

Troop 33 - Parents' and New Leaders Guide to a Scout-Led Troop

Introduction

Welcome to Troop 33! Whether you have just crossed over with your son from Cub Scouts or just joined Boy Scouts, we appreciate your enthusiasm and thank you for joining our troop ohana. We strive to develop character and independence in our Scouts through citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness. To accomplish these aims, Scouting employs methods such as: the patrol method, outdoor education, advancement, working with adults, leadership development, forward planning, and the uniform. We encourage you become a part of our troop, participating when an opportunity presents itself to you or when you identify an area where you may be able to assist.

Scout-led

One of the major differences between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts is the very important method of leadership development. In order to teach leadership, you have to let the scouts lead. In fact, one of the more vigorous debates you can have in Scouting is over the feasibility of a scout-led troop. Some adult leaders will argue that while a scout-led troop is the BSA ideal, it's not possible in their particular troop for any or all of the following reasons: the scouts are too young, too busy, too irresponsible, or just not interested. A scout-led troop can be a messy process, littered with challenges, inefficiencies, and failures. And therein lies the problem; and our need for your cooperation, help, and understanding. The process of Scouts learning leadership is iterative. It is meant to look like we are recreating the wheel, going through the unsuccessful, as well as the hopeful iterations, to end up with a working wheel at the end of the process. While it is so much easier for the adults to just take charge themselves than to teach the necessary leadership skills to the scouts, this will ultimately hamper the Scouts' development. One example is when your Scout comes to you as a parent about what is going on or what to do. While it is easiest to tell them the answer or find out for them, it would be more helpful to respond with, "Did you ask your Patrol Leader?" Or, "How can you find that out?" Another example could be a Scout who is not liking how an activity may be going. A possible response may be, "How would you want to do it differently? Have you spoken with you Patrol Leader or the Senior Patrol Leader?" Answering their questions with a (guiding) question may frustrate them a bit, but ultimately helps enforce the Patrol Method.

Troop 33 strives to foster a Scout-led Troop. However putting that into practice is often difficult and can be very subjective in regards to how much help is too much help. This guide will hopefully bridge the gap between theory and practice. The importance of a scout-led troop and patrol is emphasized in two chapters of the Scoutmaster's Handbook; chapter 3 "The Boy-Led Troop" starts with this strong statement:

"Empowering boys to be leaders is the core of Scouting. Scouts learn by doing, and what they do is lead their patrols and their troop. The boys themselves develop a troop program, then take responsibility for figuring out how they will achieve the goals. One of our most important challenges is to train boy leaders to run the troop by providing direction, coaching and support. The boys will make mistakes now and then and will rely upon the adult leaders to guide them. But only through real hands-on experience as leaders can boys learn to lead."

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As mentioned before, perhaps the most common reason for the existence of adult-led troops is that it is easier for the experienced adult leaders to run things; teaching leadership to scouts is not easy. A second common reason is that the adult leaders may be afraid of failure; they want a smooth-running troop. A scout-led project will occasionally falter, and adults may feel it necessary to take over to ensure success. A third is that the troop may have adult leaders that do not delegate well (Grant Tokumi = guilty), and do not wish to give up control. In fact, many consider that the main barriers to a scout-led troop come from the attitudes within the adult leadership.

Always Rigidly Flexible

This guide is meant more as guidelines than actual rules. Just as every troop, scout, adult leader, and parent is different, what works best is not always the same. Also what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. We do not want change for the sake of change, but to meet the changing needs of the troop.

The Parent Involvement

Parent support and involvement is essential. Unlike the full parent involvement in Cub Scouts, parents are asked to become much less involved with their own child and more within the structure of the troop as a committee member or assistant Scoutmaster to help provide the framework upon which the Scouts' activities are based and to provide the buffer to protect the Scouts from harm when (not if) they make a mistake.

Parents coming on outings are required to complete the on-line **Youth Protection training (YPT)** to understand the behavior that BSA asks of all adults. The Scoutmaster will occasionally meet with ALL parents to share his/her vision for a successful troop and to involve the parents in accomplishing the troop's goals.

The Troop Committee

The troop committee is like a steering committee—volunteers who actually handle the business end of running the troop.” From the Scoutmaster Handbook: “The most important responsibility of a troop committee is recruiting qualified adult leaders for the troop.” “The Scoutmaster should be able to turn to the committee at any time for assistance, support, and encouragement.” The Committee helps ensure that the Troop's activities comply with the guidelines and ethos of our partner organizations: Boy Scouts of America, Aloha Council, Manoa School APT, and other groups (i.e. Manoa Japanese School, Manoa Valley Church). The troop committee does not run the troop. That is for the Scoutmaster to train the scouts to do.

Adult-led Symptoms and Impacts

Adults loudly asserting authority

Adults yelling at the scouts in front of the troop is one characteristic of an adult-led troop where the adults have not transferred authority to the youth. Yelling at the scouts has a toxic effect on the supportive atmosphere we want to nurture in a troop. We use the Scout hand sign as a silent way to bring the troop to order for this very reason.

Also, the scouts never learn to lead if the adults dominate. The only time an adult

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should step in is if there is an immediate safety threat. Otherwise, there is time to work through the youth leadership chain of command. The only way for scouts to learn leadership is to actually hand them the reins of power, with plenty of instruction of course.

Adults jumping in with more enthusiasm than patience

Volunteers who take charge of a situation are usually a good thing except when they preempt the scouts' responsibilities. It is hard to wait for a scout to initiate something that you could handle better in much less time. However if you do something for someone, they will not learn the skill. Adults already know how; scouts still need to learn. Scout meetings and outings should provide a hassle-free environment in which to learn leadership. We are a learning organization, scouts must learn from their own mistakes. Better yet: learn from others' mistakes. Adults can help by being a grunt worker along-side the scouts and setting a good example while they are doing their tasks. Adults usually handle setup and breakdown of the adult equipment, such as the cleanup of the equipment and food under the adult fly.

Adults operating in Cub Pack mode

Parents crossing over with their scouts can often feel more comfortable slightly modifying the structure they know from Cub Scouts rather than to adopt the changes demanded by a scout-led Boy Scout program. They continue the parent-child authority structure and don't hand power over to the scouts. This leads to an extension of the parent-child relationship into the teen years when the youth should be transitioning to independence.

Adults enabling codependency

Parents of scouting age scouts are often comfortable with the roles they have established with their young children. They organize the program and the scouts follow along. But the scouts remain in a dependent role. Very young Scouts may be comfortable with a dependent role for a while. Adults feel useful and scouts don't have to put out much effort. The troop operates like an adult-run outing club. But as the scouts grow older, their lack of control of the program begins to chafe.

Adults contributing to older scout attrition

Scouts can stay dependents only so long before they rebel from imposed adult authority. Adults giving the scouts more control over outings can help solve an older scout attrition problem.

Scouting trains scouts in life skills. Removing "scout-led" from the program removes an extremely important aspect of Scouting: leadership and teamwork. Scouts need to practice team leadership in the safe environment that Scouting provides. Without this practice, they are less prepared to enter the workforce, where mistakes have significant consequences.

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Scout-led Advantages

Scouts learn critical planning skills

When adults involve the scouts in the process of planning an outing, the scouts take ownership of the outing. Scouts need to learn how to set achievable goals. For example, planning a backpacking trip can start with an instructional on backpacking 1 month prior to the event as an outline to make them aware of the basics, and followed up with patrol leaders providing further guidance to individual patrol members as needed. Including the scouts in the process allows the adults to teach the logistics of planning: setting goals and objectives; breaking the project into smaller tasks and determine deadlines when they need to get done; assigning responsibilities to individual team members; considering and planning for contingencies; putting the plan into action and tracking progress; evaluating the outcome and modifying the plan.

Scouts learn to lead in a safe environment.

Leadership is not only knowing what you need to do to succeed but also knowing what to do if things go wrong. The adult leaders are responsible for maintaining a non-confrontational environment by letting the scouts know the adults support them, and will be available if needed. Adults minimize the fear of failure by maintaining a supportive environment.

Scouts learn from mistakes

It is hard to watch a task proceeding poorly, but if a scout-led troop meeting does not go as planned, there is no great loss. If a meal on a camp-out does not work out, it becomes a learning experience, a teachable moment to show how one responds to mistakes and still shows respect for others (not to mention a great story at the next camp!). It is very important to meet after each activity with the scout leadership to help them conduct a Start, Stop, Continue evaluation (SPL Handbook p. 97). How could this activity have been done better? Good judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from learning from your mistakes.

Scouts learn to lead others and work in teams.

Working well with others is perhaps the most important life skill that youth can learn. Scouts gain confidence by being entrusted with power and in leading their peers. The youth leader learns that their leadership style needs to change from Explaining, to Demonstrating, to Guiding, and finally to Enabling as the group develops into a working team (EDGE Method).

Scouts learn respect when treated with respect

Adults should show respect by not interrupting or criticizing the youth leadership during a troop meeting, no matter how badly things may be going. Instead, the adults should praise youth leaders in public when they do well, which helps boost both their confidence and the troop's faith in them. If the troop believes in their Senior Patrol Leader, they will treat him with respect and listen to him more readily, which in turn makes the troop run more smoothly. The time for critique is after the meeting, in private. Sadly, it is much more difficult to build up confidence in others than to tear it down. The adults will earn the respect of the scouts by their actions and example, not by demand.

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Conclusion

Welcome to the Troop 33 ohana. I consider all the scouts and parents an extension of my own family. Scouting brings together people from all kinds of varying backgrounds, personalities, and upbringings. Once we get to know each other, we can lean on each other for help in areas that we can offer. I look forward towards our continuing journey together with the common goal of guiding our scouts to be strong, independent, and productive members of society.

If you have any questions or want to discuss anything, feel free to reach out to me anytime.

Yours in Scouting,

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References:

Scudder, P, Boy-Led Troop - Parents and New Leaders Guide to a Boy Led Troop, <<http://scoutmaster.org/Boy%20Led%20Troop.pdf>>