

Tips for encouraging a large troop to be boy-led

Illustrations by Bill Basso

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Readers respond to a unit committee member who asked how a troop of 100 boys might provide Scouts with opportunities to lead when adults find it easier to assume the leadership roles.

When adults in the troop take over, they do a disservice to the troop and the boys. Their role should be to advise and guide the Scout leaders but never actually lead the troop.

I also suggest that the troop use the expertise of older Scouts in mentoring relationships with younger Scouts. This will help to get more Scouts trained to be leaders and allow older Scouts to stay involved in leadership positions.

M.Y.

Fort Collins, Colo.



Adult leaders and parents need to understand that if they step in and take over, boys will retreat from leadership.

Whether a troop has 10 Scouts or 100, the process begins with the Scoutmaster, who should understand, and be committed to, boy leadership. He should be trained and, ideally, have taken the Wood Badge course.

Secondly, you can't expect Scouts to lead if they've never experienced a boy-led troop and are not trained to lead. Our troop provides twice yearly half-day junior leader training sessions for patrol leaders and troop guides.

Patrol leaders are trained in the fundamentals of leadership and learn the skills to manage a patrol. The senior patrol leader and assistant senior patrol leaders are trained to lead a patrol leaders' council (PLC) meeting, a troop meeting, and camp-outs.

As Scoutmaster, I refresh this training with five-minute leadership training reviews at every PLC meeting and camp-out.

Adults should be gently reminded not to do what a Scout can do and to tell the Scoutmaster or assistant Scoutmaster if something needs to be done. He can advise the senior patrol leader of the problem and let him use his patrol leaders to the best effect.

Scoutmaster B.D.

Manchester, Mo.

If adult leaders step in with the misunderstanding that they are helping, they are actually depriving the Scout of a key method of Scouting—leadership development. (It is a common source of frustration for any adult to watch a young man struggle with leadership, and this is true of Scout troops of any size.)

A Scoutmaster's guidance is essential for good troop leadership. But being a good Scoutmaster means that you have to let Scouts not only succeed but also fail. Teach them to learn from both their successes and failures. And always remember: Never do for a boy what a boy can do for himself.

M.L.

Lilburn, Ga.

The problem is with the adults, not the youth. Scouts can lead—and will do so—if allowed. Re-read *The Scoutmaster Handbook* about the patrol leaders' council to see what should be done. The most frequent response an adult should provide to a Scout's question is: *Have you asked your patrol leader?*

This approach will change the thinking of adults. It will show who is running the show and demonstrate trust in the patrol leader and other Scout leaders.

It is the start of moving the troop toward how it should be.
Scoutmaster J.H.
Plano, Tex.

The key word in the question is "easier." It is probably true that most adults will make decisions faster, have more ideas, and lead better because of their experience.

But the adults should back off and let the Scouts lead, allowing them to plan and make decisions. Adults should do this even though Scout leadership may take longer, some decisions may not be the best ones, and mistakes may be made. How else are the Scouts to learn leadership if they aren't given the opportunity?

The senior patrol leader and other members of the patrol leaders' council will need help learning leadership skills. Assign an assistant Scoutmaster as adviser-trainer of the PLC. Conduct training as often as necessary, send members of the PLC to junior leader training, and after each troop meeting, review the meeting with the PLC.
D.J.
Howards Grove, Wis.

Our troop uses its great adult supporters as "patrol advisers." They are there only for counseling and to ensure that things are being done correctly and safely. Patrol advisers do not give answers but instead help the boys think "outside the box."
C.B.
Lafayette, La.

We have a 100-plus boy troop with an active committee and extremely involved parents. (Sometimes the parents are too involved, but they are vitally necessary to manage such a large troop.)

However, the Scouting experience requires that the boys run the organization.

We have between five and eight assistant senior patrol leaders. Depending on troop needs, they have specific jobs in managing the troop and report to the senior patrol leader. Each ASPL has an adult committee member he can contact with problems or questions.

When a Scout earns Star rank, he has the opportunity to join what we call the troop leadership corps. This large group of our highest-ranked Scouts fills all our troop leadership positions and provides troop guides for the younger patrols.

Our Scouts are chomping at the bit to hold a leadership position. But because a little power can be dangerous, our Scoutmaster goes to great lengths to instruct new Scout leaders on the proper use of their new authority.
A.K.M.
San Antonio, Tex.

