

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 3: Setting Up An E-mail Course Online Help and Hints for the Discussion Questions



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THE COMMISSIONER'S INTERNET RESOURCES WORKSHOP PART 4

Section 3 -- Setting Up and E-mail Course: Online Help and Hints for the Discussion Questions

Using these Scenarios - Hints and Help Notes:



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.

The original scenario questions from Section 2 are presented here in green typeface. Hints and help notes are presented in black typeface. The actual scenario problem text has been omitted here to save on space.

Please be aware that these hints and help notes are intended only to cause additional discussion on your part and are not intended to be definitive answers.

In this Section you will see some abbreviations. Here's what they mean.

ASM	=	Assistant Scoutmaster
SM	=	Scoutmaster
UC	=	Unit Commissioner
ADC	=	Assistant District Commissioner
DC	=	District Commissioner
DE	=	District Executive
SE	=	Scout Executive

Scenario # 1 - Commissioner's Nightmare

Identify the problems.



1. Lapsed charters can be an indication that:
 - a. The unit leaders and Commissioner staff need training in how to complete the

charters.

b. That the District's organization is not adequately stressing the importance of getting the charters in on time.

c. That there are communications problems.

d. That the Unit Commissioners are not doing their jobs sufficiently to know of problems in the units and that they were not aware of the weak state of some units.

e. That the program may not have been meeting the needs of the Scouts in those units.

f. There may be leadership problems in the Unit where the Unit Commissioner should have been active.

g. How should the District Commissioner and Assistant District Commissioner react?

h. Should this figure into the Annual Unit Service plan?

I. What kind of management problems does this suggest and how can they be fixed?

j. