seen a kid trash a decent pair of midweight polypros, but they blow through sweatpants all the time.

Here's the scoop on outdoor clothing fabrics:

Polypropylene (goes by Poly-Pro, Thermax, MTS, Capilene, “wicking fabric”): Polypropylene is exactly what it sounds like - it’s plastic. These days, some polypro is even being made from recycled plastic milk bottles. It consists of very soft, thin, hollow plastic filaments. Plastic, of course, does not hold water, and the hollow fibers “wick” water away from the skin by capillary action, making the skin warm and dry. This stuff is to die for - *the* best all-purpose outdoor clothing. The one disadvantage is that it holds body odor in a big way. Washing is required often, so purchase the dense-weave stuff that behaves better in the wash & dry cycle. A second disadvantage is that plastic melts when exposed to heat. Don’t cook with poly gloves on, or stand near the fire.

Uses: Most common use is in “long underwear” sold separately as tops and bottoms. Also found as liner socks and gloves, hats (usually as a liner), and sometimes blended with other fabrics in other clothing articles.

Purchase: The most versatile items are “midweight” long underwear tops and bottoms. These are the year-round inner layer for every sport from canoeing to x-country skiing. “Expedition” weight is very warm and useful only in the late fall and winter. Don’t bother buying anything less than midweight, it’s not worth it. Purchase underwear with the dense, soft weave found in the more expensive offerings like Patagonia’s - don’t necessarily buy Patagonia, but look for that style weave; some of the cheaper generic polypro has a thin, scratchier weave which is not as good and which doesn’t hold up well over time or in the laundry. Liner socks and gloves are also great, as are hats with polypro liners.

Nylon pile (Polartec, “fleece” fabrics): Nylon pile is that soft, slightly fuzzy stuff that you see in all kinds of cool colors in many jackets and hats. It’s made of nylon fibers - a petroleum product. Like all petroleum oils, nylon is hydrophobic - it doesn’t hold water. Just like polypro, squeeze it and it’s virtually dry. It does not have the “wicking” ability of polypro, however, so isn’t best as an inner layer. It is much easier to make nylon fiber “bulky” than it is with polypro, though, so it makes a better insulator, especially for jackets, vests, and hats. It doesn’t hold odors like polypro, but does melt with heat. It’s not great for high-wear areas where abrasion/friction is an issue. Except for this, think of nylon pile as a synthetic replacement for wool.

Uses: Jackets, vests, jacket liners, hats, neck gaiters, mittens & gloves (under an outer shell), also very warm pants.

Purchase: These days, the quality of nylon pile fabrics is pretty similar, so go for best price or other garment features. A pile jacket is a great thing - highly recommended for 4 season use (cold summer nights). Balaclavas (pullover hats) are also wonderful. Hats are good too, but best with a wool blend to survive scout abuse. Some folks find the pants great, for others they are too warm. In either case, they’re definitely winter-only wear.

Wool (wool, Ragg wool, Virgin wool) : Wool comes from sheep, a protein fiber. Sheep live in places that are always cold and wet, like Scotland. Unlike the artificial fabrics, wool does hold a fair bit of water when wet, though not nearly as much as cotton (ever seen a wool towel? not likely). Wool retains about half of its original insulating capacity when wet - the best of the natural fibers. Being a natural fiber, wool is also much better at dealing with heat (scorching slowly rather than melting instantly), and is much better for areas of high wear/abrasion (like socks). It often can be found cheaper than the artificial fabrics, but that is becoming less the case over time. Wool is significantly heavier

than the artificial fabrics, making it a worse choice for backpacking. It becomes extremely heavy when wet; young scouts should avoid heavy wool layers for water activities.

Uses: Sweaters, heavy shirts, pants, hats, socks, gloves.

Purchase: There's nothing better for hiking socks, though the best these days is a blend of wool, polypro, and spandex for stretchiness. Cheap rag wool gloves are great for 3-season 'round camp use, especially when cooking. Wool hats are fine, though some find them scratchy (here too we are seeing wool/polypro/spandex blends). Purchase hats, gloves and socks, and pants when cheap. Allow scouts to use pants, sweaters, heavy shirts if their family has them, but don't recommend for purchase.

Down (Goosedown) : The small, fluffy feathers from the wingpits of geese. Down is nature's best insulator because it "fluffs up" more than anything else. It is light and very compressible. Artificial fabrics are only recently even getting close to this combination of weight, compressibility, and insulating loft. Down is a loose, feathery stuff that needs to be sandwiched between two layers of fabric, usually nylon. This means down garments need lots of fabric and are usually used only for "big" insulators - winter parkas and sleeping bags. Dry down is great. Damp down compresses, shifts, and loses its insulating capability. Wet down holds buckets of water, weighs twelve tons, has no insulating ability, behaves like wet concrete, and is impossible to dry in the field short of thermonuclear detonations (which are guaranteed to melt the nylon shell). It's takes a lot of geese to make a jacket - down is often double the cost of artificial fabrics.

Uses: Winter parkas, "Michelin Man" pants, vests, sleeping bags.

Purchase: Because of its lousy behavior when wet, down is a "dry snow" winter-only insulator. Experienced outdoorsmen can keep it dry in backcountry ski conditions if they're careful, and around town or on the ski slope it's great. Not recommended for scout purchase or use in the backcountry. Be very wary of allowing scouts to use down sleeping bags on trips.

Nylon, down-like insulators (Hollofil, Quallofil, Thinsulate, LiteLoft, etc.): There's been a big boom of research by the chemical companies (DuPont, etc.) into artificial mesh/batten fabrics which are used like down in outdoor wear. This seems to be ongoing, with new stuff coming all the time. I think the chemists are upset that they still can't quite beat Mother Goose. Like down, this stuff is sandwiched between two layers of nylon. Unlike down, it behaves gracefully when wet, keeping much of its insulating value and holding little water. Unlike down, most of it does not "bunch up" or shift to leave cold spots. It's heavier, not as compressible, and suffers a greater degree of "breakdown" over the years.

Uses: Parkas (mostly Thinsulate), pants, slippers, sleeping bags, gloves (Thinsulate).

Purchase: Sleeping Bags! Parkas are OK, but they don't really fit with the multi-use layering system. Get big, hefty Parkas and pants for backcountry winter trips & camping. Ditto for the slippers. Gloves are great for skiing, but scouts tend to melt these on campouts if not careful.

That pretty much runs the gamut on insulating layers, except for specialty-use stuff like neoprene for wetsuits.

Wind & Rain wear

All of the above insulators, though, are just insulators - we all need also to be protected against convective cooling by the wind. For this reason, the outer layer, which needs to be big enough to fit over multiple inner layers, must be a wind-proof nylon shell. The shell should have a hood (ones with stowable or detachable hoods are cool). Scouts should get shells with no insulation, so that they can use the shell in a wide variety of weather. With appropriate non-cotton insulating layers, being protected from the rain is of less consequence.

“Fancy fabric” waterproof/breathable shells are great - GoreTex, H2NO, or others are simply wonderful, with GoreTex leading the pack. They are waterproof, breathable, and windproof. Unfortunately, these are very expensive to purchase for growing kids, unless there’s going to be a chain of hand-me-downs.

The second choice for scouts should be a nylon shell treated with a water-repellent coating that still allows the garment to “breathe” - to allow perspiration and moisture to escape through the fabric. These can typically found relatively inexpensively, though be conscious of quality - pants in particular should be made of a relatively tough and abrasion-resistant nylon.

Last choice is “coated” waterproof nylon. This is sold as a rainwear, and is adequate for wearing at a fixed camp. When hiking, skiing, or performing any other activity, however, perspiration buildup beneath the garment makes the wearer every bit as wet as the rain would have. This is true even if it’s not raining! These garments are inexpensive, and can be identified by a glossy coating on the inside of the garment. Scouts and their families should be discouraged from purchasing these garments - it’s usually better to Scotchguard a plain nylon windbreaker, unless the person has cotton layers underneath (in which case it’s a toss-up). Getting two sets - a windproof one for dry days and a coated nylon for rain is an OK choice, and still probably less expensive than the cheapest GoreTex.

An inappropriate choice is PVC (plastic) wind and rainwear. This comes as semi-disposable pants and jackets or as ponchos. Guaranteed to be destroyed in one or two trips, it suffers the same disadvantages as coated nylon.

A few more unusual items are worth mentioning, since they go beyond what many consider “normal” outdoor wear:

Footwear

These days it seems most kids have only one kind of footwear. Tennis shoes. If they must hike and camp in tennis shoes, it is guaranteed that their feet will always be wet. Stress the importance of good wool socks, with lots of dry pairs and at least one extra pair of tennies.

Best for most scouting activity are the lightweight hightopped hiking boot made of leather and nylon. These have become quite popular and are readily available for prices approaching those of good tennis or running shoes. They’ll last a lot longer, keep feet a lot happier and offer some ankle support. Kids love ‘em and abuse them. Make sure that parents know to spray-waterproof them with silicon or Scotchguard before the first time they are worn! Re-waterproofing will be required periodically.

Venture scouts whose feet have stopped growing should invest in light to midweight all-leather boots with sewn-on (not glued) soles. When taken care of, these last for decades.

Many boots are made with a GoreTex lining sock. Aside from increasing the price of the boot, GoreTex in this application offers relatively little benefit. Yes, the inside of the boot will be waterproof, but a spray protectant still should be applied to the outside. The dirt, grime, and perspiration that boots encounter clogs the Goretex pores and limits the breathability advantage of the fabric unless frequently washed, inside and out. Not worth it for kids.

Gaiters

These are nylon sleeves which normally cover from the top of the ski or hiking boot to the top of the calf (though low and high gaiters can be found). Most have tough Cordura nylon waterproof bottoms with breathable nylon upper sections. Gaiters are very strongly recommended, and should be worn any time hiking boots or X-country ski boots are put on. Their chief function is keeping water, sand, scree rocks, snow, etc. from falling down into the boot. They also protect the lower leg from snakes, branches, brambles, and the like. Neck gaiters are a sleeve of nylon pile that serve like a pull-on version of a turtleneck top. They're cool too.

Balaclavas

These pull-over hats are great, especially for sleeping in, and have become very popular with scouts. They still aren't a total replacement for a regular hat, as they tend to be thinner. Pile is a better choice than polypro, though the two layered on each other would be awesomely cozy. Not related to the Greek honey and molasses pastry, baklava.

On fashion

Forget fashion. Use whatever works. But... remember that guys like at some level to be identified by their clothes. Goofy hats or other outdoor items which are acceptable outdoor gear should be tolerated, commented on (they'll love you for noticing), even encouraged. Troop 8 has a tradition of practical but unusual headwear.

Sleeping Bags

To go into a long discussion of sleeping bags here would probably bore you to tears. Here's the scoop:

Scouts should get a "mummy" or tapered-cut (wide mummy) sleeping bag. Younger boys in particular should have mummy bags so that they have less space to heat up. Rectangular bags are bad.

Scouts should have a bag with a synthetic fill (not down). It's probably best to get a warm three-season bag, rated to around 10°F. For a Polar Bear, an extra blanket or other tricks can be used for warmth.

The scout's sleeping bag should not have any "lining." It should be nylon, inside and out. Flannel linings are heavy, plus they are usually cotton, and they are almost always found only on rectangular bags.

The scout must have a waterproof nylon stuff sack for his sleeping bag. These are relatively inexpensive and very important - don't allow rope and garbage bags. Stuff sacks should be oversized for the bags; on backpacking trips we often stuff other things in with the bag, including a sleeping pad. Plus, smaller boys don't have the arm length or strength to stuff a sleeping bag into a sack which "just fits."

Sleeping pads are necessary for all but summer camping, to insulate the scout from the cold ground. While ThermaRest pads are quite nice, they are also very expensive and heavy. Simple closed-cell (incompressible) foam sheets work almost as well and for a fraction the cost. In winter, two pads should be used, at least under the head and torso. Blow-up type air mattresses are stupid. They're heavy, time-consuming, and guaranteed to be punctured by the scout in under three trips.

Ditty Bags

Troop 8 requires scouts have their own personal eating-wear, which they are responsible for keeping track of and keeping clean themselves. This need not be fancy - a plastic bowl, spoon, and cheap plastic insulated coffee mug with a lid work great. The troop orders these through Campmor and sells them as a set in a small nylon carrying bag. Encourage kids to get these - they work great for both car camping and backpacking. We also sell just pieces, so that kids can "customize" the set to their taste.

It used to be that we just used "troop" eating-wear, and each meal's cleanup crew then had to wash everything. This made a huge job for a few boys, much bigger and less fun than anything they'd ever done at home. It also meant that some (like the lunch crew) got away with a much lighter task. It didn't encourage personal responsibility for keeping track of stuff, and allowed kids to keep grabbing "fresh" plates. Finally, the practice didn't work for backpacking trips, where personal eating-wear is *de rigeur* and troop stuff too heavy. Moving to personal "ditty bags" was a fabulous improvement. Just be sure to inspect the first-year guys' occasionally for cleanliness.

Ditty bag ingredients from Campmor:

- 80913 Plastic Soup Bowl
- 80921 Aladdin 12oz insulated mug w/lid
- 23123 Chow set
- 48203 Nylon ditty bag - 6" x 13". Buy assorted colors!
- 67790 Mini Cord-lok (toggle) Pack of 6 (use one per bag).

Water Bottles

Every scout also should have a 1 quart wide-mouthed soft plastic (nalgene) water bottle. Metal canteens are useless - they fit nowhere in a pack and are awkward to fill and carry. Narrow-mouthed canteens and bottles make it difficult to add drink mix and are guaranteed to freeze at the neck in the

wintertime. Smaller than a quart is too small; bigger than a quart is too big. One choice. We should probably be selling these along with ditty bags.

Campmor order:

80880 Nalgene Wide-Mouth Bottle, 32 oz.

Group Gear and policies

The troop maintains a great deal of Troop Gear for use by scouts on campouts, as well as “loaner” and rental gear for use by individual scouts who are underequipped. The two categories are distinct; Troop gear always refers to materials used by more than one scout, while loan and rental gear is used by one scout alone.

Tents

The troop has a number of two-person North Face tents for the scouts to use. Once upon a time we had Eureka scout 3-person tents. Lest anyone be tempted in the future to switch back, here are the reasons we went with 2-person tents despite the additional cost:

- The 3-person tents were too bulky and heavy to be used on backpacking trips, particularly by the smaller boys. Remember, every pound counts when a kid only weighs 70-80 pounds.
- The older boys on the PLC discovered that 3 person tents caused kids to stay awake much later at night than 2-person tents. Two people get tired of talking & fooling around much faster than 3 people. Two person tents are also too small to really socialize in, thereby reducing the attraction for kids to hang out in their tent.

The change in tents was a big improvement to troop operations and morale.

To encourage boys to be responsible for the tents, every item on a tent is color-coded - the stakes, the poles, the bag, the tent, the fly.... everything. Each pair of two boys is assigned a tent which is “theirs” for at least a year. No other scout or adult can use it. If they lose any piece, they do without. If they damage the tent, they have to deal with the problem. The boys are responsible for the repair or replacement of any piece of the tent lost or broken, up to and including the whole tent. They are also responsible for taking the tent home to dry it out after a wet weekend, and for bringing it back.

This system works great, as long as you stick to it. Never, ever for the sake of expedience give someone another group’s tent, or the whole thing comes apart. New boys or guests must be assigned new tents or must tent with someone whose partner is missing. Replacement items should all be painted to match the color - code.

Patrol Gear

Each patrol also has a set of color-coded patrol gear which belongs exclusively to that patrol. This includes a dining fly, dining fly poles, stakes, ropes, and mallet, cook gear, stove & fittings, propane bottle, first aid kit, propane lantern, etc. The idea here is the same as for the tents. Everything is color-coded, and the boys are responsible for their own patrol’s gear. Anything lost or broken they pay to replace. Anything they dirty, they clean.

Unlike the tents, as a system this has not yet worked well. There are several reasons for this. First, our Troop room is always a confused jumble because it’s too small to store the stuff by patrol. Second, we tend to do a variety of different campouts, where at times we all eat and cook together as a group. This breaks the cardinal rule that we mentioned for tents: it must always be theirs. If it’s grabbed and

used by other people, the patrol is not responsible and will not be responsible. Third, the system has suffered from poor adult planning and maintenance. We're the ones who just grab stuff, we're the ones who let the system slide too quickly before the kids have "bought into" it. Fourth, at the end of a campout, it is often inconvenient to have all the drivers return to the church for equipment dropoff and cleaning – so again it becomes "someone else's responsibility."

The patrol equipment setup would work IF it was set up all at once, perfectly, ready to go AND we as adults make sure we never violate the rule that the stuff belongs to the patrol. It would not cost much more to outfit an "adult patrol" set of gear, which could be used for "whole troop" arrangements.

Loaner and Rental Gear

For some time now, the troop has kept a cache of non-cotton outdoor clothing and other personal gear to be loaned (or, where it is still being paid for, rented) to scouts. While we talk about this as troop equipment so as to encourage the shy kid and family to use it, the reality is that all of this gear really was purchased by and belongs to the scoutmasters.

The Troop Committee has from time to time at our prodding considered this, but has never taken any action. So the scoutmasters took action ourselves, adding rental equipment slowly over the years. Whenever a kid needs extra clothing, we try to fit them in our old stuff. Rock-climbing gear, white gas stoves, and a variety of other equipment are all borrowed out of the personal gear of the scoutmasters.

Several years ago, when cross-country ski rental became very expensive in the area, one of the scoutmasters invested in a bunch of skis, boots, and poles to use as "in-troop" rentals at \$5 per day. More recently, we've been moving toward in-troop rentals with small, adjustable-frame Kelty backpacks.

To keep this system working on the "loaner" end, it's important for each scoutmaster to clearly mark the gear with their name, and to impress on each scout (& parent!) his obligation to return the item. It's not that anyone steals - it's just that kids are inattentive and forgetful.

Loaner gear should not be small items, which are easy to lose. For years we've tried to maintain a set of troop compasses, and after several hundred dollars of expense we have no compasses. There's a rule here: Loaner and troop gear items cannot be small things. Remember that.

The way the rental program works is simple. When a scout uses in-troop rental gear, he's billed for the daily rental fee. That money goes to the scoutmaster whose equipment it is, to help pay for its purchase and eventual replacement. What happens to the equipment after it has been "paid for" (yeah, right... it's never happened yet!) is up to the scoutmaster. At some level, the hope is that either the equipment will be loaned for free, or that it will continue to be rented and the money will go toward getting more rental equipment.

In cases where some boys rent from our in-troop supply and others rent from an outside agency (because we don't have enough in-troop), we ordinarily average the cost across all the boys. This way we don't penalize a scout for something like having the wrong sized feet for in-troop rentals.

Right now, we've got rental x-country ski equipment (\$5 per day), rental expedition cold-weather parkas and pants (\$10 ea. per event), and one rental youth backpack (\$5 per weekend) owned by Bob

Geier. We also have a large assortment of loaner clothing and gear owned by Dave Regensburger and Bob Geier. Bob also provides quite a bit of Venture equipment.

None of the parents really know or understand that this is how this works, which helps us in outfitting those kids whose financial situations aren't the best. Using "troop gear" is OK, but accepting charity from a scoutmaster is hard for some folks to take.

Troop Discounts

In order to help families to select and purchase quality outdoor gear, the troop has taken to arranging several discount sale opportunities.

Bivouac Outfitters on S. State near Nichols Arcade will, by prior arrangement, hold a "discount night" for Troop 8 families. The store stays open late to serve the troop and a general 10-15% discount is provided. While this just reduces Bivouac's prices to reasonable levels, they will match catalog prices if you bring a catalog. More important, it provides an opportunity for scouts and parents to discuss equipment with the scoutmasters while looking at purchases. It's one of our best teaching opportunities. Doing it in September before cold-weather season starts seems to work best. Bivouac is reluctant to do it during the Christmas season, as they are open late then anyway.

The discount mail-order establishment Campmor provides troop orders with a 10% discount off their already reasonable catalog rates. We traditionally request a bunch of catalogs from them in November and place a troop Christmas order. The troop also uses Campmor for a great deal of Troop equipment - stoves, tents, dining flies, lanterns, stakes, ditty bag materials, etc.

The rules for Campmor purchases with the discount are as follows: The order must be faxed on troop letterhead with our Campmor account number (#20828364) to Campmor's Group sales department (FAX 201-327-2315). We have an open account, which means that the terms are "Net 30" - they will bill us after shipping the order and we must pay within 30 days. When we pay the bill, we must pay by Troop check. No credit cards or personal checks are allowed.

When handling the Christmas Campmor order, get payments up front for the full amount less ten percent. Also be sure you get item #, description, price, and catalog page number on each item they're ordering. Some sale items may not be discounted (though we haven't had that happen yet), so you will need to check the final billing when it comes through. All transactions should still be posted through the family's troop account with the treasurer.

The other thing you'll need to check is what is being ordered. Unlike REI or Bivouac who tend to stock only quality gear, Campmor does sell some of the cheap crap. Try to intercept this and double-check with the family. Of course they can order whatever they want, but make it clear when the item probably won't be of a quality appropriate for scouting activities.

From time to time, we also hand out information on REI coop to interested scouts or families. While REI will give the troop a 10% discount, this is roughly the same as what is given to coop members in rebates, so ordering through the troop offers little advantage. Folks are better off to join themselves.

First Aid

There's no way in the world that this little booklet is going to be able to cover the gargantuan topic of first aid skills. Maybe the Underground will eventually publish a guide to backcountry first aid, but don't hold your breath.

Unfortunately, these days the quality and utility of community first aid classes is downright lousy. Red Cross has watered their curriculum down so much that there's virtually nothing left. Even the quality of CPR instruction is highly suspect, with fewer than 12% of CPR certified adults able to perform adequate CPR in the field.

Where's a Scoutmaster to learn the things he needs to know to be able to handle problems in the woods? God knows the council isn't going to teach him.

Sadly, there isn't a good answer for this. First aid training, to build skills to the point where they can really be used, takes real instruction over a period of time. In the outdoor community, a standard curriculum called Wilderness First Aid (WFA) exists, with classes held around the country. Some states also offer a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) certification. These classes provide the bare essentials for backcountry medical intervention, and are worth looking for.

In town, Huron Valley Ambulance offers Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Medical First Responder (MFR) courses. These are generally well-taught, though they are geared toward professional responders handling in-town emergencies. They don't really cover the complications of the backcountry, and tend to shortchange assessment skills. Again, some states offer an EMT-Wilderness course, but arranging attendance at one of these out of state would be quite difficult. EMT training also takes considerable time (200 hours of class time, plus clinical time in hospitals and on ambulances).

Whatever method or class you find, practice, practice, practice. You'll never be able to use your first aid training under "real" conditions unless you are totally at ease with it. Work particularly hard at non-technical skills like assessing people for injury, and maintaining a good "bedside manner."

The "standard" text on wilderness medicine is **Medicine for Mountaineering**, edited by James A. Wilkerson and published by the Mountaineers. This is a highly technical book, but can be used as a reference for wilderness considerations in first aid. We at Troop 8 teach the treatment practices of *Medicine for Mountaineering* when they are in conflict with outdated material in the Boy Scout Handbook.

A better text for beginners is **Mountaineering First Aid**, also published by the Mountaineers and used as a text for many WFA courses. This is a good basic overview, and does a nice job of presenting wilderness medicine "in context" - not just the first aid but the group dynamics and rescue considerations. Another good work is **Emergency Care** published by Brady/Prentice Hall. This is one of the standard EMT class textbooks, and is therefore easier to learn more advanced principles from than M for M.

And now a few tips:

- Walk, don't run to an accident or injury. Almost nothing can be improved by your haste, and much can be lost.

- Healthy boys want to be independent and be treated like adults. Sick boys want and need to be cared for and “mothered.”

Emergency Procedures

Incidents and Emergencies are rare to Scouting with Troop 8, perhaps in part because we are prepared for them, and “cut them off at the pass.” This section is designed to provide some common ground rules for dealing with developing problems. The most important things during an emergency are knowledge & communication – everyone should know and be able to anticipate how everyone else is going to react.

The first rule is that the trip leader must never himself be the source of the emergency. Nothing is worse than to have the leader down and all the injuns running around. That means that as trip leader on an outing you must never push yourself to the limits of your abilities; never put yourself in a position where there is a remote chance of getting into trouble. I know, this means less fun! It might mean not taking that expert ski run or not actually rock climbing yourself, but that’s the price to be paid for leading.

Every scoutmaster should understand that there is an almost overwhelming tendency for the leader, when confronted with an emergent problem, to “dive right in.” They are, after all, the leader - the person with the most knowledge, expertise, and responsibility. You must fight this urge with all your might. As a leader, your duty is to the whole troop, not just an injured or lost individual. In an emergency, the first and most important thing you need is information. If you “dive right in” then you make yourself unavailable to the majority of the group. When you dive in, you get cut off from the flow of information as you work on the specific problem. You must not do this.

Your job as a leader is to use your resources - the other scoutmasters, the boys, the parents, bystanders - and to make decisions. Your resources will give you information, suggestions, and ideas, and serve as your hands. Properly directed, a group is far better at dealing with a problem than you are alone, and at the same time you fulfill your responsibility to the group. This is a long-standing practice of emergency response teams everywhere - the best trained and experienced person serves as Incident Commander and does none of the work himself.

When dealing with an emergent situation, move slowly and think. There is virtually no problem where your immediate haste is going to do anything but harm. When giving instructions, take time to have the person repeat the instructions back to you and ask any questions. Nothing is worse than rattling off a set of orders and having the person run off doing very different things. Use all your resources - make sure every boy is contributing to the effort in some way. If possible, injured people should always participate in their own rescue and treatment, even if it’s as simple as holding a bandage. This puts them back in control and goes a long way toward psychological recovery. Trust scouts, and involve them appropriately. They will always come through, and will learn good lessons.

Keep the group together or at least establish clear re-meeting times and locations, and what to do if those fall through. Don’t hide things - share information with everyone so that all the brains are working on the problem, not just yours. Keep an eye on your workers as well as on the problem, so that they don’t become a part of the problem.

Is that general enough for you? It reduces to : 1. Move slowly and think. 2. Stay in charge of and use everyone. 3. Move slowly and think. 4. Stay in charge of and use everyone....

Freak time procedures

An example perhaps will illustrate the points in question. Here's the troop procedure for dealing with a "freak out" – a group that has hit their designated freak time and has not shown up. They could be lost, they could be hurt, or both.

Step one: consider all the information and conditions. Weather, route, persons involved and what equipment they had, what resources you have. Try to figure their possible navigation mistakes or actions.

Step two: Form groups for a "hasty search." A hasty search involves quick-moving teams covering trails along the group's route or possible routes, checking major landmarks, junctions, roads & points of interest. Each team of at least two should be equipped with a day pack, food, extra clothing, flashlight, first aid kit, fire-starting equipment, compass, maps, etc. Each team should know exactly what ground they are to cover and when and how they are expected to report back in. The trip leader does not go with any of these groups, and not every available person is sent out (because what happens when a group returns having found the injured party?) All search parties should be back in by dark, and nighttime searches should be limited in scope because of the risk to the searchers.

If the party is found:

Step three: If the party is found and needs assistance, the trip leader and remaining scouts organize the assistance. Unless absolutely necessary, the trip leader should stay and continue to coordinate. If he must go to the injured party (like he's the only person with needed special medical knowledge), then he must designate a new trip leader before he departs. Thereafter he is no longer leader for the duration of the emergency, he is now the chief medical responder.

Step four: If an injury requires evacuation assistance, then carefully plan the evacuation, what equipment and assistance will be needed from outside, how and where you will meet outside responders, etc.

If the party is not found:

Step three: If the party is not found, the next step is a more systematic and thorough version of the hasty search done in daylight. Get set up for this, and get some rest if appropriate. Consider how and when to alert professional search & rescue assistance. Implement a coordinated and thorough trail search, considering all possible actions by the group.

Step four: If the thorough version of the hasty search comes up negative, it's time for a systematic quadrant-by-quadrant grid search. This takes LOTS of people and professional coordination. By now your hasty searchers have made it to roadheads and other civilization contacts anyway, and should be instructed to notify authorities.

Again, remember that as the concern level rises, all the members of the group will start to get hasty, worried, and upset. You must stay in charge of the whole group, slow things down, direct things, get people involved and working, and ensure good communication. If you don't, it actually becomes more likely that someone in the group will be injured than someone in the lost patrol.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD)

Emergency situations or “scary” events can be stressful for both adults and scouts alike. Often, this stress is not immediately apparent, but shows up days and weeks later in indirect ways. As a scoutmaster and group leader, it is very important that you address this. It begins by involving everyone during the “rescue,” so that they feel they had some important part to play, no matter how small. The main tool, however, is the CISD – the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing.

A CISD should happen as soon as possible after the incident is resolved; certainly within 24 hours, before other “coping mechanisms” kick in. A CISD gets everyone back together for an open-ended, honest sharing of feelings and thoughts about what happened. Only people who were involved in the actual incident should be there - no parents, no outsiders. Begin by giving a brief outline of the bare facts of what happened. This ensures that everyone knows the same thing and is “up to speed.” Then provide the ground rules. Participants should talk about what happened, share ideas and feelings, be honest, take nothing personally, and try not to make judgements.

If no one jumps right in, some adult or older scout should be primed to provide the example by “kicking things off” with his own honest thoughts and feelings. As things proceed, let people talk! Don’t correct them, don’t jump in and defend yourself or others. Affirm their feelings and comments. Support them. Thank them for sharing. Keep the tone gently under control, but allow them to express emotions.

When things start to peter out, you’ll know it. Bring things to a conclusion by summarizing, recognizing it was hard and difficult, praising them for their assistance and skill, and reminding them that good things come out of hard times.

Then get with the other adults and do a CISD for yourself.

If something really serious has happened that has affected you as much as the boys, the CISD should be conducted by an outside professional. You will probably still need to arrange this. Remember, it must be done soon. Many professional emergency response teams have one or more people trained to do CISDs for the professional rescuers. These people would gladly assist your group if asked.

Car transportation and procedures

This is a quick overview of the more-or-less standard Troop 8 “protocol” for car transportation. Like all systems or traditions, it was developed by hard experience over time as a way to avoid problems and make the car transit portion of a trip enjoyable. Violate the traditions at your own peril.

For a car trip,

- Transportation is arranged by the parent Transportation Coordinator, who must secure enough vehicle capacity for the trip, and who files the required “tour permit” with the Council office. As scoutmaster, your job is to get the coordinator a list of participants including scoutmasters (even if it’s tentative) as early as possible. You should include any special space needs (skis? firewood?). The coordinator will get back to you with a list of drivers and vehicle types. This is a HUGE job and a huge help; be sure to shower your Transportation Coordinator with praise and thanksgiving.

- In terms of logistics, equipment takes space. You’ll generally need cars to fit all your people, plus one spacious additional vehicle for equipment. Make sure the Transportation Coordinator knows this, and be sure to double-check.

- Everyone meets at the cafeteria. Typically, it takes at least half an hour from your designated meeting time until departure, often 45 minutes or even an hour. Use this information for your own planning purposes; *never* tell anyone this. Always tell them that they *must* be there at the designated time.

- Arriving boys line their personal gear up along the wall in front of the cafeteria. Troop gear gets loaded first, then personal gear. Assign older boys to direct the loading along with the drivers.

- When it’s time to put scouts into vehicles, the accepted Troop 8 call is “Lock and Load!”

- We don’t reserve seats in vehicles - it’s healthier to shuffle people around.

- Before departing, each driver should be given a map and a very clear set of expectations in line with the Troop 8 “rules of the road.” You should make each driver repeat the instructions back to you to be sure they’ve got it. If you don’t, you will be amazed at how screwed up things can get. Parent drivers often pay less attention than boys and are more apt to show initiative by doing something completely unexpected on their own. Remember, as scoutmaster, *you* are the one responsible for those boys. The boys’ parents didn’t sign a permission slip naming the parent driver.

- On long driving trips, each driver should bring a spare key for his vehicle, which is stored in a different vehicle. There’s no logistics nightmare on a long trip quite like a lost key or a locked-in key.

- After the boys are in the cars but before any driver leaves, a scoutmaster *must* go to each car and obtain a count of the total number of people in each vehicle. This is your check to make sure you “have” everyone. This must be done *every time* you get into vehicles (for short stops, we’ll sometimes give drivers instructions that they can’t leave until they get the same kids, or the same number of kids, back into their car). Parents should be told never to leave until their vehicle has been counted. For simplicity, we count humanoids (including adults), not boys. Adults are as likely to wander off, and it’s just as embarrassing to leave them behind.

- Music, food, drink, and other rules are up to the individual drivers. If they allow food or drink, we strongly recommend they have a garbage bag and towel available.
- On all car trips, we try to “keep together.” Again, we as scoutmasters are responsible for these boys, and by staying together we guarantee that assistance will be immediate in the event of a problem. This is especially facilitated by car-to-car radio links.
- On longer trips, we usually designate “regroup points” where everyone is expected to stop and meet up if they become separated. These usually coincide with stops for food or fuel, since it may take a few minutes for stragglers to get in.
- Ordinarily we will wait at a “regroup point” or a destination for up to an hour. If a car is missing at that point, we begin a vehicle version of the “freak out.” This includes: telephoning the home of the driver to see if he has “called in,” telephoning the highway patrol, and sending search vehicles back along the road to look for the missing car. Our allocation of resources will increase until the car is found and the troop “reunited” under the two-adult rule.

If a different action is intended (like if we don’t see you at the regroup point, we’ll expect you’ve gone on to the destination), you must make this clear when you brief the drivers. Generally, it’s not a good idea.

- In keeping with the Scout Oath “to help other people at all times”, it is normal for us to stop and offer assistance to stranded motorists or accident victims. In the case of stranded motorists, the level of assistance provided may be limited by our needs to continue with the trip or arrive at a reasonable time. In the case of accidents, caring for people obviously takes priority over trip plans.
- On long driving trips, there is a “Chinese Fire-Drill” rule. At every stop (ex. for gas, for food, etc.) all the boys shuffle cars. They can’t stay in the same car, and they can’t stay with the same people. This works *great* at preventing boredom and ensuring that boys don’t get on each other’s nerves (or the driver’s!) during the long car ride. Sometimes they will complain about it initially, though - just be firm.
- We don’t allow special or early pickups or late dropoffs. If an exception has been made under unusual circumstances, then we will not allow the exception to interfere with outing logistics. So if the special pickup isn’t there on time, we leave, and the boy goes with us.
- It is completely impossible for us to predict exactly when we will return to Ann Arbor. This depends on weather, morning camp cleanup/teardown time, and a host of other factors. For this reason, we do not have parents come to the cafeteria to pick up their boys; instead, we drop them off directly at home when we return.
- The dropoff policy means that it is advantageous to put scouts in cars based on geographic location for the way home. We generally divide town into three areas: North End (north of the river, off of Plymouth Road), West Side (west of Main Street but south of the river), and South End (South of Stadium Blvd.). To date, we don’t have any scouts in “Central” (near U of M Central campus) or East (Ypsilanti). We do have a few “outliers” (ex. Brighton); these are dropped off en route or with another family if arrangements have been made by the parents.

- When dropping a boy off, drivers should wait until the boy is safely inside before departing. If no one is home and the boy can't get in, he goes home with you.
- Sometimes, for equipment reasons, everyone will return to the cafeteria before reshuffling and going home. Even then, we take the boys home. Experience has shown that it takes far longer for boys to call and parents to actually arrive and pick them up than it does to deliver them (and of course we need to stay with them until the parents arrive). Make sure new boys know this and don't call home from the cafeteria for a ride!
- Sometimes, when going directly home, troop or personal gear will be left in a car. This should be brought to the meeting the following night for storage or redistribution.
- Be sure to remind the boys to thank the drivers, and be sure to thank them yourself!

Trip and Camping Rules

Sad to say, but many kids are so “wired” electronically these days, or are so used to poor standards of behavior amongst their peers, that we as scoutmasters often have to instruct them on proper etiquette, while protecting the integrity of our campouts.

These rules were put in place by vote of the boys at Patrol Leader Conferences. While it is possible along the way that they might change these, a scoutmaster should try to avoid that!

No electronics

These days there are a whole host of portable electronic gizmos to enthrall young people, from “Walkman” personal stereos to LCD portable televisions to portable video games and the like. The rule is these are not allowed on campouts and trips. If discovered, they will be confiscated and returned at a MUCH later and inconvenient time, so as to ensure that they’ll never show up again (Geez, Mr. Geier last time had my walkman for over a month! He kept forgetting to bring it to the meeting, and the one when he did bring it I wasn’t there....).

The reason for this rule is simple. These electronic gizmos are inherently antisocial. They take one or two kids “out of the action” and out of the group for a good portion of the trip. If you allow them, you simply will not have a program or memorable events. Period. They are death.

The only exception to this is on very long car trips. In that case they may be allowed in the car, but they must be locked in the trunk for the duration of the outing. Even this is somewhat problematic - talking, arguing, singing, socializing, etc. are so much more fun and productive on the car ride.

No Pop

It may not be as true for adults with our larger body mass, but pop is a drug. Loaded with caffeine and sugar, it seriously affects the behavior of the middle-school aged crowd. It is not allowed on campouts.

This one comes up from time to time, because it seems so many kids these days regularly drink all kinds of pop at home, for both meals and snacks. Remember, this rule was voted in by the patrol leaders, because the older boys got so frustrated having to deal with their younger associates when they were “wired” on pop. It’s also expensive, so keep it away from camp.

We relax this a bit when pop is readily available in camp (like summer camp), but still do everything we can to discourage it (like no one can bring a pop back to the troop campsite). Believe it or not, if allowed kids will bring CASES of pop on campouts or back to their tent... we used to have it happen regularly.

No Personal Caches of Food

Here's the rule: a scout who brings his own food or snacks with him to an event will eat those, will not eat dinner, will not help with dinner or cleanup, will not plan dinner in the future, and will not feel well. He will also litter the wrappers all over camp for someone else to pick up.

Remarkably, parents are often complicit in this activity, and need to be reminded from time to time of troop policy - send no food with your kid, unless specifically told otherwise. Involve these kids in food selection, so that they can contribute for the whole group.

Exception: Long car trips may allow "car only" food for snacks, but only with the permission of the driver.

For field rank scouts, this rule is generally overlooked as long as things stay reasonable. Often these boys will be prepared enough to bring along "emergency" food of a wholesome nature which can bail you out of a jam...

Group equipment normally has priority

When arriving at camp, two tasks need to be accomplished: personal tents need to get set up and personal gear taken care of, and group gear needs to be taken care of.

Generally, group gear gets done first. The dining fly goes up and the gear gets stowed under it before personal tents start popping up. That's because the dining fly serves as a shelter for the gear, and because if the tents go up first, boys will be in them rather than helping with the dining fly.

This rule is relaxed for late-night arrivals, and is of course adjusted to maximize efficiency (there's no point in having 12 people try to set up a dining fly).

The Cook Cleans

Cooking is kind of fun. Cleaning dishes is not fun. Cleaning dishes when the cook has burned crud onto the bottom is really not fun, and leads to a shorter life expectancy for the cook.

Troop 8 tradition, which began with Venture crew, is that the cook has to clean the pots. This has an enormously beneficial effect on the cook's efforts to be clean and efficient about pot usage, and to pay extra attention to not burning things. Because the cook is "right there" when he's done cooking, he can immediately throw water on to boil and clean while things are still "fresh." The job is much worse for a second person who comes along an hour or two later. Finally, you don't have the "Who is supposed to be cleaning?" problem. The system works well.

Good scout spirit, of course, suggests that it's entirely OK for another patrol member to help out with either the cooking or cleaning duties.

The Cook Eats Last

This is a standard outdoor tradition, emphasizing the role of service provided by the cook. The cook, as the host, always eats last, and always eats his mistakes. The rule is void, however, if everybody else is taking too long and he's just standing around waiting to serve people who won't come to dinner.

Beware the Easterly Bob

Scouts, particularly 1st-year boys, have this amazing tendency to leave their stuff lying all over creation. To try to get them to get a grip on this, there's a standard Troop 8 practice. Anytime the whole group leaves camp or goes to bed for the evening, camp should be "bomb proof." That means that a major storm should not be able to do any damage.

Anything that doesn't pass the test, especially loose items left out which could be blown away or buried by snow, get "blown away" by the Easterly Bob (the name of the dreaded Scoutmaster Wind). The stuff is "gone" for the remainder of the trip. Packs left open or heavy items left out can be drenched by the "rain clouds" (usually a full water bottle) that come with an Easterly Bob.

Scouts are encouraged to try to protect each other from the Easterly Bob by picking up after each other. Scoutmasters obviously use discretion based on the age of the boy and the importance of the item when deciding whether it really disappears "forever," but always use it as a teaching moment.

Minimum Impact Camping

One of the lesser-known of the Scout Laws/Codes/Mottos is the Boy Scout Outdoor Code:

*As an American, I will do my best to -
Be clean in my outdoor manners,
Be careful with fire,
Be considerate in the outdoors and
Be conservation-minded.*

Perhaps that's because the wording is so awkward and uninspiring. Sometime the Troop 8 Underground is going to have to rewrite the silly thing.

The real meaning of the outdoor code in these days of heavy backcountry use and abuse is this: It is a scout's duty anywhere and everywhere he goes to minimize his adverse impact on the environment, by exercising care and consideration. This notion of "minimum impact" outdoorsmanship is at the core of good wilderness use and education throughout the world. As a scoutmaster, one of your big jobs is to teach - in small, day-to-day ways - how to minimize human impact on our wilderness.

You will find this to be a big challenge. Most of our boys grow up in the heedless, disposable, waste-generating modern world. Most parents dutifully pick up after their kids, and so boys aren't thoughtful about their waste in the wilderness. At every opportunity you get, you must call them into service: our wilderness will be destroyed by careless users and abusers, unless you boys help do something about it (beginning with yourselves)!

Boy Scouting, with its traditions that date back to the old "military campaign" days of backcountry travel, has as a relatively poor wilderness ethic. We still, for example, teach assorted lashings for making camp gadgets, heedless of the wreck this would make of the wilderness were it ever practiced in the field. In Troop 8, we try to live to a higher standard.

For general information and research on minimum impact camping practice, Troop 8 bases much of its program on the NOLS curriculum. The reference work which can be found in most any bookstore is **Soft Paths: How to enjoy the wilderness without harming it**, by Bruce Hampton and David Cole. This is a compilation of research and development by NOLS over a 20 year period.

How we take care of the land depends a great deal on the nature of the land itself. In wilderness land management, it is now common practice to establish designated campsites, which concentrate impact on one area so as to spare others. Here fire-rings are common, and if wood is brought with you a fire is an OK thing. In such cases close tent-camping is also OK, and latrines are usually available with toilet paper. Even in these areas, though, efforts should be taken to minimize impact.

In the backcountry, the rules change. Fires are *not* cool, and great pains must be taken before and after if a fire is going to be attempted. Tents should be scattered widely, so that no single path exists from place to place, thereby creating a new trail (and erosion potential) through trampling. With no latrines, campers should use small, individual "cat holes" for BMs, and only "natural" toilet paper like leaves. Big trench latrines overload the ability of the soil microbes to break down the waste. Toilet paper takes a long time to break down, changes the chemistry of the soil, and is frequently dug up by animals. If TP is used, it must be burned and the remains bagged and carried out.

For full details of minimum-impact camping techniques, take a look at Soft Paths. What follows here are some very basic rules to keep in mind.

- Protecting our water supplies is crucial.
- Never camp next to a stream or body of water; always camp at least 200 feet away (out west, a violation of this rule can earn you a hefty fine).
- Never take a dump in or within 200 feet of a stream or body of water. Always urinate well away from water and water channels.
- Never wash dishes in streams or bodies of water. Take water from the stream in a clean pot, and wash in camp. Pack out the uneaten food. Widely scatter the dishwater away from your water source to distribute the load on the ecosystem.
- Never bury unused food, always carry it out. Animals will always manage to dig it up, and many animals are made ill by our processed foodstuffs and spices.
- Never wash with soap, even the biodegradable stuff. It has a big chemical impact on the environment in terms of pH changes. Plus, unless you thoroughly rinse everything the soap residue on pots and dishes will cause illness in your party (“the mung”). Rinsing is difficult, because you can’t rinse in the stream.
- Never bring shampoo or anything silly like that into the backcountry.
- When using toothpaste, don’t spit in a water source or directly on the ground. Either swallow the paste, or take a mouthful of water and “spray” the paste over a wide area to distribute impact. Use as little paste as possible.
- Bring as little garbage with you as possible. Repackage foods to eliminate excess cardboard and other packaging.
- Always leave a place cleaner than when you found it. Pick up all the trash left by the carelessness of others. Pick up all your trash, and camouflage your site - try to make it as though no one was ever there.
- You will occasionally run across “illegal” campsites in the backcountry. Fire rings, lean-tos, etc. that are not part of a designated site. When you come across these, destroy them! Widely scatter the fire-ring and ashes, take down and scatter the lean-tos. Return the area as much as possible to its pristine condition. Land management agencies don’t have the personnel to do this themselves; by assisting in this way you prevent more and more areas from being trashed out as “unofficial” developed campsites, and eliminate the attraction for other lazy hikers to camp there.
- Choose sites with durable vegetation or rock; avoid sites with fragile vegetation or loose soil.
- Talk regularly to the boys about how important taking care of the woods is, and the things they can do. Catch them doing well, and praise them!
- ABOVE ALL, as scoutmaster, be a stout example in your wilderness ethic. Pick up the most trash yourself, speak with anger and sadness when you discover areas damaged by others, show great

care when fire-building or dealing with your own waste. The boys will follow your example, and take it to heart.

The Time Control Plan (TCP)

The Time Control Plan (TCP) is a method for organizing expedition routing information and teaching scouts how to plan for everything from a one-day hike to a month-long expedition. TCPs were originally developed by Paul Petzoldt, but have become universally recognized in the outdoor field. In many ways they resemble the sort of navigation and flight planning used by pilots before a trip, or by military officers or relief agencies during operations. TCPs for longer expeditions are often filed with controlling agencies (Forest Service, Sheriff's Dept., etc.) for search and rescue purposes, should assistance become necessary.

TCPs in their full form are generally a Venture activity, but the basics of the planning process can be taught to younger scouts. Some of the principles behind TCPs are part of our requirements for Tenderfoot, 2nd class, and 1st class ranks.

Each hiking group on a Venture expedition should fill out a TCP for the hike they will be doing. The TCP should encompass all the time between when they leave the "whole" group and when they meet back up with it. In the case of a TCP left with an outside agency, it would include all the time from when we left civilization until when we were expected to return.

A TCP serves two purposes. First, it forces the scout group to carefully plan their route, how long it will take, and what equipment they will need; it also gives us as adults a chance to oversee and double-check their planning. Second, each group must make copies of their TCP and give one copy to *each* of the other groups. This allows the other groups to organize search & rescue operations if the group in question does not show up; it also lets the other groups know where to find the party (if they are needed to help look for/rescue someone else). The content of the TCP should reflect these two goals: planning and safety.

A full TCP takes the following form:

Names

The names of all the members of the group, including the designated group leader. A leader should always be designated - by deciding this up front, there are fewer questions later when leadership is needed. For a TCP given to an outside agency, the names section would also include a brief description of the experience of the party members.

Equipment

This is a list of the major equipment carried by the group, not a list of every piece of equipment. For in-troop use, it focuses on group gear, to make sure that each hiking group has all the materials needed to camp by themselves if they had to. Things like stove(s), fuel, tent(s), first aid supplies, and food should be included. Each entry should list who is carrying it and how much there is. A TCP left for an outside agency might also include a brief description of personal gear (ex. "All group members have shovels, avalanche transceivers, and PolarGuard sleeping bags rated to -30° or better")

Starting Point & Destination

For both starting point and destination, the exact location should be given based on the USGS Topographic map of the area. The group should specify whatever is necessary to exactly identify the spot. This is good practice for real emergencies, as this is exactly what you have to do to specify location for rescue personnel (including helicopters).

Examples:

- USGS Cherry Creek Quadrangle, NE corner, Heart's Content campsite.
- USGS Gannet Peak Quadrangle, center, base of Gannet Glacier at intersection of unnamed trail from northeast and General West hiking trail.
- USGS Minister Valley Quadrangle, SW, large field next to intermittent stream 1 mile north of the "B" in Bledsoe Lake and a half mile west of Lookout Point.

Route

The route portion of a TCP is the most time consuming. This should describe the exact route the party intends to take from start to finish, with checkpoints along the way. The idea is that once a group is finished with the TCP, navigation will be easier - they'll know where they're going, what to look for next, and how long it will take.

This portion is usually done in table format, with columns for direction, checkpoint, distance and "missed" point. A "missed" point is a spot where, if you hit it, you know you've gone the wrong way or gone too far. In nondescript land, a missed point can also be a time (if we don't see the trail after 30 minutes, we know we missed it...). In mountainous terrain, an extra column is added to the table to record elevation gain (not loss) for each segment of the route.

Distance & Time

After the route description, a TCP lists the total measured distance for the trip. This is in walking miles, not "as the crow flies" miles, and should allow for curves & twists.

In addition to distance, the group must also compute elevation gain, because going uphill takes more time than walking in flat terrain. There is no bonus for downhill, though, because walking a downgrade generally takes as much time as walking flat land (sometimes more, if the terrain is very steep or there are many switchbacks). Thus if the trail goes up 1000 feet, then down 1500 feet into a valley, then up 2000 feet, the elevation gain would be 3000 feet - the amount the group would have to climb that day.

The total time the group will need for the route will depend on the adjusted distance - the measured walking distance PLUS one mile for every 1000 feet of hiking elevation gain. In the example above, they would add 3 miles to their measured distance. Divide the new total distance by the speed of the group (usually around 2 miles per hour for scout backpackers who are pretty strong - up to 3 mph if they are very strong and manage rest breaks well, but often down to 1 mph for 1st and 2nd year boys or

weak packers) to get the total time the hike will take. After a few days, guys will get used to their hiking speed and make more accurate estimates.

ETD, ETA, and Freak times

Using the amount of time they just figured the hike would take and the time they want to arrive (or that you expect them to arrive), the scouts should work backward to determine when they need to depart (and figure back from that when they need to wake up!). The last part of the TCP gives their estimated departure time and their estimated arrival time. Emphasis should be placed on meeting their departure time. Sometimes scouts will “pad” their walking time to allow a chance for longer rest breaks, lunch stops, etc. This is good planning, and should be allowed.

Scouts and any members of an expedition should always try to make their ETA. Nevertheless, things can go awry, estimates may have been too short, checkpoints might be missed and require backtracking, etc. Generally, it is not appropriate to ask for search and rescue just because of one of these “normal” delaying occurrences.

For this reason, good TCP practice demands what we term a “Freak Time” - the time when the group wants the rest of the expedition to “Freak Out” and assume they need assistance. There is no magic number for freak time. Determining it depends a great deal on the nature of the group, the equipment carried, and the nature of the environment and terrain. Thus a well-equipped and experienced group in easy terrain might have a freak time of as long as several days or more past their ETA, while a group doing a difficult glacier crossing might specify that the ETA *is* their Freak Time. Search & Rescue operations take a great deal of time and energy (and, if they involve outside agencies, can be very expensive). Search & Rescue also puts more people at risk. Freak times should therefore be set to ensure that minor mishaps do not precipitate a “freak,” while also guaranteeing that help will arrive in a timely fashion if something does go wrong.

Scouts should be encouraged to set their own times, including freak time, with little interference or second-guessing by adults. Occasionally a time may be genuinely inappropriate; this is best addressed by gently asking how it was determined, then asking “What about...” questions to get them to see the factor they may have missed. There is a cardinal rule, though: freak times are not to be determined by the goals or desires of the expedition or its leaders. That’s what ETAs are for (“We need you there tonight so we can try the peak ascent tomorrow”). Freak times are set only by considering when search & rescue operations should begin. A “freak” means your expedition plan is trashed by the need for emergency response. If they’re appropriately experienced & equipped, it’s far better to have the “lost patrol” arrive the following morning, allowing the well-rested and “unfreaked” scouts to actually try the peak.

That’s it for the TCP. Use it. Teach the guys to use it, and make them do it. Like any good thing, it takes work to put together a TCP, but by doing it in advance it seriously helps the navigation and decision-making process while they’re on the trail. By keeping them “ahead of the game” it also greatly enhances safety.

Be sure also to read about emergency procedures and trail technique and make sure the kids know these, so that everyone is aware of exactly what will happen when the group “freaks.”

Sample

Two sample TCPs are provided in the Master Forms Appendix, one for “internal” use and one for leaving with an outside controlling agency.

Trail Technique

Use of our wilderness lands has increased over seven hundred percent in the past 30 years. During that same period, total trail mileage has decreased by nearly a third. This means more traffic on the trails, more people in the woods, and more impact on our wilderness.

In travelling the backcountry, scouts need to be taught good trail practice to minimize trail erosion, keep themselves safe, and deal courteously with other travellers they might encounter. We should start teaching good trail technique from the beginning, and reinforce it any chance we get.

Troop 8 trail technique is based on our experience and on the backcountry curriculum of NOLS. It has its roots in extensive research into trail impact done by assorted federal and private agencies. Getting kids to live up to these expectations, especially when they involve a bit of extra effort, requires your good example and your resolute determination to reinforce these principles every chance you get. Remember, if you get lazy once, it'll be OK for them to be lazy forever.

- When hiking on a trail, walk single file so as not to erode trail edges. When hiking off-trail, spread out and do *not* walk single file, so as to minimize vegetation damage and not create a trail.
- Avoid unofficial and closed trails.
- Never, ever “cut” switchbacks - the back & forth turns of a trail on steep terrain. While it may be faster, even a few who run down the hill in hiking boots can start a permanent erosion gully. Out west, rangers can issue fines in the hundreds of dollars to hikers who shortcut switchbacks.
- Wear good boots, and hike through the mud, instead of skirting around it and widening the trail.
- When crossing a stream on rocks or on a narrow walkway, remove your backpack hip strap. This gives you better balance & makes it easy for you to get out of your pack if you fall in.
- Avoid treading on fragile vegetation.
- When encountering other hikers, stop and step off the trail quietly until they pass.
- When encountering mountain bikers, stop and step off the trail until they pass. On steep terrain, step to the uphill side, as a falling or out of control biker will go off the downhill side.
- When encountering horses, step off the trail to the downhill side and stand quietly so as not to spook the horses. The lead person should greet the riders in a calm voice while they are still ahead; this alerts the horse to your presence.
- Whenever stopping for more than a very brief map check, move well off the trail so that others can pass.
- Whenever stopping for a rest or food break, move far enough off the trail so that other hikers will not readily see you. Studies show that most people go into the woods for solitude, and 80% report that they would prefer not to encounter others. Help minimize your presence when you can. Avoid obnoxious neon clothing.
- The minimum number for a safe hiking party is four. They should be well-equipped. The maximum number is 10-12. More than that becomes difficult to manage and has a high impact.

- There's no reason to bunch up, though kids often will and scouting tends to encourage it. It's OK for hikers to spread out. Each should remain within easy eyesight and earshot of the next person, but the view is nicer if you're not staring at a pack right in front of you.

- Always appoint a sweeper. A sweeper is an experienced hiker who is comfortable in the outdoors and can handle most difficulties. The sweeper stays at the back of the party and makes sure no one gets behind him. The best/most experienced hiker in the party should sweep. Being selected sweeper is a high honor in Troop 8.

- When reaching any obstacle or landmark (like a trail junction), everyone must always wait until the sweeper makes it past the obstacle or arrives at the landmark. This ensures that everyone's safe, and that the "tail end" of the party won't "miss the turn."

- A group must hike at the speed of its slowest member. It's the responsibility of the leaders to look behind them regularly to check on how everybody's doing. It's the responsibility of the people in the back to call for a slowdown if the person in front is getting too far ahead.

- When possible without putting weak hikers together, put boys who have the same "natural" walking speed in the same hiking party.

- The holler "BWAAAY- OOOAH" or a yodel from a member of the party means "stop." When heard, the hikers behind the caller should catch up; the hikers in front of the caller should stop where they are until the caller catches up. If the group has gotten too "strung out" the hikers in front may need to "pass the call" forward.

- When encountering an obstacle that requires climbing or scrambling (in other words, you've got to use your hands to get by), hikers must "spot" their fellows. This means that on either side of the obstacle the hikers stop and keep their hands out ready to assist the person negotiating the obstacle if he falls. As each person crosses, he turns and spots the person behind him. Do this always - it teaches "watching out" for others and careful treatment of hazards.

- Remember that the strength and endurance of smaller boys is initially high, but crashes quickly.

- "Grazing" is the best eating method for the trail, much better than stopping for a big lunch. Bring lots of gorp, and eat and drink constantly.

- "Map checks" should be done frequently; certainly at any landmark or unusual finding. When doing a map check, each boy gets out map and compass, steps off the trail, and (without talking to any of his fellows) independently figures out where he is and what direction to go. They then get together and compare notes, and decide where to go. This helps eliminate "lemming mode" - most people will tend to go along with the first or loudest person to speak rather than use their own brain. Boys also can get lazy and rely on the one kid who seems to know what he's doing.

- The speed with which you get somewhere depends relatively little on your hiking speed. It depends mostly on the length and frequency of your rest breaks. To move faster, don't walk faster, take fewer and shorter breaks. Boys should work toward a pattern of hiking nonstop for 50 minutes, followed by a 10 minute break. 50-10, 50-10 for best speed.

- When hiking uphill, teach the “rest step.” As you step up, briefly “lock” your knee, with your leg straight, then step up and do the same with the next leg. With your knee locked, your weight is borne by your skeletal structure, and your leg muscles get a brief rest on each step. Boys will often hike with the knee partially flexed through the whole motion, requiring their muscles to work full time.

- Hikers at all times should know where they are, what the next landmark is that they’ll see, how long it will be ‘til that landmark, and how they’ll know if they missed it. They also need to know what direction they should be going. Ask them this frequently. Note that these things correspond to the navigation plan on the TCP.

- Always pick up trash.

- Designated campsites are designed so that the impact of campers is concentrated in one area and does not “trash” a larger stretch of wilderness. Use them. If camping in the backcountry, spread the camp out and leave no trace.

- If you come across a campsite in the backcountry (fire ring, etc.), destroy it. Scatter the ashes, remove the fire scar, distribute the rocks, and do your best to break it down so that others will not be tempted to use it, thus turning it into a highly-impacted area.

- Take nothing but pictures & memories, leave the lightest of footprints, teach nothing but respect and care for all living things.

River Travel Technique

Most Troop 8 river travel is done in canoe, though on some events we've been in rafts, duckies, or kayaks. This section deals with the basics of Troop 8 river travel procedure and rules, which are designed to help you as a scoutmaster keep some handle on a long line of strung-out boats. Each year as you start river excursions, it's important to re-teach these rules of the river and make the explanations clear. Remember, adults who have been out only infrequently will be most in need of re-teaching. Emphasize your expectations to them.

For river work, the minimum number of boats in a group should be three. This is standard river practice across the country, and guarantees adequate resources to respond to a boat in distress.

For equipment, every person should have an appropriate PFD sized for them, and tightened snugly. In swift moving water or whitewater, everyone *must* wear their PFD at all times. In calm or slow-moving water with a close, unobstructed shoreline, everyone *should* wear their PFD at all times. The rule, however, is that scouts who have earned swimming merit badge or adults with equivalent ability may opt for "seat cushion" flotation devices. If the water is slow and not over anyone's head, you can let scouts who meet the 1st class swimming requirement do the same. Make sure you state to all the scouts and adults what the rule is at the start of the trip. Make sure, too, that you set the rule where all the adults are going to abide by it. It's much easier to allow seats if the conditions are OK than argue with a parent who wants a seat (or keeps sitting on his PFD, prompting the scouts to follow suit).

Every scout should bring a full canteen or water bottle, and there should be plenty of high SPF sunscreen to go around. Each scoutmaster should have a small cache of snack food to share with everyone. Anticipate any hypothermia / rain risk (including afternoon thunderstorms), and equip accordingly.

Each trip should have several waterproof first aid kits in different boats. Each trip on moving water should have at least two rescue/throw ropes in different boats, a prussic rope and carabiners for rigging a rope system to rescue a boat.

River Pre-Briefing

It's important to get everyone together before getting into boats to provide the river briefing at the start of the day. This is the trip leader's one opportunity to set expectations and give important information while everyone is paying attention.

River pre-briefings should include a review of the signal system and expectations of the boys (PFD rules, stopping below rapids, helping capsized boats, etc.). The pre-briefing should also include a review of the river features and likely hazards or obstacles and how to avoid them. Finally, the briefing gives everyone the plan for the day: where lunch is, other stopping points, how long a trip, etc.

At the end of the briefing, check to make sure everyone is accounted for and that everyone has "got" the equipment they will need.

On the river

Group rules on the river are similar to the rules for hikers on the trail. They are designed to make sure the group stays more or less together for mutual aid and support, and to ensure safety and fun. First rule, as always, is to make sure everyone knows what the plan is - where we're at, where lunch is, how to identify the takeout, etc.

Second rule is to identify a lead boat and a sweep boat. Nobody should pass the lead boat, and the sweep boat should not let anyone get behind them. Note the responsibilities there - it's the responsibility of the other boat not to pass the leader, but it's the sweep boat's responsibility not to let another boat get behind.

Lead boat must have someone who knows the plan and knows the river travel system. Sweep boat must have a pair of experienced boaters who can handle any problem or emergency with their boat or another boat they come across. Just as for hiking, being asked to "sweep" is a high honor, given only to those with good judgement and strong skill. The sweep boat should have a large first aid kit and much of the technical rescue gear.

Lead and sweep boats can switch many times in the course of a trip, but only someone designated by a scoutmaster should serve as lead or sweep. It's OK for a sweeper to hand off to someone who had swept before without explicit scoutmaster OK, though the leader should *not* change in this way (because all the other boats have to know who the leader is).

The signal system

Sound doesn't carry well in a river valley, especially with moving water. Most river signals, therefore, are done with paddles.

Paddle held straight up & down, blade on top : All clear signal. When used by the boats in the front, this is a question - hey you boats in back, can we go/keep going? The paddle-up signal is passed back until it reaches the sweep boat; if they raise their paddle, then every body can start moving forward. The rear boats can also start the signal, which means "hey, we're OK, keep going"

Paddle held up horizontally: Stop signal. Used by boats when they are not ready to proceed (Joe's on shore taking a leak), or when requesting or requiring a stop. When given, the boats in front should stay where they are, while the boats in back of the signaling boat should catch up.

Paddle held diagonally right or left, blade high: "Go this way" signal. This is given by a downstream boat to an upstream boat. The paddle is pointing at the best place to run the river (*not* at an obstacle!).

Paddle waved back & forth, blade high: EMERGENCY! We need help! This is the river equivalent of 9-1-1. It means someone is badly injured or in the process of drowning. Upstream boats split up, with half going to each side of the river. Upstream boats pull to shore above the signaller & proceed to respond to the emergency. Scouts who misuse this signal are to be treated as though they pulled a false fire alarm in a crowded movie theater.

All of these paddle signals are "universal" in that they are common to most experienced river folks.

Troop 8 also uses two voice signals in river conditions:

BWAAAY-OOAH! (*WAY-OH*). Shouted from the rear when they are losing sight or getting too far from the boat ahead and the lead boats haven't noticed. This is the verbal equivalent of the STOP paddle signal - downstream boats should stop where they are, while boats upstream from the signaler should catch up. The downstream boats also must "pass the signal" on up the line to get the whole crew to stop. Boats don't need to stop in the middle of a rapid, of course - they can find a close, convenient spot. Boats stay stopped until the sweep catches up or they receive an "all clear" paddle signal passed from the rear, whichever occurs first.

BOAT OVER! This cry is used whenever a boat (Troop 8 or otherwise) capsizes. It is used to alert everyone around that a boat has flipped and they need to respond. The response varies from laughter (and moving closer to lend a hand if needed) to moving quickly to assist in retrieving people and equipment from a bad mess. Even if things seem just fine, other boats should always "hang out" until the boat is refloated.

The system at work

Much of the responsibility lies with the lead boat, who needs to keep an eye out "over his shoulder" and an ear out for "Bway-oh" calls. The lead boat should occasionally stop and let everyone catch up, though not bunch up - use the "all clear" paddle signal to decide when to proceed.

The lead boat and all following boats should always stop after a hard-to-negotiate obstacle (like a rapids) until every boat has come through and is secure. This way lots of folks are present to assist, and no one will "take off" downstream while someone gets into trouble.

The responsibility of all the other boats is not to let the boat in front of them get out of earshot. As soon as this becomes likely, they need to give the "Bway-oh" call to slow the train down.

You will find occasionally that the system breaks down. Don't let it get your dander up - be calm, relax. At the next opportunity, however, do remind the "weak link" about how things are supposed to work.

The extent to which you adhere rigidly to the system to keep folks very close, or are more relaxed and let things string out, depends on the difficulty level of the paddling, the experience of the paddlers, and the goal of the trip. Just make sure everyone knows in advance what the expectations are. The expectation is always that a BOAT OVER call means "standby to assist."

You will often find that your paddlers, both adult and scout, split naturally into two groups - the speed-demons and the lolligaggers. This division is dependent on both skill and personality. It can be frustrating for the demons to be constantly stopped by Bway-ohs from the lolligaggers. Consider whether splitting into two smaller groups would be appropriate. If you do split, make sure that you have enough advanced paddlers with the lolligaggers to get them home in the event of a problem. (Occasionally this split happens spontaneously because of a "weak link" in the middle of the chain. Oh well. Hopefully the lead will stop somewhere up ahead.) If you don't split, make sure you do something to keep the demons interested and busy - a running race or wargame between them, splitting

them up and putting them in boats with the lolligaggers, upside-down canoeing, get them in a capsized war and let the lolligaggers get way ahead, whatever.

River's end

There's an interesting thing that often happens at the end of a river trip. The speed demons who get to the takeout first are still frisky and rambunctious. They feel that it is their duty, now that they have arrived, to capsize every other boat which is arriving. The lolligaggers at the end of the day are tired and a bit out-of-sorts, and have pretty much ended their water fights (or you made them end, just so you could get in before dawn...). The two meet, and the last thought that the usually smaller lolligaggers take away from the day is not "gee what a great day of canoeing," but a good measure of being angry and upset at having been tipped into the drink again when they were tired, hungry, and not at all in the mood.

Simple rule: Once any boat has landed or reached the takeout, no more violence against boats or people in them. Waterfights amongst willing participants out of boats are fine - but incoming boats are not to be touched. If the new arrivals want to participate, they'll land the boat and then dive back into the frey.

Also at the end of the river, each boy is responsible for his own personal equipment and the handling of his own boat. Ordinarily, younger boys won't have the physical strength to handle a boat completely on their own, so older boys should be ready to assist.

Helping others

Final rule of the river: Rivers are fun but can be dangerous. Most other boaters are not as skilled or prepared as the average 12-year old Troop 8 scout. If they're adults, they're stronger - which means they'll get themselves into worse trouble faster. Often, they'll be drinking, which means they may get themselves into awful trouble. It is a scout's duty to help other people at all times. Always check on and assist other capsized boats. Always help retrieve other groups' lost paddles or items. Always check when something "doesn't seem right." Always pick up trash. You may save a life. You will definitely make an impression. The people you aid will remember the Boy Scouts fondly for years. At the same time, the boys will learn the "habits of the heart" they need to put their skills, and their oath, into action.

Rock Climbing

No, there's no way that this little scoutmaster's guide is going to be able to provide competent instruction in rock climbing, especially rock climbing supervision. There's no substitute here for experience under a qualified instructor.

This short section is just to outline the official Troop 8 belay and signal system. Our system is based on the NOLS system developed originally by climber Paul Petzoldt. It differs slightly from the other North American system which began with Outward Bound.

As any experienced climber knows, the equipment, when well-placed, is not a problem. Carabiners and ropes used properly can take shock loads well in excess of what a human body is able to withstand. The critical link is the human one - everything depends on the skill and attention of the belayer, who controls the flow of rope to the climber. Good communication based on standard signals is critical to guiding the belayer's actions and ensuring the safety of the climber.

For this reason, when teaching belaying to scouts, it is vital that the instructor always be serious. To joke around in this area of instruction is to invite further joking or carelessness by the scout, as scouts will always joke more, and be less careful, than the adults they see. Considerable research has shown that in the medium- to long-term, we only remember well the things in which we have been *over-instructed*. More than regular scout activities, boys must be over-drilled in rope & rock safety. As a scoutmaster, you must avoid the temptation to be as "relaxed" as you would be on a personal climbing trip as this sends the wrong signals to those with less experience and skill.

Despite this, scouts can and should serve as safety belayers to each other. Not allowing them to belay means that adults are just running an activity and not teaching useful skills and responsibility – an approach contrary to the very heart of scouting. More than that, it deprives boys of the skills they will need to teach others, or to climb safely on their own (which they will all try eventually!). Belaying should involve much practice, followed by a short period with a "second" experienced belayer who backs up & observes the new guy for proper technique and attitude.

Climbing Signals and Systems – The Double-Check.

For instructional and scout climbing, before a boy begins to climb a rock face, we require a double-check of the equipment and rigging. This is done in two stages.

The first stage involves a double-check of the anchors used to secure the top-rope and belayer. At least one other experienced senior scout or adult must double-check the person who did the original rigging - no matter who did the rigging! All the boys should regularly participate in this double-check to get used to it (and what to look for).

The second stage requires that any boy or adult before climbing must have his harness & tie-in knot checked by another person. No matter who the climber is! Similarly, the climber must check the harness, anchor, and belaying rig of his belayer. Only when everything has been double-checked can the climbing sequence begin.

As with anything, there is a common-sense limit here. By the time responsible 16-18 year olds have been climbing and teaching a while, they are given a bit more slack ... and obviously the last person down a real rappel is not going to have anyone left to check him (so be sure that person is capable).

The Start Sequence

Because the belayer is the key to safety, the belayer starts the sequence. The climber can encourage him to begin (“You set?”) but must wait.

Everything in our signal system is based on syllables. This is important to safety, because in real multi-pitch climbing (or real top-roping) sounds don’t carry well. Making the signals syllable dependent helps increase the safety margin when shouting from a mountain top in a strong wind.

The signal system is also based on an “answer-back” for the same reason. The climber or belayer is expected to answer “THANK YOU” to all signals his partner gives – IF he understands them. If the signaller does not hear a THANK YOU, he knows he was not heard and must repeat the signal.

Belayer: “ON BELAY!” (3 syllables)

Climber: “THANK YOU” (if not yet ready) (2 syllables)

“CLIMBING” (when ready to climb) (2 syllables)

Belayer: “CLIMB!” (1 syllable)

Note that the North American system used by OB finishes with CLIMB ON or CLIMB AWAY, which can be confused for other two-syllable signals and which should not be used in Troop 8 scouting.

It is important that the seriousness of belaying be conveyed repeatedly. Once a person says “ON BELAY” *he is responsible for the other person’s life*; his brake hand can never leave the rope no matter what.

While Climbing

While climbing, most signals come from the climber. One syllable signals indicate a request for releasing rope, while two-syllable signals indicate a request for taking in rope.

Climber: “SLACK!”

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (belayer then releases 3-5 feet of rope and stops - if climber needs more, he’ll ask again).

Climber: “UP ROPE!”

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (belayer then takes in rope until he “feels” the climber on the end)

Climber: “TENSION!” (this is an “Oh No!” signal usually given right before a fall)

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (belayer takes in rope, pulling hard to remove all stretch and actually support a bit of the climbers weight, then secures in belay position).

Climber: “FALLING!” (sometimes “OH SHIT!”)

Belayer: (secures climber in belay position) “THANK YOU!”

Climber or belayer: “ROCK!”

Partner: (getting out of the way of any falling object as quickly as possible) “THANK YOU!”

“ROCK!” is the universal signal used whenever anything - rock, tree, human, etc. comes free-falling off the cliff. Person(s) below should get out of the way - usually close to the cliff is a good choice.

The exception is “ROPE!” which is used while tossing a rope from above when setting up a system.

Ending a Climb

If you are using a Yo-yo belay, so that the belayer is at the bottom of the cliff, when a climber reaches the yo-yo carabiners he’s “made it.” He then calls

Climber: “TENSION!”

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (pulling tension to take climber’s weight)

Climber: “LOWER ME!”

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (belayer then lowers climber slowly back down rock face as a controlled rappel).

Once a climber is totally safe – back on the ground, or on the cliff well away from the edge (usually behind the belayer), he ends the sequence:

Climber: “BELAY OFF!”

Belayer: “THANK YOU!” (belayer then releases brake hand, undoes system)

Belayers should be cautious about accepting a “Belay Off” command from a new climber, and should make sure the climber is in a very safe location (away from the edge!) before acknowledging the signal.

Rappelling

“Sport” or “Hollywood” rappelling should be strongly discouraged. Unlike in climbing, during a rappel you are entirely equipment dependent and self-dependent; safety is therefore reduced a bit. Rappels should ordinarily be reserved for their real use: getting from the top of a rock face back down to the bottom, when safe walk-downs are not available or convenient.

There are exceptions. One is for teaching the skill. The second is that many first-time scout climbers lack the balance, fearlessness, and upper-body strength to succeed at a climb on their first day out. It can be devastating for a kid to have the whole day be a failure – not able to even “get” a single climb! Because anyone can do a rappel, but it’s also exciting and scary, using a rappel at the end of a first climbing day gives these guys something to succeed at, and allows them to go home fresh from a victory. Use it.

Rappel signals

Ordinarily, we do not use a second belay for a rappel, except perhaps for a very first-timer. If a belayer is used, the signals for this are the same as a regular climb - ON BELAY, CLIMBING, CLIMB - even though the person is really rappelling rather than climbing. BELAY OFF finishes at the bottom.

For both belayed and unbelayed rappels, there is an additional signal, used to indicate that the rope is now ready for the next person to come down. This is OFF RAPPEL AND ALL CLEAR, and is used only when the rappeller is off the rope and well away from the cliff face (otherwise he could be hit by rocks dislodged by a new rappeller).

If an extra measure of safety is called for in an unbelayed rappel (as for a scared rappeller), the person can be “bottom belayed.” This involves simply standing with one’s hand on the rope at the bottom, and if the rappeller gets into trouble the rappel can be stopped by pulling hard on the rope. The signal system is generally not used in this case, though an “ON BELAY!” from the bottom belayer is helpful.

Rock Climbing Instruction

While any instructor is likely to have his or her own preferred progression, Troop 8 has established some basic outlines and traditions which may be used as guides. These are the steps for first-timers, though all scouts must review the basics the first time out for the season.

The first sessions are not done at a wall or site, so folks won’t be distracted by other climbers. These sessions are instructional and therefore shorter, because of attention span considerations. Care should be taken to observe scouts whose attention spans are not long enough for these sessions - they should be excluded from any Venture or climbing activity until they mature.

Session 1 - climbing knots, including “dressing” knots properly.

By Troop 8 tradition, no one is ever allowed to climb unless they can tie their own harness and tie-in knots, and properly dressed them without assistance.

Session 2 - climbing knots review, tying harnesses, care and handling of rope & webbing.

Session 3 - belaying and signals

Session 4 - belaying and signals, practice & review, with belay anchor.

Session 5 - Anchors for fixed sites, belay review.

Session 6 - Anchors & belay review, Rappel systems & signals

Session 7 - Comprehensive review or climb.

(Session 8 - for older scouts - setting anchors)

(Session 9 - for older scouts - protection placement)

(Session 10 - for older scouts - lead climbing intro)

Sessions beyond seven usually are full-day exercises for continuing Venture Crew members.

Remember, throughout the instructional process you must be aware that kids will generally expect you to do everything for them, from tying knots to ensuring their safety. Build in exercises to work against this attitude and make them responsible for their own and each others' protection. Example: when belaying a scout, deliberately have the belay rigged improperly. Make sure they catch it during double-check. If they don't, then someone else gets to do the climb because the scout is "dead." Force them into the habit of always checking on themselves and each other, including the adults (who can just as easily make a mistake).

Summer Camp

Aside from Venture trips, scout summer camp is the “biggest deal” of the scouting year. It’s the only time the whole troop gets out into the field for more than a weekend. Even better for the adults, someone else is running the program! You’ve got time to relax, take photos, enjoy the outdoors, and spend good time with the boys.

Summer camp planning begins in February, when it’s time to start recruiting. Initial per person deposits are due at most camps on the first of April, so you need to be “selling” summer camp to the boys and families in late February and early March. You’ll need a family deposit deadline of the last meeting in March. Final payments are due the end of May. Exceptions are made by the camps for incoming webelos, but you should give an estimate (though not payment) for these. Your goal is to get *everyone* to come to summer camp. No event is more important in the scouting year.

As a big deal, summer camp is also a huge logistics headache. Transportation, medical forms requiring a physical, deposits, separate permission slips, and a tour permit you have to bring with you. Yuck! Most camps will send you a logistics checklist with dates, but be sure to read their camp handbook as well. Happily, there is a parent volunteer who is the “summer camp logistics coordinator” to relieve you of this mess. You might need to sit down & train them, especially for a new camp, but that’s OK.

Your job for summer camp will be to get boys signed up (or at least set up) for merit badge work. Merit badges are a big part of summer camp. Many boys will be shy, or won’t know what to take or how to get started. You’ll need to meet with each individually before you go to “prime the pump.” Some camps even require this.

Remember, many badges will not be accomplishable by first and even second-year boys. Rifle is tough, shotgun is impossible for small boys. Archery requires considerable previous skill. Lifesaving is quite hard. You’ll need to redirect these boys into badges where they will succeed. They will argue with you, but you must do it. Nothing’s worse than failing. It’s far better to succeed at Basketry.

First-year boys should for the most part just try “crafts” merit badges or learning ones like Mammal Study or perhaps Swimming, if they are already good swimmers. The rest of their time should go toward “1st year” program - working on basic scout skills like firebuilding and knife use.

When you arrive at camp, one of the first requirements for everyone is a swim test. Make sure the boys have swimsuits & towels easily accessible in their stuff and get this done quick, before the crowd. Adults must be tested too.

A problem you will have, particularly with younger boys, is their “not knowing what to do” and hanging around camp because of a mixture of shyness and homesickness (with older boys, it will be because of fatigue). A scoutmaster needs to be around camp to “catch” this and take them off to an activity, or sit & chat, or... As a rule, we usually set some “you can’t be in camp” times for part of the morning and afternoon.

Use your older boys! Summer camp is a great, high-profile leadership experience. Have them do tent-checks for neatness, enforce curfew & quiet hours, keep an eye on younger boys, arrange for showers, etc.

Make sure you have an activity planned for each evening in camp. Gambling merit badge work is fun, so are capture-the-flag games and campfires. Try to work out a schedule in advance.

We've found that it's really nice to do one evening (Wednesday or Thursday) away from camp at something special. In Ohio, we used to go see an outdoor play "Tecumseh" which was great. Find something nearby that will work, even if it's only an in-town movie and ice cream. It's a great mid-week refresher and change of pace.

Keep an eye out for too much candy & pop (and keep it out of camp!), and for boys not eating enough dinner (a sure sign of too much candy). Watch for "the latrine smells so bad I'm going to hold it all week" syndrome.

Choose which all-camp activities to participate in. There's no reason to do them all. Some of the best times for you and the boys will be informal, with just the troop in our own campsite.

The last day or two of summer camp is a great time to do troop elections. You've got almost everybody there, and they've had a chance to see who really was helpful and did the work all week, and who was a grouch.

Changing Summer Camp

Camps go up and down in quality over a period of time, and troop interests change. Because summer camp is such an important part of the program, you might find it necessary from time to time to switch camps in favor of a better program. Don't do this lightly! Switching camps poses some big problems.

The biggest problem you won't anticipate. Once they get used to a camp, boys like to keep going there. Every returning boy looks forward to the camp "he knows." He talks about it to the younger boys. He knows where things are, what the best programs are, and how to make things "work." There is a tradition. Remember, traditions are good - they mean much less work for you as scoutmaster, and a much higher comfort level for the boys. The first year at a new camp, no one will know anything, and they will compare everything to the old camp that they knew and liked. So be ready for it - you'll need to do a *lot* more preparation work for a new camp (including visiting it so you know you're way around in advance). Even then the boys will be disappointed, and will report for the first year that it wasn't as much fun.

The second problem you'll have is poor campsite choices. Troops sign up for sites while at camp the previous year. They take the best sites and dates. Coming later as a "transfer in," you're going to get the dregs.

Don't make the mistake of letting the Parents Committee choose a camp. How many of them have ever been with you for the whole week at summer camp? How do they know what to look for? Just like the boys, when they don't know what to look for or how to begin, nothing will happen... and you'll miss all the deadlines and good choices. This is your job, and the job of the PLC.

New summer camp selection has to happen the previous summer, or at latest early fall. By far the best thing to do is to send a few older PLC members as "lone scouts" to the potential new camp for the week to see how it is.

Remember, all this is a pain. Be sure you're ready to make at least a 3 year commitment to the new spot.

