

# Are you delivering the Promise?

BSA brochure 18-251, 1993 printing.

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## Are You Delivering the Promise?

The first acquisition a new Scout is likely to make is his personal copy of the Boy Scout Handbook. The pages fast become dogeared because of constant use. The handbook is a book of dreams, dreams of "Adventure ... hiking along trails ... canoeing across misty lakes ... a patrol bike-hike ... [a] plunge into a cool mountain lake." It also talks of being prepared to help others, and of the values Scouting stands for. It tells a new Scout that he will have a voice in how his troop operates, and may even have the opportunity to lead.

Boy Scouting is a great program that yearly attracts almost one million young men. How do we fulfill the promise for these Scouts? Do we provide a program in which boys can truly be leaders and be involved in shaping their future and the future of others around them? Do we provide a program that is exciting and challenging, one that every Scout wants to tell his friends about? This brochure will give you an idea of how successful troops "fulfill the promise." It also provides some suggestions on how you, too, can fulfill the promise for the Scouts in your community. Only you, and the leadership of your troop can determine whether your troop is fulfilling the promise. To do this, you will have to ask some hard questions and answer them honestly.

In the past year, the Boy Scouts of America has surveyed thousands of Scoutmasters. Hundreds of Scouts and Scoutmasters have been interviewed. From this information, we have been able to determine a number of attributes common to successful troops.

You may ask, what is considered a successful troop? This is a good question. The ultimate answer is probably a troop where a boy feels that the promise has been fulfilled. Since that feeling is hard to quantify, we focused on some program items that relate to the promise. We first looked at the level of program planning in the troop and the amount of youth involvement in the

process. We examined key ingredients such as troop elections, junior leader training opportunities, and the frequency of patrol leaders' council meetings. We sought information on the outdoor program. We checked the level of training of the leaders, and even how many assistant Scoutmasters were active in the troop. We evaluated troop meetings to make sure all Scouts were being involved. We asked the troops if they were Quality Units.

We received a lot of useful information. Most of it you have heard before: Good troops do things by the book; they go camping frequently, and have lots of quality adult and boy leadership. What we did find was that as a troop grew in size, the number of quality indicators also increased. It's the old chicken-or-egg problem: Which came first, the size or the quality? The fact is, good troops with good programs serve a large number of Scouts. In fact, once a troop reaches twenty-one Scouts, the level of quality changes significantly.

So let's talk about how we can help you get your troop to grow. Growth will come when you deliver the promise to your current members and have a workable plan to attract new members. Focus on the elements that follow.

## **Adult Leadership**

Let's say you have a troop of 8 Scouts, three adult members on the committee, an assistant Scoutmaster, and a Scoutmaster. First of all, some bad news: In a recent study, 72 percent of troops that dropped had five or fewer adults. We certainly don't want you adding to the statistics, so how do you get more adults?

The best troops have a high ratio of active adults to Scouts. It is not unusual to see, for every two scouts, one adult working with the troop committee or serving as an assistant scoutmaster. The primary reason most adults are involved is because they enjoy the fellowship with the other adults in the troop. They all have responsibilities in the troop, which gives them a purpose -- a lofty one -- of helping young men grow. That's great, you say, but I have this troop with kids from single parent households, or from two-parent households where both parents are wage earners, and these parents just don't have the time. In many cases, the parents of the Scouts in the best troops don't have any more time to devote to Scouting than other parents. They *make* the time because it's important, it has a purpose, and being with the other adults is fun. Maybe that's where you should start. Why not have a fun activity just for parents? Give them the opportunity to get to know each other and find out what they have in common -- Scouting, maybe? Strive for their help in planning some fun activity for them and their son, or for the entire family. You may have to put more effort into recruiting Mom and Dad than you did into recruiting their son.

## Outdoor Program

Everyone we talked to said that the reason young people join Scouting is for the adventure in the outdoors. When asked about their camping record, 66 percent of larger troops said they went camping twenty-five or more days a year. More than 93 percent went to a Boy Scout-operated summer camp. In many cases, it didn't stop there; these troops were also participating in the national high-adventure programs, climbing mountains or swimming in the sea. Most successful troops don't just have an outdoor program; they have outdoor adventures, developed with imagination and many other resources. The most important attribute of these troops is that they kept their promise to provide outdoor experiences for their boys. They planned, prepared, and carried out the activity as promised. Yes, we hear you, Scoutmaster with the eight-boy troop and five adults. You say you don't have the resources to do this kind of program?

Have you every thought of going to Philmont? The Philmont crew size is only eight. The idea might generate enough excitement among your Scouts and parents that *they* would make it happen. Then you would have parents involved, Scouts commitment, and a great outdoor adventure ahead. But you don't have to plan a big trip, it could be a small one. The key is to involve everyone from boys to parents in making the trip successful. Preparation gives purpose to troop meetings and outings. Developing the troop's resources, from dollars to equipment, becomes a prime objective for the troop committee. It brings all the resources to bear on a single objective, and also develops a team spirit that makes a troop successful. It sets a standard of excellence in program that will be continued.