My husband had a similar problem when he became Scoutmaster of a troop of about 80 boys. Many assistant Scoutmasters had found it easier to do jobs themselves rather than have Scouts do them.

My husband informed the adult leaders that the troop was now going to be “boy-run.” Some embraced the idea, others were skeptical, but my husband persevered.

Now the boys plan outings and meetings and are expected to make them work. Of course, some meetings and outings look like complete chaos, but that is O.K. Every mistake made by a Scout in charge is considered a learning experience.

S.W.

York, Pa.

The BSA offers plenty of training programs for Scout leaders. The troop committee chairman should be sure the troop is taking advantage of them.

Yes, it is easier for the adults to take over leadership, but our goal is to train Scouts to become leaders.

Assistant District Commissioner L.B.

Brazil, Ind.

When our troop grew in the 1990’s to well over 70 Scouts, I found that the patrol method developed by Baden-Powell works for both small and large troops.

However, we made some alterations in the troop leadership plan:

- The Scouts elect a senior patrol leader in the spring but he does not take office until September. That gives him three months to work with the patrol leaders’ council to plan the annual troop program. It also gives me time to work with him on expectations.
- The SPL appoints an assistant senior patrol leader for every two patrols. The ASPLs go to patrol meetings, help the patrols at troop meetings, and generally support their patrol leaders.
- To get more leaders, we use Scouts called troop instructors. They are members of patrols and are assigned an instruction period during troop meetings.

We usually have four to six instructions going on at the same time, and this allows many Scouts an opportunity to lead during a month.

Scoutmaster D.W.

Brodheadsville, Pa.

Stuck in the Troop Meeting Rut?

June 10, 2014 By Clarke Green

Like Hannibal Smith “I love it when a plan comes together” and I think planning is an important skill, but the repetition of the same plan, over and over again, can wear a rut in the floor.

Somewhere in the dim, dark past the Troop meeting plan was created; preopening 10 minutes, opening 5 minutes, instruction 20 minutes, patrol meeting 20 minutes, game 20 minutes, closing 5 minutes.

There’s a lot Scouts can get out of meetings that follow a predictable plan, but there’s also room for breaking the mold now and again. Breakout meetings can be just for fun, but any savvy group of Scouts can build in lots of skill-based elements to help Scouts advance.

With a little imagination, your Patrol Leader’s council can plan something new, here’s a few ideas;

Trek Meetings

Get out and about! If your regular meeting place isn’t ideally situated for a trek think about using a local park or other open location.

Challenge Trail

Patrols begin at the meeting place and follow a map that takes them to different destinations where an activity is planned (a skill demonstration, game, or challenge) and loops back to the meeting place.

Scavenger Trail

Patrols are given a list of locations and or objects to find in the area around the meeting place. They can take a snapshot of the item or answer a descriptive question to prove they've found it.

Man Hunt

Several people have become lost in the neighborhood of the meeting place. Here's where they were last seen, what they were wearing and what they were doing, the patrol who rescues them (a couple may need to be carried on a stretcher!) wins.

Covert Operations

Your Patrol must arrive at the rendezvous point marked on this map in 30 minutes without being detected by the agents dispersed throughout the area. You lose ten points each time an agent detects and photographs your patrol. The agents are equipped with cameras, and report to the rendezvous point in 30 minutes to tally the score for the winning patrol.

Beat the Clock

A race to move your patrol (with their backpacks, a stretcher or what have you) from point A on the map to point B.

Maker Meetings

Set aside the whole meeting time to make something useful or something fun. The choices are endless but here are a few suggestions:

1. Paracord bracelets or neckerchief slides.
2. Fire starters
3. Kites
4. Pioneering projects
5. Hiking Sticks
6. First aid/survival kits.

Campfires

Build fires and cook dinner, end with a campfire program.

Parent's Open House

Each patrol prepares a couple of demonstrations, games or events that parents can participate in.

Inter-Patrol Scoutmaster's Challenge

Every so often we dedicate one Troop meeting to an Inter-Patrol Scoutmaster's Challenge; an evening of skill, spirit and leadership competition. Here's the details.

Do those ideas get the wheels turning? At your next patrol leader's council meeting ask the Scouts what ideas they have for getting out of the troop meeting rut.

Let me know what they come up with, and share your ideas in the comments below. Caution: once you start breaking the mold, you may never get back in!