Spring City Trip

Troop 8 likes to follow the practice of having at least one troop campout every month of the year. This works well even through the cold months of late fall and the deep snows of winter.

Perhaps the ugliest month to camp in, though, is March. Dreary, mud, rain. Blech! Even Troop 8 historically has found the Michigan March to be at times more than we were willing to embrace.

For many, many years, the troop has had a tradition of doing an “urban” campout in the month of March, called the City Trip. The idea is to pick a cool city, preferably with a cool way of getting there (train, plane, or automobile), and go play tourist for the weekend.

Traditionally, this has been a whole-family campout. Parents and younger siblings are welcome and encouraged to come along. It’s still a troop event, though, so the itinerary is geared toward the interests and attention span of the boys.

Organization

The city trip is the only outing which is organized primarily at the adult level. Parents submit ideas and information on potential cities to the Troop Committee in the fall. A city is selected, and a parent volunteer installed as city trip coordinator. Often, this has been an adult familiar with the city in question. Your job as scoutmaster is to “get after” the committee in October to get them working. This one takes a lot of lead time! Planning needs to be done by January in order to get word to families in time to plan family calendars, send deposits, etc.

The city trip coordinator arranges for hotel accommodations “near the action” for the best deal we can find. Usually, scout groups can get discounts, and there are weekend discounts in most major cities. It’s important to find a hotel with extra “kid activities:” big game room, swimming pool, etc. If special transportation arrangements are made (train or plane), the coordinator also handles these.

The city trip coordinator also obtains all the “tourist” information on the city, and helps the scoutmasters put together a group itinerary (with options and “backups”). This usually includes museum trip or trips, a performance, some shopping, etc. Everything must be geared to scout-age kids. Three hours in one place is usually the outer limit for attention span and fun, and art museums usually don’t fly. Particular attention should be paid to Sunday morning plans, because many activities are not open on Sundays.

Remember, logistics! The level of planning should include finding appropriate restaurants, ‘round town transportation, and even some “gee we’re tired” down-time. Don’t forget church location and times!

Sign-ups for the city trip are also handled at the adult level, since the lead time is quite long to guarantee hotel space. Printed information goes out to parents, and the parent telephoners work with the city trip coordinator to determine who is going from each family, the rooms needed, etc. Typically about half the boys who go are “on their own” and half have families with them.

In hotel accommodations, the “standard practice” is to put the boys together in rooms near the scoutmasters, and give the parents and the rest of the family some “peace and quiet.” Both the boys

and the parents tend to prefer this arrangement, and it should be encouraged. It does mean, however, that the scoutmasters and older boys have to keep an eye on things.

The trip

These trips are very relaxed and low-key. As scoutmaster, your job (along with the trip coordinator) is to be ready with options and backup plans to always “keep things moving” depending on the mood of the group. You also have to keep your fingers on the pulse of the boys.

Remember that your “parent density” is high on these trips, and most parents won’t be familiar with Troop 8 outings protocol. Be extra-clear in your communication, and watch out for “go it on their own” renegades. Mostly, though, you’ll find the parent presence makes it possible for the scoutmasters to relax and enjoy the trip along with everybody for a change.

Labor Day Picnic

This “tradition” started in the early ‘90s. Many families are in-town over Labor Day because of the school schedule, and it’s usually a wonderful time between the hectic days of summer and the start of a new “Troop Year.”

The families of the troop get together usually on Saturday or Sunday afternoon of Labor Day weekend for a potluck, bring-your-own BBQ picnic. The traditional activity has been a Boy Scouts vs. Adults softball game, which gets much pre-picnic hype.

This event is a great chance to meet and chat with parents, even some of those whom you rarely see, and for parents to meet and chat with each other.

Organization

Like the spring City Trip, this event is organized primarily on the adult level. The Troop Committee sets the date and time, and assigns a picnic coordinator. This is an “easy” volunteer job that involves reserving a pavilion and large grill at an appropriate park (usually Gallup), arranging softball and other game equipment, procuring a bunch of charcoal, and working with the parent telephoners to handle the food.

Scoutmasters and any interested adults are in charge of the athletic activities (at least for the adult side); scouts, of course, have to get their own team strategy together. This takes only a bit of scaffolding.

Past years have shown us that adults typically win the first game, but that the second game gets very close. Always “zero” the score for the second game to give the boys a fighting chance. Mixing the teams up, or putting the scoutmasters on the side of the scouts, might be good ideas to try in the future.

Above all, enjoy! This one’s a real treat.

Program and Awards

Perhaps the most recognized aspect of scouting is its way of recognizing the achievements of boys through awards, badges, and advancements. You bet! Kids love to win things and earn things, and will work hard to learn and improve so that they can earn awards and be recognized.

They'll only do this, though, if the awards are "real." If the advancement and award program is going to be at all useful, the awards have to mean something to the boys and the troop. As a scoutmaster, you have to guarantee this by ensuring that the criteria for presenting an award are always adhered to, and that every award genuinely represents success at achieving some real skill. Nothing is so worthless as a cheap award.

This section talks about the Troop 8 policy, procedures, and expectations for all the awards in scouting. If you've actually been crazy enough to read this tome cover-to-cover, this is the last chapter! Enjoy your scouting work, and God bless.



Merit Badges

The merit badge program is designed to encourage scouts to develop a level of mastery in one particular area. It's an incentive to learn a particular topic well – well enough to be a boy “expert” and perhaps instructor in the field. Fourteen merit badges form a “required” core program for field rank scouts working toward Eagle. These include topics like citizenship, camping, first aid, and fitness, topics that we feel all boys need to know well. The rest of the over 100 badges are “elective” badges that appeal to a particular boy's interests and skills. Some of these badges are outdoor-oriented, some relate to hobbies, still others to careers or school.

A merit badge is earned by a boy working with a merit badge counselor for that badge - an adult who is an expert in that particular area and who desires to share his or her expertise with young people. As a scoutmaster, you will be “signed on” as a counselor in whatever merit badges you feel you have the ability to instruct.

Most of our merit badges are earned by boys with “in troop” counselors - scoutmasters, parents, or troop friends. The scoutmasters keep a list of in-troop adults who we feel are qualified to counsel specific badges, and direct scouts to those adults. This is particularly true for the “required” merit badges and the outdoors badges. If a scout is identified with an interest in an unusual badge (Golf? Rabbit Raising?) we go out and try to find a parent who has the skill to instruct it. We like to be sure that boys don't keep going to one person for all their badges, so as an informal rule, no more than 1/4 of the scout's badges should come from the same person (5 out of the 21 for Eagle).

Many boys will earn merit badges at summer camp. This is great, and to be strongly encouraged. Unfortunately, the quality of instruction at summer camps is varied, and some boys “earn” a badge by just showing up. It is *always* the prerogative of the scoutmasters to retest a scout or reject a badge that you feel hasn't been earned. A scoutmaster has to sign off on the blue merit badge card too before it is approved!

As a merit badge counselor, you should use the same standards and practices for merit badge requirements as you do for rank requirements. The idea behind a merit badge is that the scout is an expert. That means the scout must be able to perform every skill on his own without help or prompting; he must be able to answer questions in some depth and have the knowledge to be able to think through new problems in the area; he should demonstrate skills, whenever possible, in “real life” scout outings.

If you're a counselor for one of the “outdoor” merit badges, like canoeing, camping or skiing, then almost all the requirements should be observed in the field. For example, don't sign off on the “J” stroke for canoeing until you see a boy actually using it properly on a river during “normal” paddling (when he figures you're not watching). When someone tries to tip him or the water gets rough, watch and see if he switches to the kneeling position for stability. Ask him later why he switched, and see if the answer is on the mark.

For other badges or requirements (like CPR), “real life” application would be too inconvenient. You should still try to get as close to “real life” as possible. School and Red Cross CPR classes, for example, leave kids with generally mediocre skills (so much so that only about 12% of the adults in Red Cross classes were able to perform adequate CPR following the class). Give them practice sce-

narios that make them think & evaluate what to do. Introduce variables (“The person throws up.” “Your breaths were going in before but not any more.” “Joe adult takes over but isn’t doing CPR right”).

You get the idea. Remember, when a scout gets a merit badge, he should be an “expert” in that area. Experts aren’t people who can recite a book answer on how to do something. Experts are people who can do things or understand things even when they’re complicated. Experts aren’t people who stood in a group while other people got tested; experts are ones who passed the test themselves and thought it was easy.

Scouts will always rise to your high standards, and will be proud of their merit badge accomplishments as a result. Later, when a scoutmaster says “you’ve got first aid merit badge, go teach the Beaver patrol about bleeding and pressure points” they’ll dive right in, instead of standing embarrassed and saying “Pressure points? I don’t think I remember that...”

Paperwork

As a scoutmaster, if a boy has finished a merit badge that you counsel, the easiest thing to do is to fill out an advancement form. The advancement form (a multi-part thing) is the only official record which goes to the advancement chairman, who in turn delivers it to the council office. Keep your own record, though, so that you and the advancement chairman can cross-check with each other before a court of honor. Remember, nothing’s official until the council gets that form!

For outdoor merit badges where the final requirements are met when you observe a boy performing a skill, you might not even tell the boy. Presto! He gets the badge at the next court of honor. This works fine, and leaves some “suspense.” In order for this to work, however, you must be diligent about spending some time after each outing recording when a boy has achieved a particular “partial” requirement. Set aside half an hour on Sunday evening following a campout to take the time to do this.

For other, more bookish merit badges where the boys work systematically through requirements, you may fill out a “blue card.” Give the boy his copy, which indicates he’s earned the badge. Blue cards do not go to the council, so you must still fill out an advancement form.

You might have a boy or a parent merit badge counselor give you a blue card. You can either pass this along to the advancement chairman (who will fill out and advancement form and take it to the council), or you can fill out the form yourself and give it to the advancement chairman. In either event, you must keep a copy in your own records so that before the next court of honor you can cross-check with the advancement chairman and make sure everything is set.

Occasionally boys at summer camp or boys working with you will accomplish most (but not all) of the requirements for a merit badge. This is called a merit badge “partial,” and is indicated by listing the requirement numbers for the badge on a blue card, and initialing those the boy has completed. *Never* give the boy the only copy of the merit badge partial. It will soon be lost and you’ll have no idea where anybody’s at, or who to “push” to get finished. Always keep your own records of who has done what, and always keep a copy of the partials from summer camp. The advancement chairman should also help keeping track of merit badge partials, and remind you occasionally of who needs to finish things.

In Troop 8, merit badges and merit badge cards are only awarded at courts of honor.

“Official” vs. Troop 8 Practice

Officially, every merit badge counselor is supposed to be a registered adult on file at the council office. The problem is, registering adults costs \$15 - \$20 each, and many of our parents only counsel one badge, and only in-troop. For these people, we make sure they meet the experience requirement and understand the rules, but we don't register them.

Because of this, and the fact we use out-of-council summer camps, we never turn the blue cards in to the council office (they have the counselor's name). Council really could care less, but every now and then somebody gets anal. We only turn in the advancement forms.

As a scoutmaster who is already registered, we encourage you to sign up for whatever you're qualified in. You can choose whether you're "Troop 8 only", or whether you'd be willing to help kids from outside the troop occasionally. Be sure to mark TROOP 8 ONLY in large letters all over the form if that's what you want. Mostly, you get very few calls from outside the troop, and only if you counsel unusual badges (weather, aviation, radio, etc.)

In-troop, the scoutmasters need to keep a list of active counselors. We prefer to have parents counsel most of the "required" merit badges - citizenships, safety, personal management, etc. This is a wonderful way for them to contribute and for the boys to get in contact with more people. Recruit counselors all the time. Most parents are quite willing to do this if you pick something they're interested in, and you give them a hand on how to get started.

Like everything in Boy Scouts, under no circumstances can a parent or other close relative sign off on any merit badge or merit badge requirement for their own son. Never. They can work together, but you'll need to find another counselor who will confirm the boy meets *all* of the requirements.

For your part, even if you're not a counselor for a particular badge, you can sign off a requirement for that badge if you see the scout meet it. For example, CPR is required for canoeing merit badge. You don't counsel canoeing merit badge but you do counsel first aid, and the boy did CPR for that. You can sign off the canoeing CPR requirement. Or you might not counsel hiking merit badge, but you can confirm the boy did a continuous twenty-mile hike for requirement 5 (he did it with you). You can sign this off. Of course, you can only sign off requirements that you are "expert" in and can be sure the boy is doing correctly.

The Appendix contains the explanation sheet we give to new merit badge counselors to explain the program and procedures. Be sure to review this!

Rank Advancement

The core program in scouting is a progression of ranks, reflecting the growth of knowledge, experience, and leadership in a boy. In philosophy, scout ranks are closer to the karate notion of “belts” than they are to the idea of military rank. By developing skills and being “tested” by a board of review, every boy can move up to the next rank, until reaching Eagle Scout (“black belt”).

The Boy Scout ranks are divided into three classifications as follows:

Introductory rank : Scout

Regular ranks : Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class

Field ranks : Star, Life, Eagle.

Boys who have earned the Eagle Scout rank can go on to earn Eagle “palms” to be worn with the Eagle badge of rank; these aren’t further ranks but are rather additional marks of honor.

In the troop, rank has its privileges. For special honors or treats or bestowing “extra turns” at a fun event, you should always consider scout rank. This helps make rank a “sought after” commodity, and recognizes those boys who have put good effort and time. Rank also applies to eligibility for elected positions, Order of the Arrow, and the Venture program.

Introductory Rank

The introductory rank of Scout requires that the boy complete all the joining requirements. In Troop 8, these are spelled out in our new scout’s packet; most are also in the Scout Handbook. A few of these requirements involve parent participation; this is unique to the Scout rank. Finally, to earn the badge, the boy must meet for a scoutmaster conference; this is a one-on-one talk between a scoutmaster and the boy. In this case, the scoutmaster checks the requirements (like tying a square knot and the meaning of the scout oath and law), makes the boy take the Scout Oath, and generally uses the rest of the time to “get to know” the new recruit. We don’t “fail” boys on Scout rank, unless they have an objection to the Scout Oath or Law.

Regular Ranks

Boys pursue the “regular” ranks by getting “signed off” on a whole long list of unrelated “requirements” for each rank. These requirements relate to outdoor skills, scouting knowledge, citizenship, and first aid. A requirement can be signed off by a scoutmaster or field rank scout, and boys can work on the requirements for all three ranks at once - they don’t have to finish tenderfoot to get something signed off for Second Class. Requirements can not be signed off by non-scoutmaster parents, they also cannot be signed off by any close friend or relative of the boy.

In Troop 8, we do not follow the practice of some troops that make rank requirements an exercise in step-by-step planning or progression, where a boy trots from person to person working down his list. We maintain that in order to be “signed off,” a boy must be able to demonstrate the skill (or explain the principle) on his own, in a “real” situation, without any help or prompting. That means in order to sign off a taughtline hitch or trucker’s hitch, you have to actually see the boy use it correctly to secure a

dining fly on a campout, without any help or hints from anyone. When you see it, take note of it, and the next time you see the boy with his book, take care of the signoff.

Similarly, we do not ever sign off requirements on the same day they are taught. If you teach head bandages and the boys practice, then to be signed off they must come back a week or two later and perform the bandage correctly on a “real” victim without any help. Sometimes, we’ll do these checkouts on the trail or in a campsite, having an adult or older scout suddenly play-act being victim so that a boy can demonstrate a skill.

Remember, the goal behind requirements and rank advancement is useful knowledge and skill. You do no one any favors by letting a boy “get by” on a requirement. He will be much prouder and more confident in the end if he knows it well. Remember, too, that later he’ll have to help teach the skill to younger scouts.

On some of the requirements for regular ranks, Troop 8 has its own policies or protocols for what is expected, which may differ from the text of the Scout Handbook. Be sure you read over these notes before instructing boys, to guarantee that we are consistent. This is particularly true of first aid skills, where the Scout Handbook can be outdated or dangerously oversimplified in its presentation.

You will find as a scoutmaster that one of your roles is to “track kids down” to sign off requirements in their books. Only the more fastidious boys will actually seek you out. Make a habit of it. At each meeting, grab as many boys as you can and check out their books. If there’s anything you can sign off, do it. If you notice they’re getting close to a rank, take a look at what they’re missing and see if you can teach it, or find someone who will. Always praise them when handing the book back, and encourage them to further involvement. “Good job - keep it up you’ll make second class by next month!” “Alright! You did a nice job with the fire this weekend... looks like you just need some first aid stuff. That’s easy. For next week, put together your own first aid kit and bring it in to show me.” Even this brief “personal touch” makes a big impact.

You will also find that some boys will bop from scoutmaster to scoutmaster looking for someone to sign a particular requirement. If you know the boy meets it, then great. But be wary - if someone else didn’t sign it, was there a reason? If you’re not sure, err on the side of “No, not yet.” This is particularly true of the “Scout Spirit” requirement (see below).

Once they’ve got all the requirements signed, they need to have a scoutmaster conference and a board of review. The conference is a one-on-one meeting with a scoutmaster (usually the sitting scoutmaster-in-chief or the scoutmaster assigned to the boy’s patrol). The scoutmaster “quizzes” the boy on all the requirements to make sure he’s ready. He might instruct the boy to go back and brush up on one or two, and come back for another conference. He’ll also talk to the boy about the troop, things the boy is interested in, etc.

When the scoutmaster thinks the boy is ready, he’ll arrange a board of review with the Advancement Chairman. A review board is a three-person panel which will essentially repeat the scoutmaster conference, more formally. They’ll quiz the boy on requirements, and talk to the boy on scouting. If they feel the boy has earned the rank, then the award is given. (See Boards of Review).

Field Ranks

Advancement procedures for the “field” ranks of Star and Life are similar in some ways to those for regular ranks. Procedures for sign-offs are the same, as are scoutmaster conferences and boards of review.

For field ranks, though, the requirements are substantially different. Rather than a long list of specific skills, the field ranks require merit badges, service to the community, and demonstrated leadership in the troop through serving in a troop position. As a scoutmaster, this takes more judgement and prudence on your part. In Troop 8, we don’t sign off for “bogus” leadership positions like Bugler, unless we really are using a bugler. At the same time, we do sign off for real leadership positions that aren’t part of the official list, like Troop Newsletter Editor. Just like requirements for regular ranks, there’s no signoff if the boy’s performance hasn’t been good - missing PLC meetings and outings, not meeting his responsibilities, only doing what he’s told and not showing leadership or initiative, etc.

For service projects, we include community service the boy has done on his own, help with an Eagle Scout service project, or work on a troop service project.

Awarding Ranks

In Troop 8, we present the new badge of rank as soon as possible after the rank is earned. This might be at the meeting closing, or at the next meeting. This way the boy can wear the badge of his new rank as soon as it is earned. The badge must be presented publicly, though - the Board can’t present the badge privately to the scout. The new rank card is not presented until the next troop court of honor, when the boy is recognized in front of the whole troop & parent community.

Scout Spirit

When dealing with rank advancements to second class rank or beyond, the final requirement involves showing “scout spirit.” This is a requirement that we take very seriously in Troop 8, because unlike merit badges or tying knots, it gets to the core of our program – the things we are really trying to teach kids.

“Scout spirit” means that the scout lives his life in keeping with the Oath and Law. It is our “catch all” requirement. What do you do when a kid is an “A” student, a great book learner with 20 merit badges, but whose only troop position has been “Bugler” - a task he has never really performed? He wants Life rank. He’s met all the “legal” requirements. Answer: you hold him off based on the Scout Spirit requirement and work with him on leadership. What do you do with the kid who has all the requirements done for First Class, but exhibits a whining selfishness on every campout? Again, use the Scout Spirit requirement.

To advance in rank, a scout needs more than just the technical skill detailed by the other requirements. He needs to exhibit character, judgement, and honor - and not just when people are watching or when it’s convenient.

As a scoutmaster, then, part of your role is to keep an eye on boys and watch how they behave and work with each other, especially on campouts. “Coach” them, correct them, praise them as appropriate, but watch for those moments when they demonstrate that good character and good expedition behavior is important to them. Look for signs that show they’ve internalized it and made it their own. That’s “Scout Spirit.”

To be sure, the requirement is very different for a Second Class scout than for an Eagle scout. Second Class scout spirit involves things like “trying hard” and good attendance, while scout spirit for Eagle demands high moral character and demonstrated, pro-active commitment to others.

It only takes one scoutmaster to sign off on Scout Spirit, but it has to be a scoutmaster. We don’t let field rank scouts sign this requirement. As scoutmasters, we have a duty to each other and to the boys to “hold the line” on scout spirit in fairness to all.

Never sign off a scout spirit requirement because a boy is pushing you to. If they do anything more than ask if you can, the answer must be no.

Never sign off a scout spirit requirement based on one event or incident. If the scout is truly living the Oath and Law, it will show repeatedly in his interactions with others. Watch for the pattern. “Bright” incidents where a scout without prompting goes “above and beyond” your expectations of him, though, are usually good signs.

Never sign off a scout spirit requirement unless you have observed the scout closely on overnight campouts. It’s in the woods, when they have to live with each other, work with each other, and deal with problems together that a scout shows his “true colors.”

Always follow the lead of another scoutmaster. A boy looking to get his book signed will bounce from scouter to scouter searching for the “weak link.” If someone else chose not to sign, find out why before you do anything.

Always defer to another scoutmaster who has had more experience with the boy. The person who is in the best position to evaluate scout spirit is the adult who has worked closest with the kid or who has been on the most outings recently with the kid. They should make the call, not you. Tell the boy, “You need to see Mr. Regensburger about that. He’s been on more campouts with you.”

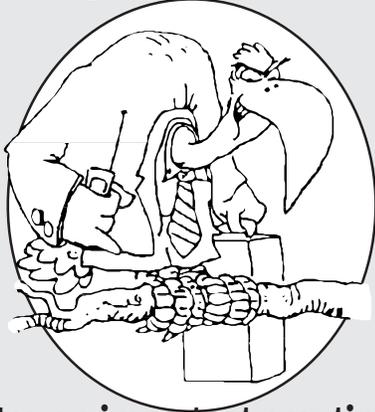
Be honest. If you don’t think you should sign off on scout spirit, say so - and don’t pass the buck. This is one of our best teaching moments! Be brave! Don’t waste it! Explain to the boy why you can’t yet, and what things he might pay attention to or improve. Be positive, not critical.

Many scouts (and parents) will take a refusal to sign scout spirit as an indication of scout misbehavior. That’s not it at all! Never sign scout spirit just because a boy hasn’t misbehaved. Scout spirit is the presence of exceptional positive behavior. When you see the positive behavior, that’s when scout spirit should be signed. (Note: You’ll almost never be able to explain this to some kids and parents.)

Never, ever, under any circumstances, use the scout spirit requirement as a “weapon” against the scout. “If you keep doing that, I won’t sign scout spirit” or “getting water without complaining would show good scout spirit” are *always* inappropriate. Come on, stand for something! It’s not wrong because you won’t sign scout spirit, it’s wrong because it’s wrong. You get water not because of scout spirit, you get water because we need water. Scout spirit signoffs aren’t a bribe for behavior. If you use them that way, the requirement will be worthless.

The next section is a reprint from the scouts’ newsletter, which details how we think about “Scout Spirit” at different rank levels.

The Vulture's Perch



Notes on important scouting stuff. Scout Spirit

If you look in your Boy Scout Handbook at the rank requirements, most of them are pretty straightforward - demonstrate first aid for serious burns, tie a bowline, earn 6 merit badges... Beginning with Second Class rank, though, there's an added, more ambiguous (look it up!) requirement: Show Scout Spirit.

Now the Vulture has had a lot of questions over the years about what exactly "Show Scout Spirit" means. No, it does not mean that on Halloween you dress up as the ghost of Baden-Powell (or any other famous scout spirit...). And it definitely does not mean that you should explain how to distill an alcoholic beverage (Scout "Spirits"...). National BSA must have had a lot of questions too, because they changed the requirement recently to "Demonstrate Scout Spirit by living the Scout Oath and Scout Law in your everyday life." That's a little better, but still... what does it mean?

The first thing you need to understand about Scout Spirit is that even though the requirement looks the same for each rank, it's really different - Scout Spirit for Life Scout is very different (and much harder) than Scout Spirit for Second Class. You'll discover that the scoutmasters will only sign you off for one "Scout Spirit" requirement at a time, because each one is harder than the next.

The other thing that you will notice is that unlike almost all the other requirements, you can never convince a scoutmaster to sign off the Scout Spirit requirement on the spot. Tie a bowline, and he'll sign that off; show him your merit badge cards and he'll sign off that requirement for Star, but he'll never just up and sign off that pesky Scout Spirit one. That's because you must demonstrate Scout Spirit in your everyday life, not in the five minutes you're talking to the Scoutmaster.

What happens is that at meetings and especially on campouts, the scoutmasters are like Santa Claus - they're always watching you, to see when you are naughty or nice. When they see that you live up to the Scout Oath and Law appropriately for your rank, then the next time you have a book around, someone will "magically" sign off on Scout Spirit.

What are they looking for? Believe it or not, there's a "scoutmaster's cheat sheet" that the Vulture and his friends all have to give us some idea. Here's just a few of the things we look for:

2nd class

Do you participate in lots of troop activities regularly (*better* than 50-50, at least)?

Do you come to "work" activities like service projects and meetings, as well as fun nights?

Do you try not to complain or put other people down, even when you feel bad or you have to do a task like cleanup?

Are you willing to try new things, and keep trying even when you don't succeed at first?

Do you pay attention when we need you to, and know when to stop what you're doing to help out?

Do you come prepared for campouts? Do you keep track of your stuff, or lose (and have to sing for) it a lot?

Do you never bully, harass, or joke around with other scouts unless they are willing & happy participants?

1st Class

A first class Scout Spirit scout must never complain about weather, or work, or cleanup, and must never gripe or "whine" when a leader makes a decision they don't like.

A scout must never criticize others harshly, or make fun of other scouts whose skills aren't as good.

Do you handle normal personal tasks and patrol tasks (cooking, camp setup & teardown, getting water, etc.) *without* being asked?

Do you keep an eye on others in the troop and help them out - like pick up their garbage, or quietly returning stuff they forgot or left out, so that the Vulture doesn't get it?

Do you sometimes lend a hand teaching new scouts some of the basics (and can you do it without yelling)?

Are you starting to help out your patrol leader & the troop by offering ideas for events, and helping to organize & call people when needed?

Do you listen & learn well when a scoutmaster or "field rank" scout tries to teach you something, or do you play "know-it-all"?

Do you Show Scout Spirit at home and in school?

Star

For Star rank, you have to serve in a troop leadership position. Did you serve well and help out the troop, or did you miss meetings, show up unprepared, not get things done, etc.?

Are you starting to show the kind of leadership a field rank scout should show? Do you help organize other scouts to get things done at campouts (like put up dining flies, set up capture-the-flag, etc.)?

Do you watch out for other scouts and make sure they're doing OK - on the trail, in camp, etc.?

Can you be relied on to finish what you start?

Are you always ready to assist and be helpful when you see something that needs doing, or do you just "hang out" with your buddies?

Life

As a troop leader, do you actively take up leadership when you see something that needs doing?

Can you organize & coordinate other scouts of all ages (without yelling)?

Are you a major player in the "behind-the-scenes" work that makes the troop run - organizing equipment, making camping arrangements, setting up activities for the PLC?

Are you a good, patient teacher and example to younger scouts?

Are you involved in your school or in the community as a volunteer?

Eagle

Do you participate actively in all troop activities?

Do all the adults and scouts treat you almost as if you were another scoutmaster?

Are you involved in your school and community as a leader?

Warning: Using this list to argue with a scoutmaster over whether you got Scout Spirit is a sure way NOT to get it. No whining!

Get the picture? To show "Scout Spirit" means to live up to your word and be Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful... at all times! Good luck, & keep working on that Spirit at every meeting and campout. As the song says, "A Vulture's eyes... they're watching you... they see your every move..."

The Board of Review

We pass a sheet out to all board of review members that does a good job of explaining what is expected of the Committee members for a review board. This sheet is included in the Master Forms of the appendix. Be sure to read this over.

This section is just information for the Scoutmaster on the “rules and regs” for review boards, since you will often be involved in helping set these up. It includes review boards only through Life rank - Eagle Boards are covered in the section on Eagle Scouts.

By the time a scout appears before the Board of Review, you should be pretty darn sure he’s going to pass. This is the job of the scoutmaster who does the boy’s scoutmaster conference prior to calling a review board. If he’s not ready, don’t call the board! Send him home, make him work harder. It’s far better for you to say, “hey, you need to work on this some more” than it is for a more formal group of unknown adults to say “No, I’m sorry.”

There’s always an exception, of course. Occasionally you’ll have a very self-confident, “cocky” young man who just won’t take your advice. After a few tries, you might decide that a more formal dose of humility is appropriate. Be sure to tip off the board of review members so that they hold him to tough questions.

Boards of Review must have three people. For everything up through and including 1st class rank, here are your options:

- Two parents, one scoutmaster
- One parent, one scoutmaster, one field rank scout (Star or above)
- Two parents, one field rank scout
- Three parents

Some selection rules:

- Parents are never allowed to sit on the Board of Review for their own son.
- The scoutmaster on the Board of Review can never be the one who did the boy’s scoutmaster conference for that rank.
- The field rank scout must not be a close friend of the boy up for review.
- For First Class rank reviews, the field rank scout should be at least a Life scout.

The reason for preferring a scoutmaster to be on the Board is because someone who knows the answers needs to “take the lead” in guiding the interview. If the Board consists of two parents and a field rank scout, the field rank scout should be sufficiently knowledgeable and confident to “take the lead” in this manner, despite the presence of two older adults. If three parents make up the board, there should be a “lead” parent who can serve in the role of a scoutmaster.

As a scoutmaster, you may have to sit on a board of review. Split up the questioning between the three members of the board in advance, and work out who’s doing what. In those rare cases when a boy does not meet expectations, you’ll find that the other members are often reluctant to say “no,” even

though they don't really want to say "yes." They will look anxiously to you for how to proceed. You get to be the gentle hard-ass. "Well, did you think he was as sharp as other boys you've seen for the rank?" "I noticed he really didn't know the answers to ..." "We want the boys to be proud of knowing this stuff well, and Bill should have done better. Let's have him work on these things some more then come back in a week or two and really nail them." If as a scoutmaster you see a good possibility that a boy won't pass his board of review (or shouldn't), be sure another scoutmaster is part of that board so that it is handled appropriately.

For Boards of Review for Star or Life, no scout can serve on the review board. Thus your only options are either three parents or two parents and a scoutmaster. The latter of course is preferred; if not possible, make sure the parents on the board are capable of asking questions about merit badge specifics if necessary.

If the scout passes his board of review, then the board members need to sign two pieces of paper. One is the Scout's book, each person putting their initials on the rank advancement. The other is a council advancement form. Don't let them get away without doing this!

Regular Courts of Honor

A Court of Honor is an official scout award ceremony, where scouts are presented with merit badges, recognized for rank advancement, and generally honored for their accomplishments. Because formal ceremonies and recognition are good for kids (and important to them, even though they might say otherwise), as scoutmasters we must work to keep these serious enough to convey genuine honor for the boys involved.

Informal troop tradition seems to have settled on having three regular courts of honor each year. Remember, the attention spans and memories of young boys are short, so you should not allow too much time to go by between receipt of awards and the court of honor award ceremony. We've sort of settled on court of honor dates following the end of each "season" - late September/early October for the summer season, February for the fall/winter season, and late June for the spring season. The September court, with the badges from summer camp, is usually the biggest.

Courts of honor also serve a second role by providing an incentive for scouts (and adults!) to get "finished up" on the last requirements for a merit badge or rank, so that they can receive it at the court. This is a great thing, and should be very actively pushed by the scoutmasters. We all recognize that often kids will finish all but one or two requirements, and then never get around to those last few (usually more "dull" bookwork) tasks. Having an excuse to push works wonders.

For this reason, we like about a one-month "buffer" between the end of the season and the court of honor, which is why summer season's court often falls the first weekend of October. This way we have three weeks in September to check up on where boys are at, get them to finish final requirements, get them to a scoutmaster conference, and finally arrange a board of review prior to the court of honor. Recently, we've taken to having a special "advancement night" on a non-meeting night a week or two before the award ceremony, just for review boards and final merit badge requirements.

Courts of honor are one of the areas where a large part of the responsibility is shared by the parents. By Troop 8 tradition, here's the way we divide things:

Committee Chairman : responsible for securing the Parish Hall for the ceremony and handling all the liaison efforts with the church. The reservation must be done many months in advance, but keys and particulars need to be picked up on the Friday before the event.

Senior Patrol Leader's parents and troop adult telephoners: responsible for arranging the food and beverage for the event. Regular courts of honor typically involve a dessert potluck following the ceremony.

Scoutmaster(s) & Advancement Chairman : responsible for getting together the week before and cross-checking advancement records. Nothing is worse than "missing" an award for a kid who is dying to receive it, so the purpose of this meeting is to be absolutely sure we've "got everything" and that all the paperwork is perfect.

Advancement Chairman : responsible for typing up list of awards and awardees and getting all the badges, cards, certificates, etc. from the council all filled out and ready to present.

Scoutmasters, SPL & PLC : responsible for planning & conducting the ceremony itself. The boys are generally responsible (with supervision and assistance!) for the opening and closing, while the

adults are properly the ones to be conferring the awards. Program planning is often delegated to a field-rank scout working on communications merit badge, as it is a requirement for that badge.

Newsletter Editor: responsible for designing and printing the ceremony program.

Courts of honor are ceremonies, and efforts should be made to keep them appropriately ceremonial. Here are some loose notes and observations compiled from years of setting these up.

- A crew of reliable boys will be needed for “setup” at least an hour in advance.
- All scouts should be present for ceremony practice at least half an hour in advance.
- Remember, for the above two things, everyone will be 15 minutes late, so make it 1:15 and :45 minutes.
- All boys must be in full uniform. Remind them. Publish it in the newsletter. Even consider a uniform inspection at the previous meeting (gasp!) to make sure your Life Scouts aren’t still wearing Tenderfoot badges.
- The parents will be 15 minutes late, too, so don’t get upset if you can’t start exactly on time. Gauge the crowd, allow people to get their coats off and the desserts set up. Flash the lights to get them seated. You’ll typically start between 7 and 15 minutes after the designated time. Never let it go beyond 15 minutes late.
- You need a way at the beginning to get “the crowd” settled down, and to put the boys in the appropriate “formal” mood, despite their excitement. We’ve settled on a brief slide show of recent events to settle folks down - the darkness and the show quiet people quite well, followed by a candle-light presentation of the Scout Oath or Law by the boys. The quiet, the darkness, and the candlelight set a wonderful solemn and mysterious mood for the boys and the crowd.
- Openings and Processions should be *slow and dignified*. Getting the boys to do this takes considerable effort and practice. Closings and Recessionals should be *quick and sharp*. This also takes practice - by this time, they’ve calmed down and are apt to be slower and not very sharp.
- The “biggest deal” for the boys are rank advancements. These should therefore be done last, by the scoutmaster and next ranking scoutmaster. A brief description of the rank may be appropriate, and each boy should be called individually, with pauses in between. Begin with the lowest ranks, and work toward the top.
- The next “biggest deal” for the boys are merit badges. Because it’s bad to have two “big deals” right next to each other (they detract from each other), something “lighter” should be put in between. Usually we use special awards for this - things like camp patches, “moving” merit badges, Venture awards, etc.
- Make it special for each kid, and be sure to take a sentence or two to recognize particular effort and accomplishment wherever you can find it (“Bill is the first boy in a number of years to earn Radio merit badge, one of the most difficult awards. Nice job, Bill.” or “John joined scouts never having swum before, and after great effort, has earned his swimming merit badge. Congratulations, John.”). Be honest, though - save your “special sentences” for better-than-average work.

- Never, ever say anything negative about a boy in public. If a boy is going to get a “joke” award like the J.W. “Be Prepared” award, this should be done in a lighthearted, generous way - and only to a boy with good self-confidence and other achievements who can “take it” appropriately.

- Remember, Courts of Honor are for the BOYS. We must always avoid the temptation to use them to recognize and honor adults. If adults receive any awards at all, they should be “joke” awards (like Purple Knots) or awards that the boys themselves would wish to give the adult (like an award to a retiring scoutmaster). In any event, they should be brief. Clearly inappropriate would be awards to committee members (the boys don’t know them) or awards to scoutmasters not conferred by the boys (like a council award or woodbadge). Remember, we do these things for the scouts, not for our own or other adults’ egos.

- Avoid using the ceremony for announcements; to do so cheapens the ceremony. Save announcements for during dessert.

- Be sure to remind scouts and parents of the importance of keeping their merit badge and rank advancement cards together in a safe place, as proof of requirements for Eagle. This is typically a task assumed by the parents (especially for the younger guys), and so they should be reminded every court of honor that this is important.

- A good, short Scoutmaster’s Minute is a wonderful way to bring the whole ceremony together for the boys and the families. Few other times offer such a great opportunity to “set the tone” for scouting and the troop. Think values, principles, inspiration, praise. Stick to one, short point or theme and don’t wander or allow yourself to be tempted into bringing in a second idea. This minute is done by the sitting Scoutmaster-in-chief, always.

- After the ceremony, lead grace before meals. The Philmont Grace, the Catholic grace, or an impromptu blessing are all appropriate. If a member of the St. Thomas clergy is present, courtesy demands that they should be asked to lead the prayer.

- Remember, a scout is courteous. Scouts will need to be reminded that they eat last, after parents, guests, and siblings. Scoutmasters lead by example, of course, and eat after scouts (if anything is left...).

- A crew of scouts and parents will be needed to clean up afterward. The Committee Chair should stay and be the last to leave, making sure that everything is appropriately locked. If the Committee Chair takes off, one of the scoutmasters must be sure that this is done.

To the best of your ability, try to make sure that every boy gets recognized for something, even if it’s only a camp patch. Try also to make sure that every boy attends, so that he receives his awards and salutes his friends who are being recognized. Recently we’ve adopted the practice of requiring that boys be present to receive awards. Cards and merit badges are saved until the next court if the boy doesn’t show. This is a good idea, as it helps keep things from getting lost (boys given awards at meetings often lose them) and gives them an incentive to show up for the court. Patches that are given out “in bulk,” though, like camp patches, should not be saved for the next court (Here’s Joe, getting his summer camp patch in February....).

Lastly, remember to keep this special for each kid - every scoutmaster should make a point of going out of their way to congratulate boys on their achievements after the ceremony, and inspire them to greater things.

Working with Prospective Eagle Scouts

After a while, you may have the opportunity to serve as the scoutmaster for “older boys,” better known as the guy who has to help them through their final steps on the trail to Eagle. Because of the bureaucracy involved, it’s best to leave someone in this position for a number of years so that they get used to all the procedures and policies. If you happen to be new to the job, though, this section is for you.

Most boys will reach Life rank, then languish for years until the nagging of friends and family or simply the approach of a deadline motivates them to action. This is OK. While others may nag, it is never the role of a scoutmaster to nag. Hey, these guys are 16 or older, with lots of other things to do. If they’re going to be Eagles, that means you respect them as solid youth leaders. Don’t demean them by nagging. Besides, at that age nagging will only get their dander up and keep them from doing it. Encourage, keep an eye out, offer to get together, and wait. They’ll come. If they don’t, well... that’s OK too. It’s their award, it’s their choice.

Most of the requirements for Eagle rank are “old hat” to Life scouts - merit badges, troop leadership, scout spirit. The only thing that they have never really done before is the service project. What’s different about this is that throughout scouting, the adults have always come up with the ideas and the outline - the “scaffolding” to get the job done. For the project, they need to do this on their own - find a need, decide to help, and put together a plan from scratch. That’s tough. Mostly it’s tough because it’s so *big* a thing, it’s hard to know where or how to begin.

Don’t help. That’s right, don’t help! This is the one thing they have left to learn in scouting, and it’s vitally important that they learn it. A Life Scout already knows what to do if you say, “OK, we’re going to do a river cleanup on Sunday in canoes with 16 people.” He’s been involved in that kind of planning for years. What he’s never done before is find a project and pursue an idea from its dawning to its completion. That’s the toughest requirement for Eagle Scout, and one that he must accomplish himself.

The only kind of advice you should give is the Socratic-style questioning to draw out his ideas. “What are you interested in?” “What do you enjoy most?” “Where do you do it?” “Is there anything you could do there?” “Are you interested in outdoor or indoor projects?” “Have you talked to your church?” “Is there anything your school needs?” etc. It’s OK to give contact phone numbers. “You might consider calling the Parks Office.” “You should call Bill Meyerson; he works in that area and may be able to help.” When a scout comes up with an idea and wants to discuss it, you should answer specific questions but avoid giving much unsolicited advice.

