

THE COMMISSIONERS' INTERNET RESOURCES WORKSHOP

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Part 4: USING THE BASICS AND INFORMATION RESOURCES TO TRAIN COMMISSIONERS BY E-MAIL - PUTTING YOUR KNOWLEDGE TO THE TEST

Section 2: Setting Up An E-mail Course Sample Discussion Questions



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THE COMMISSIONER'S INTERNET RESOURCES

WORKSHOP PART 4

Section 2 -- Setting Up an E-mail Course: Sample Discussion Questions



Using these Scenarios



These scenarios were designed strictly for training purposes and are not meant to portray an actual unit or real individual. Any similarity is strictly coincidental.

Scenarios #1 and #2 are provided to help Commissioners identify and propose solutions to structural problems in the Commissioner service based on the information provided.

Scenarios #3 and #4 are provided to help Commissioners identify and respond to customer (the Scouts) problems at the Unit Commissioner level.

Scenarios #5 and #6 are provided to help Commissioners identify and respond to personal problems that may develop while trying to be of service.



Scenario # 1 - Commissioner's Nightmare



Here's a good one for your positive pondering: You've just received a letter from the Council Scout Executive congratulating you on your selection as the new District Commissioner for the Damocles District. As you open the letter a note in neat hand-written script falls out. Curiosity prevails and you lay the letter aside, scooping up the missive inked out on the Council Commissioner's personal stationery. As you read the note you feel just like you've jumped into a cold mountain stream on a hot day. The note says:

Dear Dan,

As indicated in Scout Executive's formal letter of congratulations, we were very pleased to find your name submitted for the position of District Commissioner. You have established an excellent track record as a dynamic leader who can get results. When you recently received your Wood Badge beads after completing your ticket in seven short months, you again demonstrated that you are the type of Scouter that can turn challenges

into successes. And after reviewing your District's record, its clear to me that we desperately need someone of your calibre to turn things around.

While your successor was a wonderful, warm and conscientious commissioner, his long illness before his death last month prevented him from taking an active leadership role in the District. I know that he was very disappointed that he couldn't do much to help in a very troubling situation. Just to help you get started with the proper focus, I thought it would be worthwhile to give you a run down on your District's biggest challenges:

1. All five of your service areas have at least three or four units with lapsed charters, representing a loss of nearly 550 Scouts out of the 2300 Scouts that were registered the year before.
2. Service area five is in the worst condition. Two Troops and two Packs have lapsed charters. The remaining eight units were scheduled to recharter last month, but we haven't heard or seen anything from any of them. I think that you should make it a priority to replace Lazy Larry the Assistant District Commissioner. He's asleep on the job. I'm really concerned because the lapsed units in his area all were 50 year veteran units.
3. You know how important it is to get Scouts to go to long-term resident camps to retain their membership. In your District most Scouts come from families that can't afford the fees and we have relied heavily on them earning part of their fee through popcorn sales. This year has been particularly alarming. Popcorn sales have fallen off 50% and we've only got two months left to make up the difference.
4. You probably saw the article in the Tabloid Tantalizer last week about a Troop that lost six Scouts on a hike in the mountains. That was one of your Troops. That article on top of the earlier one about hazing in an older Troop have really hurt our membership efforts. I took the opportunity to review the training records in your District and was surprised to see that the most recent training report is two years old and that it showed less than 35% of your Troops had a Scoutmaster or Assistant who had completed Scoutmaster Fundamentals.
5. I've also seen a number of letters from parents sent to the Scout Executive complaining about the Scoutmaster of Troop 1, Stinky Simons, who has been adding his own advancement requirements to each rank. In Troop 1, our largest Troop, the records indicate that only 35% of the Scouts advance in rank each year. I think you might also want to look into the allegations that the Troop is being used as a para-military training unit complete with camouflage utility trousers, marching drills, and activities like self-defense training. Apparently all of the Scouts in this Troop are wearing the "Big Red 1" patch instead of the standard troop number on their left sleeves. As you know all too well, we are not here to create military units. I know you'll take on these problems and

with your leadership that your District will show marked improvement SOON! Let me know how it is going in about a month.

Okay District Commissioner, its your baby. What are you going to do now?

1. Identify the problems.
2. What additional information do you need?
3. What are your alternatives in each case?
4. What actions would you take?

This scenario could as easily have been written for participants to play the role of an ADC with a non-performing Unit Commissioner as Lazy Larry. But, I thought you deserved a promotion.

Scenario # 2 - Who's Minding the Store



You are a relatively new District Commissioner and have just taken stock of your new situation. Your District is almost evenly divided between urban, suburban and rural areas with three services areas that each very different.

In the urban service area there are about six struggling units and eight that appear to be doing well. You have an Assistant District Commissioner, who is very busy and frequently away on travel related to his business. This ADC's spouse handles lots of telephone calls, but has never been trained or registered in Scouting. The spouse tries to help, but as often as not gets things turned around when answering questions. There are two registered Unit Commissioners here. Few of the unit leaders are trained and their tenure is usually fairly short. You don't recall seeing any of them at Roundtable meetings.

In the suburban residential area you have three Unit Commissioners each serving three a Pack, Troop and Post from each of three chartering organizations. You also have two others that serve four units. The ADC is well trained and personable, but not very organized. This ADC can't tell you much about his units, but remarkably they all look healthy with only one exception. There is a Cub Pack that is dwindling away. This gets your attention because in past years it used to feed 10 to 15 Webelos to a Troop that is nearby. These units always show up for District events and are well represented at Roundtable meetings. Of course a few of the units have some odd quirks and every once

in awhile you hear things that make you wonder, but the units are active and the Scouts seem to be progressing.

In the rural area your ADC is a real hands-on sort. He's everywhere all of the time or so it would seem. He knows everyone and what's going on. Despite the large area he has to cover his units seem to be in good shape for now. Amazingly he only has two Unit Commissioners to help him out with the 12 units he has. This area has really high moral and does great things. Every unit is always at District events and the folks here drive through blizzards to get to Roundtable and Pow Wow meetings. The enthusiasm with this ADC's people is contagious and they all are eager to work hard to help their Scouts.

1. What are the problems that you see in each Service Area?
2. What are the weaknesses that you see with each ADC?
3. Which Service Area is in the most trouble right now?
4. Which Service Area is in the most danger - a bomb waiting to explode?
5. What should your priorities be in working on these problems?
6. What steps should be taken to improve each Service Area?



Scenario # 3 - Eager Beavers



As a Unit Commissioner you receive a telephone call from a really excited volunteer, Patsy Pzzaz, asking you to attend a Troop Committee meeting to help them get going. The Troop was just recently formed and there are a good core group of excited parents that want to make sure that the Troop really succeeds. Patsy explains that the Troop has had a few meetings and that the committee is getting ready to plan a lot of activities to ensure the Troop's success. She just knows that with your experience, you can give them a lot of ideas and help them do it right. Bursting with genial enthusiasm she continues to explain that the Troop is setting some really important goals for each boy and that they are sure each Scout is going to have a great time. Before you know it, you've agreed to attend, only you don't quite remember saying so.

After thinking about it for awhile, you decide you might as well go and see what can be done. You arrive to find a room with about five sets of parents just bursting with excitement and busily going from one subject to another in random sequence. They stop momentarily to invite you into the free-for-all. After about half an hour of listening you begin to get the picture.

Each of these sets of parents has decided to be Patrol Parents, responsible for seeing to the operation of each patrol. After all they were all successful Cub Scout den leaders at one time or another. One set has become the Patrol Parents to the Senior Patrol and as a by-product have become Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster. Patsy it turns out is the Committee Chairperson. You learn from an organizational chart that all of their sons have received appointments to jobs in the senior patrol and that the remaining patrols are at half-strength (3-5 boys). They have managed to plan about three activities a month for the next eight months and several service projects. One parent has put together some computer printouts with each boys name and goals. Another has already organized a sign-up for all of the events and summer camp.

About this time they realize you've been silent and expecting a great pat on the back for their magnificent efforts, they ask for your opinion. You look around the room to a sea of expectant smiling faces each with eyes that already are seeing campfires, canoes, and backpacks in their imaginations.

Well, its your turn to speak. What are you going to say?

1. What problems do you see in this situation?
2. What positives do you see?
3. How can you use those positives to help the situation?
4. What needs to be changed?
5. How can they make the changes?
6. What resources do they need?
7. What is your role in this situation?
8. What must you do to make sure that you will still be able to be effective as a UC in the months ahead?
9. What can you do to help?

Scenario # 4 - The Troop From Hell

Here's a tough one: You are a new Assistant District Commissioner and have only been living in the area a year or so. Before moving here, you were



active as a Unit Commissioner in another Council.

Within a few weeks of taking the job you get a call from Jumpin' Jim, as he has been dubbed by his Scouting buddies. As a bright new Unit Commissioner, Jumpin' Jim spent months developing a degree of rapport with Ivan "Independent Ivan" Doitmyway, the Scoutmaster of an old and very large Troop. At first Jim was really impressed with the Troop because there were almost as many parents at each meeting as boys. Later he realized they were coming for a social hour in the back of the meeting hall, while the boys were largely unsupervised most of the time, running wild.

Jim tells you that he's really becoming successful at hearing what goes on in Troop 666 and is a little more than distressed. After the last campout he heard that new young Scouts were severely hazed. Specifically he heard that they were stripped and covered with peanut butter and moss the first night, dunked in the toilette after breakfast, made to jump over a large fire to get lunch, scared by costumed invaders the camp the second night, and that on Sunday morning when one of the younger boys didn't wake up, the others placed his cot on a canoe and shoved it out into the lake. Jim has also heard that the only activity besides camping and cooking was dungeons and dragons, which the older boys started Friday and kept going through Sunday. None of the Scouts worked on ranks, unless their father was an ASM or at the Campout.

Jim also tells you that the SM and ASMs had an all night poker game the first night and were drinking beer. The next morning they slept in and let the boys run the Troop until lunch was well underway. Apparently the SM and ASMs have formed a patrol of their own and cook for themselves, rarely visiting the patrol sites. After meals they sit around in lawn chairs and tell each other various tall tales. Apparently they are having a great time.

Jim in a fit of exasperation tells you that when he asked one of the ASMs about what he'd heard, he was rebuffed with a "Well you know how it is, boys will be boys. They just have a lot of spirit."

Jumpin' Jim can barely contain himself, he thinks the SM and some of ASMs should be fired, etc. Despite all of this, you know that the troop produces three to five Eagle Scouts a year and has pretty steady advancement overall. You also know that the SM has been through training and has the Training Award, Scouter's Key and Scoutmaster's Award of Merit. What do you do?



Scenario # 5 - The Ancient One



As a newly appointed Assistant District Commissioner, you decide to sit down over a cup of coffee with each of your Unit Commissioners in turn and size up their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to get a picture of each unit's health. One of your most eager and active Unit Commissioners asks if you could help him with your advice, relating the following:

"I've had excellent relationships with some of my unit leaders and poor relationships with others. Most of my good relationships have been with most of the Cubmasters and the younger Scoutmasters (I'm 35 years young.) I find that inexperienced Scouters are the most receptive; while the "old" hands feel that they don't need or want outside interference." There is one old timer (30 years as SM) in my area that invites me most cordially and extends every courtesy. Yet I can tell that he would rather just not have me around. I cannot tell if he is afraid that I'm going to report back to the district or what. I just know from his reaction that I am an outsider. I think part of my suspicions are due to the fact that he is a little too anxious to tout the achievements of his troop; it is very obvious from observing that he has an active and successful program. I certainly tell him that he is doing a wonderful job, maybe he doesn't need to hear that from me, but I plan to continue telling him. I get the impression that he feels like he has to be polite and put up with me and does that and no more. He never discusses problems or concerns with me and I feel shutout.

For all of his showmanship, I really don't know much about the Troop. Whenever I begin to ask a question about his unit's participation in a District or Council event, he deftly shifts the subject to his latest star achiever or batch of merit badges awarded or tells me a story about the good old days. Am I doomed to just being a sideline cheerleader or can I do something that will make me more effective?"

Obviously your Unit Commissioner wants to do a good job and will be receptive to your advice. Weigh your answer to his question and the following questions carefully:

1. What problem(s) do you see here?
2. What are the likely causes of this problem (these problems)?
3. What can your Unit Commissioner do to improve his relationship?
4. What facts does he/she need to get?
5. What should he/she be looking for or evaluating?

6. What could have caused the Scoutmaster to become suspicious?
7. What role should the Unit Commissioner have in such a unit?
8. If the Troop is running well and the Scoutmaster doing his job properly, what's missing?
9. Any other observations?



Conflict of Interest?



You are an Assistant District Commissioner in a medium sized District. For the last year everything has been working just the way your trainer told you it would, if you followed all the steps in recruiting and managing your Unit Commissioners. In fact you have been quite proud that your Service Area has just about been tops in everything that can be measured. You've had so many people ready to help that when you wanted to recruit new Commissioners, you were able to pick extra people right out the units and pick up leaders that were leaving. It was a cinch getting good experienced people. But you've always had a nagging fear that something was always about to bite you in the backside, but couldn't quite put your finger on the problem. It is Saturday and that is the day you usually make a few calls to check on things and do a few e-mails. Today is your lucky day.

About two in the afternoon you get the first of several phone calls that shatters your image. As soon as you pick up the phone you can hear a burst of angry words rattling off the caller's lips. You ask them to slow down and explain from the beginning. The story goes like this:

My son Tommy just came home and told me he was going to quit Scouts forever. I'm steamed. Did you happen to know that he was almost ready to be an Eagle? All he has is a service project!!! But now its all over and its because of that stupid idiot you appointed Unit Commissioner. He just couldn't keep his nose out. And you know why? Its because he wanted to take care of his own brat. That's right he didn't care about the Troop at all. He proved that. He was at the committee meeting that killed my son's service project and then let his son do one that was almost the same thing. I know he pulled rank and pushed it through and it just isn't fair. You can also forget my FOS pledge, cause I'm not about to send money to support this kind of thing. I just thought you should know. Have a real nice day buster.

A few minutes later you are awakened from your daze when the phone rings again. With anxiety you pick up the phone and listen. This time its another irate parent. This one is

really upset that the Troop has been up to some things that just don't sound right and that the Unit Commissioner was there and didn't do a thing. From what you can make out of the excited bursts of chatter, your Unit Commissioner was the old Cubmaster and went to the Pinewood Derby earlier in the day. There apparently was a dispute about whether a few of the cars met the weight and size requirements. Your UC allegedly spoke quietly to everyone concerned about making this fun for the boys and urged all of them to be allowed to participate. Well as luck would have it one of the disputed cars won. Now this parent thinks that its the good old boy stuff and that the UC should have been impartial and not have favored old friends.

Again the phone breaks your growing miserable afternoon with its plaintive beeps. You'd like to let the answering machine take over, but answer anyway on the slim hope that things will be better in this call. Wrong. This one is even worse than the others. Your good friend and a great Scouter who has been a Scoutmaster for the last two years tells you he is resigning and leaving Scouting. You ask why. He says its all the Unit Commissioner's fault. He's also really ticked at you. Dumbfounded you listen further. He goes on to point out that you really never trusted him to be Scoutmaster. This is of course news to you. He explains that he knew this because you appointed the old Scoutmaster to be Unit Commissioner to keep an eye on him. He then goes on to tell you that for the last two years it has been sheer misery. Every time he wanted to do something the old Scoutmaster turned Unit Commissioner stepped in and corrected him changing things all the time. The final straw came when last night the Unit Commissioner was at the school parking lot as people were showing up for a campout. He cancelled the activity because he didn't think the Scouts were prepared with the right gear and didn't think there were enough leaders going. He didn't even consult. Instead he just told the parents to take their boys home. In a final fit of rage he tells you that if that old stinker still wants to play Scoutmaster then let him have the job. He slams his phone down in your ear.

Before you can collect your thoughts you get a fourth phone call. Almost instinctively, you begin to apologize when you realize the caller wants to talk to you about another of your Unit Commissioners. Then you wake up and realize the caller is telling you there's nothing to apologize about and please listen. So you do. This caller explains that for years nobody was ever there to help the Pack and Troop at their church. But when you appointed Charlie, an old Cubmaster with grandkids in both the Pack and Troop to be the Unit Commissioner, everything began to change for the better. The caller credits Charlie with making all the difference explaining that now the units are growing, that they have wonderful activities, and that the boys are advancing for the first time. He then tells you a story about how Charlie took the time to help one Scout who was in trouble and worked with the School guidance counselor too. This boy has just passed his Eagle Board of Review. Your caller wants to know where to get a nomination form for the Silver Beaver and is asking whether the Church has an adult award that can be given to Charlie. Tears begin to flow down your cheeks as you listen to the wonder work he has done.

Finally the phone is quiet. You have to figure out what went wrong and what to do to repair the damage. You also have to reward a great performer.

1. What did go wrong?
2. What are the dangers of having a Unit Commissioner that is “too close” to a unit?
3. What can be done to repair the damage?
4. In which situation(s), if any, should the Unit Commissioner be replaced?
5. What would you do differently, if you could do things over again?
6. All of these Unit Commissioners were close to their units. In one case this worked out very nicely. In the other cases, things appear to have gone differently. Does this mean that you should never have a Unit Commissioner that has been related to the Unit?
7. Why?



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