## Boy Leadership

This is where the real difference begins. To quote a Scoutmaster we interviewed, "Small troops are run by adults and large troops are run by boys." Sixty-one percent of larger troops plan troop program in the patrol leaders' council, versus only 16 percent of the smaller troops. Seventy-one percent conduct monthly patrol leaders' council meetings, the foundation of our democratic process, while only 26 percent of the smaller troops make this happen. How do you, the Scoutmaster of the eight-boy troop, make the patrol method work? At best, you will have only two patrol leaders and one senior patrol leader in the patrol leaders' council. It's hard to get the group dynamics working with only three Scouts. What is the solution? More Scouts!

## The Image of Scouting

These surveys we have been talking about have also given us lots of information about our youth market. We found out which radio stations Scouts listen to (hard rock and classic rock lead the way). We learned that what most influenced them to buy a product was a friend who had the product and, after that, television. (By the way, they watch television an average of two hours a day and listen to radio the same amount of time.) The average income for the boys interviewed is \$31.78 a week. These young men are knowledgeable consumers and are selective in the products they buy.

How does this relate to Boy Scouting? When asked what they thought about Scouting, many of the responses were not very positive. They used terms such as "nerdy," "geeky," and "goody-goody." They viewed our program as more Cub Scouting. In fact, in one seventh-grade classroom, the students described a program with race cars and crafts as the Boy Scout program. Scouting was viewed as not being "cool." Scouting has obviously gotten a bad rap, and as one Scout said, "They [non-Scouts] believe the rumors."

What can we do to attract more young men into our Boy Scout troops? Some of the Scouts surveyed put it very well: We either "change their attitude" or "change our reputation." To do this will take some imagination on your part as Scoutmaster. As was stated earlier, these young men are knowledgeable consumers. They are looking for the best products to spend their money on, and for where they can get the most satisfaction for the time they spend. If you offer "the best show in town," a top-notch program with outdoor adventures that gives young men an opportunity to control their own program, then you have a greater chance of attracting this market. Satisfaction with Scouting is also a key ingredient in attracting other Scouts. Remember that what most influences these young people to buy a product is a friend who has the product. When young men join your troop and *don't* have a successful experience, they are likely to tell others and discourage them from trying our program, no matter how attractive we make it.

Satisfaction with Scouting brings up another interesting issue. In discussions with Scouts, we found that few were willing to reveal openly that they were Scouts. They might tell their closest friends, who usually are in Scouts anyway, but few let it be known at school. To demonstrate this, one Scout said, "Wearing the uniform to school would ruin your reputation." Others talked about being ridiculed. Scouts are not willing to promote the program to potential Scouts. We have lost our greatest source of influence. How do we get it back?

Somehow, we need to help our current "customers" feel good about being Scouts. This is an excellent problem to pose to your patrol leaders' council, or to the whole troop. Use the problem-solving model in the *Scoutmaster Handbook*. Use empathy to understand why the Scouts feel the way they do. Why won't they let their classmates know they are in Scouting? Discover the roadblocks to be overcome. Then use invention to explore ways to overcome the roadblocks. Then use selection to determine the best ways to help Scouts overcome their reluctance to discuss our program with other young people.

There are no easy answers. The important thing is that your Scouts understand that one way they can change the reputation of Scouting is to tell others about the positive experiences they are having. Remember what our survey said: "The thing that most influenced a friend to buy [use] a product [Scouting] was a friend who had [was] the product [a Scout]."

Improving the product image with current scouts is definitely a step in the right direction, but it's not the only answer. The Boy Scouts of America is 83 years old this year. We have a reputation with the general public. To quote another Scoutmaster, "It is the image often seen in a Norman Rockwell print." We are "Mom and apple pie." We are "goody-goody." We still believe in God and remain a values-based program. This is who we are. It is a message that every parent in America needs to hear.

What we need is a public relations campaign aimed at parents to remind them who we are. Is this the responsibility of the National Council exclusively? No. The National Council has initiated a number of positive public service announcements, titled "Scouting Because...." These PSAs are aimed at both the youth and adult markets. There have also been major articles in *Redbook* and *Sports Afield* magazines. Additionally, the National Council has provided for your Council a marketing resource kit that contains many how-to's for supporting the Scouting program.

But what have you done in your community or neighborhood to remind parents of the benefits of the Scouting program? When is the last time your troop was featured in the local news? At whom was the message of the article targeted? (Adults, not children, read newspapers and watch television news.) Was the activity featured an exciting one? Did it communicate to parents why their son should be in Scouting? Did it depict the educational or service aspects of Scouting? Is your troop presenting a positive image? Are your Scouts in full, proper uniform? When outdoors, are your Scouts courteous and respectful of others? Do you leave no trace on campouts? Do you provide your Scouts opportunities for service?