You need to know the rules for projects:

- They must be a service project, done for the community or a community agency. They cannot be done for the troop or for any scouting organization. They cannot be done for any individual or family, unless done through a church or relief agency.

- From our view, the purpose of the project is to develop and demonstrate leadership; it is primarily on this that the scout will be evaluated. For this reason, solo projects are not allowed, nor are projects which rely on just a few very experienced boys or adults.
- The project must be such that it's within the boy's and the troop's capability, and that it won't be undertaken primarily by the boy's parents or family.
- The scout must obtain the endorsement and permission of the agency for whom he intends to do the project, in writing.
- The project must be sufficiently large to require significant effort in planning and execution. As a rule of thumb, a man-hours estimate in the neighborhood of 150 hours is appropriate; never below 100.
- Before beginning any part of the project except for the planning, the project proposal must meet the approval of an Eagle Project Board of Review.

The Project Proposal

Once the idea and plans get rolling, the next thing the scout needs to do is write a project proposal. This is a formal written summary of the plans for the service project, which will be reviewed by an Eagle board before permission is given to undertake the project.

There is a form available through the council, which the scout **MUST** have (it's even listed in the Eagle requirements). On each page of the form the scout should type "Please refer to attached document." The form can then be cut up or hole-punched and put in a 3-ring binder along with the full typewritten project proposal. The form, however, is a useful guide for what is expected in the proposal.

The project proposal itself should include the following:

- A summary of the need the scout will be addressing with the project, and of the agency for whom the scout will be doing the project (1-3 paragraphs). The written letter of endorsement from a representative of the agency should be attached to this section.
- A complete description of the project. How the scout intends to meet the need, his plans for executing the project, etc. (several pages).
- A safety plan for the project. (This is often used to fulfill requirements for Safety Merit badge)
- A budget for the project, including plans for how money will be raised and materials obtained. Plans should also be made for how money is going to be handled and by whom, and what will be done with any surplus or deficit. (Often, for larger sums, the scout works with the troop treasurer. This insures that money will be well-tracked, and allows for a tax deduction for donors).
- A timetable for the project, including a detailed estimate of the man-hours required for each phase, and a total of estimated man hours for the entire project. This total should include the scout's own time spent planning the project.

- A plan for recruiting and managing workers.

Once the proposal is done, it's time to set up the first board of review. Before the Board, though, there's the Scoutmaster's Conference.

Scoutmaster Conference Number One

This conference is just to prepare the scout for the first board of review on his project. You should review the project proposal and ask the kinds of questions likely at the board. Typically, begin by asking the scout to give an overview of what he intends to do, then respond with questions or comments as they arise.

Some oft-asked questions:

- How did you come to decide on this project?
- [Money-related questions]
- [Safety-related questions]
- [Clarification questions about the project or proposal]
- How will you get a whole bunch of younger guys out to work, and keep them working?
- How will you manage adult workers?
- The purpose of the project is to demonstrate leadership. How will you do this?

When you're done with the conference, indicate if any areas of the proposal need correction. Remind the scout that he must make six (6) copies of the proposal for the Board of Review, that he must be in full and totally correct uniform (badges in right place, etc.), and that he must be there half an hour early.

First Board of Review

Three boards of review are required to earn the Eagle Rank, though the second two are normally done jointly at one session. An Eagle board consists of three parents who should be "old timers" - ones very familiar with Troop 8 Scouting and review boards, and ones who are good at asking questions and giving suggestions. The board also consists of a representative from the council, who must be contacted through the Washtenong District advancement chairman. Typically, it will take at least two weeks notice to set/find a date when the council representative can come. So call the council guy first, figure out a mutually agreeable date, and then have the Troop 8 advancement chairman arrange for the other adults.

Eagle boards of review are normally held in the evening around the dining room table in the scoutmaster's home. Coffee, pop, and munchies should be available.

How the board proceeds depends a great deal on the council representative. Ordinarily, we'll ask the scout to leave the room briefly, just so we can fill the adults in on what is expected in a project and get everyone on the same wavelength. It also gives the adults a chance to read the proposal.

After that, the scout is invited back in, introduced to the members of the board, and asked to begin by giving a summary of his proposal. The floor is then open for questions from the board.

The scoutmaster is present for all this, of course, and may guide and instruct the board if the council representative does not. The scoutmaster, however, is *not* a member of the board and does not vote. He is there as an advocate for the scout, and an information source for the Board on matters of Troop 8 policy and procedure. This means you step in only if the council representative gets weird on policy ("Well, in Troop 8 we expect them to do it like this...") or to move things along. Otherwise, it's the board's (and the Scout's) show.

When questions are finished, the scout is asked to leave again and the board deliberates. As always, the decision must be unanimously in favor for the project to proceed - one negative vote means a "no." In addition to a "go for it" or a "this won't work," the board has the option to send the proposal back for revision. This requires them to reconvene to review the changes and is not common.

When the board reaches a decision (and has time for another cup of coffee), the scout is invited back in. The Board of Review gives suggestions and recommendations, as well as their verdict. If approval is given, the board members and council representative must sign the appropriate space in the middle of the official Eagle project booklet. Don't forget this!

Let the project begin

And stay out of the way. The hard part is done! The scout by this point knows how to run a project. There's no reason for you or for any adult leader to attend unless asked. There will ordinarily be a need for some adult supervision during most projects, of course, but it's up to the scout to arrange this. The scout should handle all the calls, newsletter announcements, etc. on his own.

One place a scoutmaster is handy is pictures. Remind the scout that pictures of the project (especially "before and after" shots) are important, and someone should be assigned part-time each day as photographer.

When the project is finished

Now comes the real paper chase. Ordinarily we combine both the final project Board of Review and the Board of Review for Eagle Scout Rank into one evening. It's possible to do them separately, but why bother? Here's a list of all the things you must have in your possession prior to these final review boards.

For the project:

- One "Master" Binder, including the final project report.
- Six copies of the master binder (except for pictures).

For the Eagle rank:

- A completed and council-verified Eagle Scout Application Form.
- Confidential Letters of Recommendation (6)
- A statement of values and goals (6 copies)
- A list of leadership and volunteer positions the scout holds or has held outside of scouting. (6 copies)

Now let's take a closer look at each of these items.

The "**Master Binder**" is a big 3-ring binder that contains the complete record of the scout's Eagle project. This will be sent to the national office along with the scout's application. The binder, and the copies which will be used by the board members, must contain:

- The original project proposal
- The official scout project booklet
- The original letter from the agency giving endorsement of the project
- The final project report
- Pictures from the project
- A letter from the agency thanking the scout for successfully completing the project.
- A sample copy of the thank-you letters the scout sent out to his workers and the agency.

The final project report in the Master Binder must include:

- A description of how the project went.
- The real timetable for the project, including names of actual workers, hours worked, and man-hours for each stage.
- A discussion of problems encountered and any changes in the project that were made along the way. This is most important. Projects never go perfectly - what the board wants to see is how the scout handled the unforeseen, how he made leadership decisions and responded to problems.
- A final financial report and accounting of funds.
- An analysis of what was learned/ what went well/ what could have been done better.

The **Eagle Scout Application Form** ("Red, White and Blue Form") is the scout's official application for the rank of Eagle. This is a "biggie" and must be filled out carefully, because everything on it will be checked. The scout should use his full name, as he wants it to appear on his award. Merit badges and rank dates must be filled in carefully, with attention to all the requirements. Don't screw this up! If the scout does not have records, he should check with the advancement chairman. Dates for leadership positions must be filled out on the back, and names of references on the front. *We must get a recommendation letter from every reference listed on this form*, so don't put down Uncle Fred in Lithuania if the board of review is next week.

The Eagle Application Form must be given to the scoutmaster, who must take it to the registrar (Mary Ann) at the council office. She will check all the merit badge and advancement records against the form, and if everything's cool, will sign off on her line on the back. Thus, the form can't go in until the scout has completed all his merit badges and *those* forms have gone in.

If there's a problem, we'll have to fix it. There are two ways to do this. If our records show he has earned an award but the council's don't (they lose stuff all the time), we just submit a new advancement form. Alternately, if a scout has his signed merit badge or rank advancement cards, these are appropriate proof. They can be copied, or we can submit an advancement form.

The real problem comes with guys who earned stuff in another troop and those records are missing. Here the only proof is the boy's copy of the card. Absent that, you've got to try to track down old scoutmasters and advancement people for the other troop. Major headache. If it's a merit badge, you can always have him repeat it with one of our counselors.

A bigger problem comes with a kid who moved into town from an out-of-council troop. You've got no idea about whether the records are up to date until you hear back from National. For this reason, you should submit a copy of all the boy's cards from the previous troop along with the application, and file this in our council's records.

After the registrar, the Committee Chair needs to sign the form, you need to sign the form at the Scoutmaster's conference, and the scout needs to sign the form if he forgot. Final signatures are the council representative and board of review, and lastly the Council Executive (after you turn it in).

Letters of recommendation are confidential references solicited by the Eagle Scout candidate. We must have one from:

- A parent
- A teacher
- A religious leader (pastor, etc.)
- An employer (if possible)
- A friend
- [an optional one]

That's a minimum of five, but everyone submits six. These must not be seen or handled by the scout, but should be delivered by the recommender directly to the scoutmaster in a sealed envelope. Although the council provides a "check-box" style form, these should generally not be used. Encourage each reference to write a full letter of recommendation. The scout should provide each person with a stamped and addressed envelope, and should make the request for a letter in person. As scoutmaster, keep all the letters you receive in a folder which will be shared with the board of review members.

The **statement of values and goals** is the scout's own work - what he holds to be true, what he believes in, what he wants to do with his life, etc. It should be honest and straightforward, willing to share deep ideas without getting mushy. No more than a page, no less than half a page.

The **list of leadership and volunteer activities** the scout has held outside of scouting includes school activities, sports, community agencies, church groups, etc. The board is looking for a record of meaningful involvement and leadership.

Once you've got all this material in, it's time for the last Scoutmaster's Conference.

Final Scoutmaster's Conference

This is it. The last one. Make it nice. Do dinner. You buy.

Run through the project report, and have the scout give his summary of how the project went. Ask questions focused on how he dealt with problems and potential problems, how he used leadership and the skills he learned through Scouting to handle the project.

Then just talk. Enjoy the moment. Express your appreciation, chat about the troop - the good, the bad, the ugly. Find out what he learned, what was important to him, and how that shaped what's important to him now. Ask a few of the kinds of questions the Board will ask, but don't overdo it. This kid by now should be more than ready. Use the time to get to know a new friend, and to change the relationship to make that true. Troop 8 Eagle Scouts are effectively scoutmasters, whether they're 16 or 18. Encourage them to keep giving to the community and to scouting.

The Boards of Review

The makeup of the second Board of Review is the same, though it is not necessary to have exactly the same people on the Board (having one person who was in on the project review is helpful). This one is going to go longer. Plan on two hours.

This second Board of Review really consists of two reviews rolled into one, but done separately - the final project review, and the Eagle review.

The first step is the final project review. This should be explained to the adults, usually while the scout is out of the room. It is only to decide whether the scouts' project was sufficiently well executed and demonstrated sufficient leadership to be acceptable as an Eagle Scout service project. Thus the whole first part will be devoted to the candidate's discussing and answering questions about his service project.

When questions are finished, the scout is excused and the Board discusses whether to accept the project. As before, they can accept the project, reject it, or send the scout back to do more work. To accept the project, the vote must be unanimous.

If and only if the Board approves the project, then the next step is to proceed to a Board of Review for the rank of Eagle Scout. The Scoutmaster should share with the Board the letters of recommendation he has received in confidence. The scout is brought back into the room and informed that his project is approved, and the Eagle Board begins.

This is open season. Any question about any aspect of the boy's experience in scouting, in school, in leadership, or anything in his statement of goals and principles is fair game. Sometimes, if the adults are being too shy, you as scoutmaster might need to prod this along. It should be fun. These scouts are a wealth of ideas and information.

Usually the questions are pretty general - about school, leadership, and what things in scouting and the troop contributed to this boy's life in a meaningful way. As a scoutmaster, it's great to just listen and learn. Eventually the discussion will run down, or you'll need to bring it to a close. Be attentive to this; sometimes the adults will really start running on.

The scout is asked to leave the room, the adults get more coffee and decide whether he is worthy of the Eagle Scout rank. Let the kid sweat for a bit. Talk about the Detroit Lions.

A positive verdict is required to be unanimous. Remember, the scoutmaster does not participate, except as an information source. Bring the boy back in, announce the decision, and do the paperwork.

The Board must sign off on the Eagle project book (last page), the scout's Handbook, and the red, white & blue Eagle Application form.

Now, the Big three-ring binder with the whole project report, letters from the agency and pictures, plus the red, white & blue form, the letters of recommendation, the scout's statement of goals and values, and the list of the scout's leadership positions outside the troop gets bundled up and delivered to the council office. Just put everything in the binder. If all goes well, within six weeks the Eagle award materials will be received at the council from the national office.

Deadlines

If there's anything you may need to help the scout with, it's an understanding of "lead time" deadlines. Everything must be finished before the date of the scout's 18th birthday. Actually, that's not exactly correct, but don't get into it. The board of review should happen before the 18th birthday. Keep in mind that if the board wants extra work done on the project, then that extra work has to be completed before the 18th birthday, too... so waiting 'til the very end may result in no Eagle.

In order to have the board on a given date, the board needs to be scheduled at least two weeks in advance.

In order to have all the letters of recommendation in before the board, they must be given out at least four weeks in advance.

In order to have the merit badge record checked by council with time to respond to problems, all the merit badges and the red, white, & blue form must be completed and submitted to the council at least a week in advance. That means that merit badges must be finished two weeks in advance so that there is time to get the advancement report into the council before the Eagle application.

The project takes two months or more, plus time to recruit volunteers and extra time at the end for writing the report and getting letters from the agency. You can't start until you have a project review, and that takes at least two weeks to set up, after you've got your proposal together.

You get the idea. The real deadlines that will derail an Eagle are well in advance of the 18th birthday. You need to make the scout aware of these real deadlines.

Good luck. You'll find this "home stretch" to be a lot of work, but very rewarding in the end.

Eagle Courts of Honor

This is the Big Deal, the finale of a scout's career. The Eagle Court should be scheduled at least two months after the award is earned, to allow time for National to process the award and send the materials to the council.

This is also a load of work. Eagle Courts are always dinner potlucks, with family, friends, and community members involved. Here's how responsibilities break down:

Parents of Eagle and Eagle : Invitations. Blanks are available at the council office. Invitations should go to every scout family, the parish staff, past and present scoutmasters, and past Troop 8 Eagle Scouts.

Parents of Eagle: Help coordinate food and any "special" arrangements with the Troop Committee.

Eagle Scout: Decide on and secure keynote speaker. This cannot be a sitting scoutmaster.

Parent of SPL and troop telephoners: Coordinate and arrange for pot luck dinner, dessert, etc.

Committee Chair: Arrange for Parish Hall on a date approved by the family. Get key, etc. Place requests for letters and commendations with local, state, and national figures (U.S. President, congresspeople, senators, mayor, favorite sports heroes, etc.).

Advancement Chair: Pick up Eagle award materials from Council. Also pick up "loaner" Eagle decorations from Council before event (and return afterward).

Scoutmasters: Pick up seven red roses to award to mother.

Scoutmasters, SPL, and PLC: Plan ceremony and practice with troop. Opening and closing should be particularly sharp and impressive, and each major participant should have a copy of the script from which to work. Review the rules for regular courts of honor, and the scripts from old eagle courts.

Remember, it's important to be formal and traditional. Keep things from old Eagle courts that people have come to recognize, identify with, and expect. At the same time, it's also important to change some things, to make things different for each person.

Newsletter Editor: Court of Honor program. Blank forms are available at the council office.

Troop Photographer & Scouts: Assemble slide show if desired.

The Order of the Arrow

The Order of the Arrow is a combination fraternity/honorary society in scouting. The best thing to compare it to in the normal world would be something like the National Honor Society or Phi Beta Kappa. They have a motto of service, and members of the order are generally involved in service work at council camps. The Order is open to both youth and adults.

Each spring, new boys are elected as postulants to the Order of the Arrow. In order to be eligible for election, the boy must be 1st class rank or above (and not already a member). The boys who vote on election are the boys of the troop - thus it's their peers and younger scouts who choose to recognize them as worthy of being honored.

The election is conducted by adult and youth members of the Order, after an explanation to the boys. Sometimes "OA" representatives from the "Lodge" - the council chapter of the Order - will ask to come to the troop to give the presentation and conduct the election. Often, troop members of the Order will do this.

To be elected, a boy must receive votes. The selection is set up so as to guarantee that not every candidate will be given a chance to join.

The results of the election are secret, and not shared with the boys. Later, at a campfire, the members of the Order of the Arrow will "tap out" the newly elected boys amidst much mystery and ceremony, and take them off briefly into the woods.

After election, the boy must participate in an "ordeal" in order to become a full-fledged member. Ordeals are generally held in June and September; the boy must make one of these or his election is void. The ordeal is a weekend silent retreat coupled with camp service work and a "solo" experience sleeping outdoors without a tent or other equipment.

Order of the Arrow members wear a white sash with a red arrow on it when conducting business of the Order (this is not worn at normal troop functions). Order members also wear a "Lodge flap" patch over the flap of the right pocket on the uniform. They also have their own sign & handshake stuff. But that's secret.

Troop 8 Special Awards

Over the years, Troop 8 has developed a number of special scouting awards which have come to mean as much or more to the boys as the usual scouting awards. As with any award, if it is going to mean anything, the rules for awarding it must be strictly adhered to.

Justin Williams Memorial “Be Prepared” Award

Named in honor of former scout Justin Williams. Justin came on an early December Polar Bear campout. On the Friday of departure, the weather was unseasonably warm, so Justin wore shorts and a T-shirt - and brought no additional clothes, no sleeping bag ... Needless to say, by Saturday the temperature had fallen into the teens and there was 8 inches of snow on the ground. Justin spent the weekend freezing, while borrowing from all his troopmates.

This award is given to a scout in recognition of special creativity for violating the scout motto. (Ex. - failure to bring a shelter on a downpour weekend, leaving all one's clothes behind, showing up for a backpacking trip without a pack, etc.)

Purple (Heart) Knot Award

The Purple Knot award is the only embroidered knot permitted to be worn on the youth uniform. It is awarded to youth or adults who have suffered serious injury “in the line of duty” - while participating in a boy scouting activity (cub & webelo scout activities do not earn the award, but webelos on a boy scout event may). Serious injury is defined as illness or injury requiring professional medical care (stitches, broken bones, etc.). The award is not given where a person through their own deliberate disobedience caused an injury to themselves (but would be given if another was injured).

The first recipient was Scoutmaster Paul Milne, who suffered 2nd degree burns on most of his lower arm while attempting to rescue the scoutmasters' coffee pot from an imminent spill. Another distinguished multiple recipient was Scoutmaster Dave Regensburger, for a broken leg while mountain biking, breaking the other leg on a canoe trip rope swing, and breaking ribs by running into trees while skiing.

The presentation of the award should be very serious and formal (as for a military Purple Heart), with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

Whitewater Combat Roll Award

This patch is presented to a scout or scouter who successfully completes a “combat” Eskimo roll in a kayak or covered canoe in whitewater. A “combat” roll is a roll in real whitewater conditions, where the capsizing is unintentional and unanticipated, but the individual recovers completely with a roll and without the assistance of any other individual or object (no pushing off the shore or the bottom).

Moving Merit Badge

This Merit Badge is awarded to scouts who as an act of generous service substantially assist in a scoutmaster or troop family's household move (can't be their own family). Such service usually consists of helping move boxes and furniture, box items, etc. Begun by Scoutmaster Bob Geier, who frequently moved from graduate dorms at the University to summer sublets & back, and after graduation moved around town.

Gambling Merit Badge

This merit badge, awarded only to scouts, has "formal" merit badge requirements like a "real" badge. Started at summer camp in 1992, rules compiled by Andy Kraemer.

1. (a) Show knowledge of basic mathematical laws of probability, including manipulating fractions, "and" vs. "or" probability, "at least one" probability, basic counting rules, and expectation value.
(b) Explain why "pyramid" betting schemes fail, and how to set up a betting system that makes you "walk away" before excessive losses.
(c) Using mathematical probability, determine the odds and "house advantage" for basic bets in ONE of the following: American roulette, craps, chuck-a-luck, or bingo.
(d) Using expectation value, explain whether buying a state lottery ticket is usually a "good" bet. Describe under what conditions this answer may differ.
2. (a) Explain the rules of poker, including at least five (5) variants. Be able to define appropriate terms (ante, hand, deal, see, raise, fold, bluff).
(b) Demonstrate proficiency in poker by finishing "ahead" in a friendly game against at least three opponents.
3. (a) Explain the rules of casino blackjack, and how intelligent play can change expected outcome.
(b) Demonstrate knowledge of proper "basic strategy" playing casino blackjack.
(c) Demonstrate knowledge of a sound blackjack card-counting system by playing correctly while counting through a one-deck shoe.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of at least one card game based on the concept of "tricks." (Ex. bridge, hearts, spades, euchre, etc.)
5. Explain the basic rules of card-playing etiquette, and why they are important. Demonstrate consistent "good etiquette" while playing card games.
6. Explain the concept of "book-making" and "pool" betting, especially as they relate to sports events and racetracks.
7. Explain the laws related to gambling in your home state and town.
8. Do ONE of the following:
 - (a) Write a short essay arguing either for or against establishing a public casino in your county.
 - (b) Write a letter to an elected official about a gambling issue in your state.

- (c) Describe to your counselor a time when you “lost it all” while gambling. Explain how gambling can be addictive and what you could have done to stop playing sooner.

Slang Translator’s Patch

This is a translator’s patch for the language of Slang. It is awarded to a scout who shows particular ability and willingness to interpret “kid’s talk” for adults, and to interpret the weird utterances of others into something intelligible. First awardee was Dale Fater, who performed this function for an entire summer camp, including the memorable translation of another scout’s “I planted a tree in lake Erie” as “He’s got a lot of dirt and water in his ear after the mud event - enough to plant saplings in.”

Trained patch

Given to Patrol Leaders or troop position holders who have completed a Troop 8 (not Council!) weekend Junior Leader Training session. Can be worn even if the person changes position, except that SPLs, ASPLs, and JASMs must be recertified by several “getting started” meetings with the Scoutmasters.

Scout pin (crossover webelo)

Troop 8 does not award the badge of rank for Scout until all the requirements have been fulfilled, including scoutmaster conferences with the boy and his parents. At the crossover campout, however, Troop 8 awards the pin corresponding to the Scout rank as a sign they’ve taken the Scout Oath and committed themselves to joining Boy Scouting. The pin is placed by a Troop 8 adult or scout on the left side of the Scout’s collar. It is worn with the uniform until the Scout Badge is earned.

Venture Awards

National offers several venture award patches, but does not specify their requirements. We have therefore established a set of requirements for giving these awards in Troop 8.

Venture Strip

This small red-letter strip goes above the right pocket. It is presented to a scout who has been approved to join the Venture program as a permanent member, after he has completed one Venture-only outing. In-town climbing systems instruction or other instructional sessions don’t count; it has to be an outing. Day trips, though, like a day climbing trip to Grand Ledge, count as an outing. The scout also has to have successfully passed his Venture “probation” period.

Venture “V” Letter

This large, varsity-type letter is worn at the base of the merit badge sash. It is presented to a Venture Crew member only after successful completion of an extended Venture trip, involving at least five days and nights of continuous Venture-program camping. It is reserved only for the “big events,” like a Philmont trek, a two week summer expedition, or a week-long winter trip.

Venture activity pins

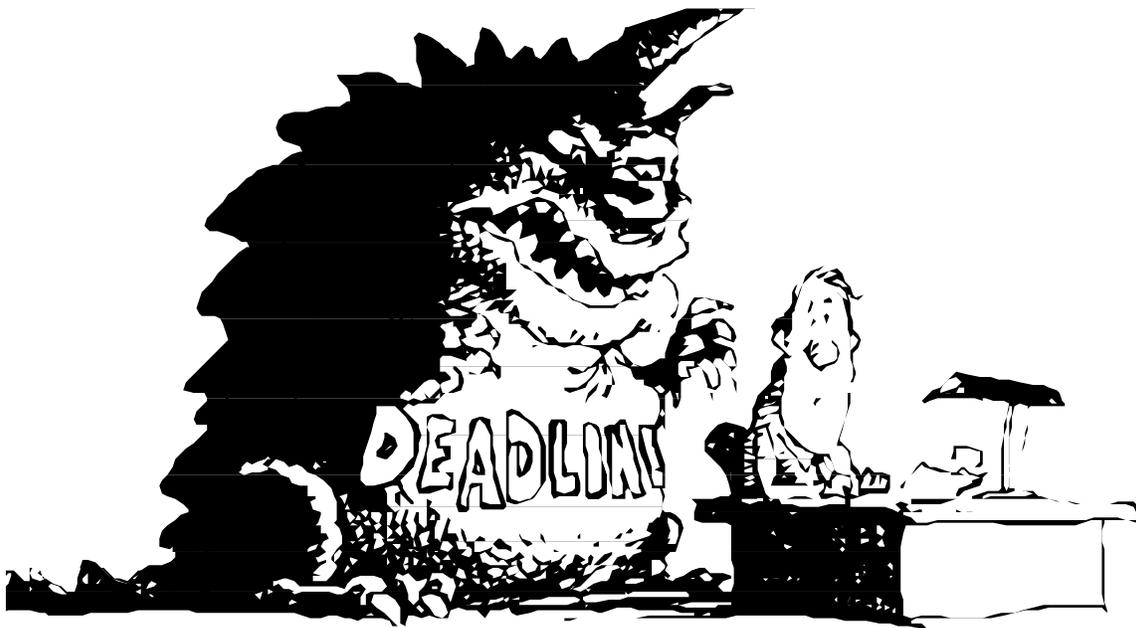
These are worn on the Venture Letter, and therefore can only be awarded with or after the letter. They signify successful participation in an extended Venture outing centering on or including the activity signified by the pin. Ex: Backpacking for a Philmont Trek, Snow Camping for a backcountry ski expedition, Caving for at least a full day underground exploring an undeveloped cave, etc.

Appendix A: Scoutmasters' Calendar

Well, we hope you enjoyed the book. There's an awful lot that goes into keeping Troop 8 healthy and happy, and often along the way you'll feel like you're perpetually behind "the 8 ball." It's normal.

To help you out, this appendix contains the Scoutmasters' master planning calendar for the year, organized by month. If you check it at the start of each month, it will remind you of the "big" things you need to consider that month, so that they don't fall through the cracks. The "review" section each month will also point you to sections of this book which may prove worth re-reading. Because yearly programs change according to the direction of the boy leaders, most of the items on the lists are not specific program events. You'll have to keep track of event tasks yourself.

Get in the habit of using (and updating!) this master calendar each year, and you'll find things become much smoother. Don't forget that all these tasks aren't yours alone - split them among the scoutmasters and delegate to the parents!



September

Traditional Events

Labor Day Weekend Family Picnic/Softball Game (usually Saturday).
Junior Leader Training (if not done late August)
Troop Leader Council program planning for year
Venture Crew August trip review, dinner & slides; plan trip type for winter & next year.
Troop Court of Honor (late September or early October)
Changeover in parent volunteer positions
Bivouac Discount Night
Great hiking/camping weather!

Checklist

- Call & personally invite all TLC scouts to the planning meeting at least two weeks in advance.
- Get with SPL & key scoutmasters at least a week before TLC to set program and agenda.
- Confirm all TLC arrangements (room, food, “break” events, school calendars, etc.).
- Compose Parents’ Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for October & November troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for October & November fun nights.
- Make reservations for cabins for winter trip(s) (long lead time!)
- Set PLC dates for October & November.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for October, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for October & November trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for October troop meetings.
- Get materials together for Venture Crew meeting, including possible trips for winter & next summer. Establish preliminary plans at the meeting.
- Confirm Bivouac discount night one week in advance with store. Arrange for as many scoutmasters as possible to be present. Be sure to emphasize/advertise in newsletters!
- Follow-up at end of month to push TLC subcommittees to finish work before October PLC.
- Make strong effort to get kids who are “close” on Merit Badges and Ranks to finish.
- Set & arrange advancement night during week before court of honor.
- Make appointment with Advancement Chairman to confirm & verify awards.

- Get with SPL & PL's to plan court of honor ceremony.
- Confirm with troop telephoners & SPL mom that potluck arrangements and calls to all families are in place for court of honor.
- Confirm Newsletter person is printing Court of Honor program.
- Confirm Committee Chair is getting room key for Court of Honor room.
- Make sure Committee Chair has set dates with Parish for courts of honor, etc. for entire year; also for Pancake Breakfast.
- Make sure Committee Chair has put advertisements in parish bulletin & St. Mary's bulletin looking for new assistant scoutmasters. (see recruiting scoutmasters)
- Make sure all parent volunteer positions are filled by competent and willing people.

Review

Troop Leadership (whole chapter)
Scoutmastership Fundamentals: Scaffolding
Troop Organization: The Troop Committee.

October

Traditional Events

One or two troop weekend campouts. Hiking & biking are favorites; Council camporee possible.

Haunted House “fun night”

Troop Court of Honor (first weekend, if not at end of September)

Checklist

- Do a shepherd’s meeting.
- Follow-up on TLC subcommittees to finish before PLC.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL’s, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents’ Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for November & December troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for November & December fun nights.
- Set PLC dates for November & December.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for November, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for November & December trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for November troop meetings.
- Make reservations & begin securing equipment for winter Venture outing.
- Send Venture winter outing information pack with signup and deposit schedule.

Review

Outings & Trips: Outdoor Clothing & Equipment, Proper Preparation
Scoutmastership Fundamentals: Working with parents

November

Traditional Events

Troop Bad-Weather campout (end of fall “theme” program).
Indoor fun-nights (Whirly Ball, etc.)
TLC Spring & Summer planning session
End-of-fall gear check & cleanup

Checklist

- Do a shepherd's meeting, especially if not done in October.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner included events through early January in case there's no December newsletter because of holiday.
- Make any necessary reservations for December & January troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for December & January fun nights.
- Set PLC dates for December & January.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for December, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for December & January trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for December & January troop meetings.
- Set gear check/clean date with quartermaster(s).
- Make sure inventory in place for refurbishment & repair (extra tent stakes, K-tape, cleaning supplies, etc.).
- Set work crews for equipment clean date, and adult to record damage/loss for billing on tents, etc.
- Set date for December Advancement Night
- Obtain multiple copies of Campmor Catalog
- Distribute Campmor catalog, order information & deadlines, and suggested purchases to parents & boys.
- Get commitments & deposits from Venture crew for winter trip participation. Begin equipment checks. Finalize reservations.

Review

Outings & Trips: Group Gear, Spring City Trip
Recruiting & Retaining Boys: Retention.

December

Traditional Events

End-of-Semester advancement night
Ice Skating fun night
Early-season “up north” cabin ski weekend
Domino’s Christmas Lights fund-raiser
End-of-semester slide show and Xmas “final meeting”
After-Christmas Venture winter trip

Checklist

- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL’s, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents’ Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner if possible this month.
- Make any necessary reservations for January & February troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for January & February fun nights.
- Set PLC (or TLC) dates for January & February.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for January, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for January & February trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for January troop meetings.
- Get crew to put together slide show several days before final meeting.
- Mail final Venture trip information to parents.
- Decide on whether you’ll have new SPL & Patrol Leader elections in January, and set date if yes.
- Collect Campmor orders and payments & send group order to arrive before Christmas.
- Distribute Campmor order and determine final billing for treasurer.
- Arrange complementary Auto Show tickets for January.

Review

Troop Leadership: Troop Elections
Program & Awards: Rank Advancement, Scout Spirit
Outings & Trips: Car Transportation

January

Traditional Events

Downhill and/or x-country ski weekend cabin campout.
Patrol Leader & SPL elections if needed
Ski/sled day trips
Detroit Auto Show Saturday fun-day.

Checklist

- Shepherd's meeting early in month. Start pushing potential Eagles who will need to do projects in the spring.
- Get SPL to mail 50-50 rule violation termination letters.
- Get with Committee Chair to finalize roster, etc. for rechartering.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for February & March troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for February & March fun nights.
- Set PLC dates for February & March.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for February, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for February & March trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for February & March troop meetings.
- Recruit boys to run for election.
- Conduct mini Junior Leader Training for newly elected boys.
- Procure complementary Auto Show tickets in advance.
- Make sure Troop Committee has finalized arrangements for Spring City trip and telephoners begin taking reservations from families.
- Make sure Committee Chairman puts advertisements in parish bulletin for St. Thomas & St. Mary's for assistant scoutmasters. Find out if any potential volunteers have called the council recently.
- Send letter to cubmasters of Pack 8 and "unaffiliated" webelo programs.
- Put together Troop 8 recruiting slide show.
- Obtain summer camp promotional material.

Review

Troop Organization: The Council
Troop Leadership: Troop Meetings, Service Projects.
Program & Awards: Working with prospective Eagle Scouts.

February

Traditional Events

Troop Court of Honor
Polar Bear campout/winter finale
Meeting visits by webelo packs.

Checklist

- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for March & April troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for March & April fun nights.
- Set PLC dates for March & April.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for March, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for March & April trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for March & April troop meetings.
- Set meeting dates for webelo visits. Run slide show and get names & addresses.
- "Lock down" Venture summer trip reservations.
- Distribute Venture summer trip information & promo to current crew members.
- Distribute summer camp promo materials and information.
- Begin determining potential new Venture crew members.
- Make strong effort to get kids who are "close" on Merit Badges and Ranks to finish.
- Set & arrange advancement night during week before court of honor.
- Make appointment with Advancement Chairman to confirm & verify awards.
- Get with SPL & PL's to plan court of honor ceremony.
- Confirm with troop telephoners & SPL mom that potluck arrangements and calls to all families are in place for court of honor.
- Confirm Newsletter person is printing Court of Honor program.
- Confirm Committee Chair is getting room key for Court of Honor room.

Review

Recruiting & Retaining Boys: Recruiting
Troop Organization: The Venture Program
Outings & Trips: Trip Logistics & Planning

March

Traditional Events

Spring City Trip
More Webelo Troop visits
Meetings at Mack Pool - include webelos

Checklist

- Do shepherd's meeting.
- Arrange Eagle project reviews for boys planning spring projects.
- Confirm w/committee everything arranged for spring city trip, pancake breakfast.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for April & May troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make arrangements for May crossover campout, including rain date.
- Make reservations for June "father/son" canoe trip.
- Make any necessary reservations for April, May & June (Tiger's game) fun nights.
- Set PLC dates for April & May.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for April, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for April & May trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for April troop meetings.
- Make preliminary determination of potential new Venture crew members.
- Conduct Order of the Arrow elections at a meeting.
- Set date & make arrangements for spring equipment cleanup & checkout.
- Get summer camp deposits by end of month & mail.
- Mail follow-up letters to potential webelo recruits & parents; put on mailing list.
- Have scout leadership call each potential webelo recruit and invite to March "webelos welcome" event.

Review

Troop Organization: Adding New Adult Leaders, The Catholic Church, and Troop Finances
Outings & Trips: Emergency Procedures, Trip & Camping Rules, Summer Camp

April

Traditional Events

Pancake Breakfast Fund-Raiser
Parish grounds cleanup service project
Early-season day canoe or bike trips
Dayton/Wright Patterson campout and HAM Radio fest (biannual)

Checklist

- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for May, June, & July troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for May, June, & July fun nights and day trips.
- Set PLC dates for May and June.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for May, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for May and June trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for May troop meetings.
- Confirm arrangements for May crossover.
- Keep a close eye on potential "new" Venture crew candidates.
- Mail Venture summer trip pre-trip schedule to returning crew members and "for sure" or "likely" new members.
- Hold an advancement night.
- Mail New Scout Packet & crossover information to potential webelo recruits at end of month.
- Confirm Committee Chairman has placed advertisements for assistant scoutmasters in the parish bulletins.

Review

Recruiting and Retaining Boys: New Scout Signup, Webelo Crossover
Outings & Trips: Proper Preparation for Trips, River Travel Technique.
Troop Leadership: Other Special Activities

May

Traditional Events

Webelos Crossover Campout
Canoe & biking trips

Checklist

- Do Shepherd's Meeting.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Make any necessary reservations for June, July, & August troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for June, July, & August fun nights and day trips.
- Set PLC dates for June & July.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for June, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for June, July & August trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for June & July troop meetings.
- Make "final cut" on new Venture Crew members. Secure first deposit for summer trip if not yet done.
- Collect final payments for summer camp & mail.
- Make final arrangements for "perfect" webelo crossover campout.
- Set up date(s) for New Parent Conferences.
- Set date(s) for pre-summer camp orientation campouts for new boys.

Review

Outings & Trips: The TCP and Trail Technique
Troop Leadership: Setting up Patrols
Recruiting & Retaining Boys: The New Parent Conference

June

Traditional Events

New Parents Orientation Meeting(s)
Father's Day/end-of-school weekend canoe trip
Tiger's Baseball game & fireworks Friday.
Troop Court of Honor

Checklist

- Finalize arrangements, call to remind parents, and then conduct new parent orientation meeting.
- Follow-up with parents who did not make the orientation meeting.
- Get total of webelos/new scouts coming to summer camp. Collect payments and notify camp.
- Collect medical forms for summer camp & Venture Trip.
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner.
- Finalize reservations, trip leaders, etc. for all summer events.
- Make reservations for Labor Day weekend picnic and August (or September) Junior Leader Training.
- Get requests from old boys on who they would like to patrol with.
- Get SPL to mail 50-50 violation letters.
- Decide new patrols.
- Meet with boys to discuss summer camp activities & plan individual merit badge programs.
- Make strong effort to get kids who are "close" on Merit Badges and Ranks to finish.
- Set & arrange advancement night during week before court of honor.
- Make appointment with Advancement Chairman to confirm & verify awards.
- Get with SPL & PL's to plan court of honor ceremony.
- Confirm with troop telephoners & SPL mom that potluck arrangements and calls to all families are in place for court of honor.
- Confirm Newsletter person is printing Court of Honor program.
- Confirm Committee Chair is getting room key for Court of Honor room.

Review

Outings & Trips: Proper Preparation - adults, Minimum Impact Camping
Troop Leadership: Setting up patrols
Program and Awards: Boards of Review

July

Traditional Events

New boy orientation campouts
Summer Camp
New SPL & PL elections (at summer camp?)
Final Venture pre-trips

Checklist

- Do Shepherd's Meeting.
- Final follow-ups with new parents who have not yet done parent orientation meeting. (Must do or boy can't keep coming).
- Get with SPL at least a week before PLC to set agenda.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of meeting a week in advance.
- Compose Parents' Meeting report.
- Assure Scout Newsletter proofed, assembled, and mailed in timely manner. Include events through early September because there's no newsletter in August.
- Finalize arrangements for August/early September Junior Leader training.
- Make any necessary reservations for September troop events & fun nights.
- Set TLC date for early September.
- Set Newsletter compilation date for September, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.

Review

Scoutmastership Fundamentals: Working with kids
Program & Awards: Merit Badges

August

Traditional Events

Venture Expedition
Family vacations (limited troop program)
No PLC or newsletter.
No Parents' Meeting.
Junior Leader Training (end of month)

Checklist

- Get with Scoutmasters at least a week before Junior Leader Training to set program.
- Call PL's, etc. to remind of JLT a week in advance.
- Make any necessary reservations for September troop events, and set equipment check dates.
- Make any necessary reservations for September fun nights.
- Arrange Bivouac discount night for September.
- Finalize TLC date for early September.
- Confirm Newsletter compilation date for September, and article deadline date before that. Recruit articles.
- Assign trip leaders for September trips.
- Assign meeting instructors/leaders for September troop meetings.
- Put together "big, fun" regular meeting to kick off new year after August vacations.
- Get SPL to mail 50-50 violation letters at end of month.

Review

Troop Leadership: PLC's TLC's, etc., Junior Leader Training.
Outings & Trips: Labor Day Picnic
Scoutmastership Fundamentals: Becoming a Scoutmaster, Structure

Appendix B: Master Forms

Throughout the text you've seen copies of the many forms we use for everything from the packet we send to potential new scouts to the master script we re-work for every Eagle court of honor.

Well, here they are again! All nice, neat, and done on white paper so that you can use them as reproduction masters if you have to. Remember, there should be digital versions of these floating around in someone's computer somewhere in the troop, and updating them every now and again is a good idea.