Perhaps you should consider asking a member of the troop committee to coordinate a public relations program for the troop. Parents need to hear about our values-based program, but what about young people?

Currently, more than 70 percent of new Boy Scouts are coming from Webelos Scout dens. As the leader of your troop, you need to do everything you can to maintain and enhance this relationship with Cub Scout packs and Webelos Scout dens in your community. Make sure every den has a den chief, a quality Scout who understands younger children and whom they will want to emulate. This den chief is helping you to sell your troop and to keep these Cub Scouts looking forward to their next adventure. Provide opportunities for the Webelos Scout den to do things with the troop. Make sure they see your most exciting activities. Be careful to give them only a taste; make them wait until they join for the full experience. One idea is to make the graduation ceremony a positive event the younger Cub Scouts will remember for a long time.

More than 95 percent of the Scoutmasters we interviewed were getting *all* their new Scouts from Webelos Scout dens. We know that the second-year Webelos Scout program only serves 20 percent of the available youth population. What are we doing to involve the other 80 percent? Nothing! Why? As we talked to Scoutmasters throughout the country, we found that most of them were quite comfortable with their troop size. When asked why, each had an answer, ranging from "not enough young people in the neighborhood," to "not enough room in the meeting hall."

One thing they do agree on is that Scouting is a good program and should be available to more young people than the 18 percent is currently serves nationwide. There are two primary solutions to this dilemma: adding more new troops and upsizing current troops.

## **Upsizing Your Troop**

We know your task as a Scoutmaster is not organizing troops, though on occasion you might be called on to help. You should, however, be vitally involved in upsizing. Before we discuss this issue, lets review some facts. First the median troop size is sixteen Scouts. Second, as stated earlier, the quality of program increases significantly when troop size reaches twenty-one. Our best troops (11 percent of the total) serve thirty-three or more youth. Remember in our study of dropped troops, 71 percent had five or fewer adults and 78 percent had fewer than sixteen Scouts.

How do you upsize? First of all, you must be willing to move out of your comfort zone. Sit down with your troop committee, parents or your commissioner -- someone who will help you take an honest look at your troop. Look at your program, adult leadership, and youth involvement. Determine what you need to do to serve more Scouts. There are no pat answers, because every troop in America is different. Your solution may be easy as buying more equipment; more likely, it will involve a number of solutions.

Develop a plan for success and set some realistic goals. Bring the committee, chartered organization, parents, and Scouts along on the ride. It must be the troop's plan, not *your* plan. Don't expect overnight success, but do set some checkpoints along the way to monitor your progress. Plan a troop celebration on the target date you set for achieving your goals. Remember that the bottom-line goal is to "deliver the promise."

Once you have the program on track, you might ask, Where are the new Scouts? Unfortunately, they may not be standing in line to join your troop, unless you have convinced your current Scouts to sell the program to their friends. (If you have, drop us a note at Boy Scouts of America, 1325 West Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, TX 75015-2079, and share your success story.)

In some communities, Boy Scouting still has a poor image. What others perceive us to be is not what we really are. We are a values-based program, but we are a lot more. Our challenge is to get boys to sample our program. Is there an activity your troop does that would entice potential embers? How do you let others know about the activity? Remember, school announcements may not be the only route to take. One alternative is sending potential members a personal letter describing the activity and inviting them to attend. Build up the exciting, challenging aspects of the event. You may not wish to mention Scouting. Your district executive can probably provide you with a list of potential Scouts. Let them sample the activity, then let them know what they have just participated in is a part of the Boy Scouting program. This approach is much like the blind taste-tests used to sell soft drinks -- you don't know which brand it is, but you know you like it. Dare to be creative, and when you find a method that works, be sure to write and let us hear from you.

Now is the time to answer the big question, "Am I delivering the promise to the Scouts in my Troop?" If your answer is yes, the congratulations! If your answer is no, then this is the time to begin making that promise come true.

These are the attributes of a good troop. Check to see how you measure up.

- Y/N Troop has earned the Quality Unit Award.
- Y/N Scoutmaster has completed basic training.
- Y/N Troops follow traditional troop-meeting pattern (standard troop-meeting plan with two or more skill training groups.)
- Y/N Troop has a high ratio of active adults to youth.
- Y/N Leaders regularly attend roundtables.
- Y/N Troop meetings are planned at patrol leaders' council meetings.
- Y/N Woods Wisdom is used in planning troop program.
- Y/N A patrol for new Scouts exists, with a troop guide and assistant Scoutmaster
- Y/N Troop adds at least ten Scouts per year.
- Y/N Troop has an annual minimum of twenty-five days and nights of camping.
- Y/N Troop attends a long term council camp.
- Y/N Leaders are proficient in outdoor skills.
- Y/N Troop has at least twenty-one Scouts.
- Y/N Troop has a program for older Scouts.

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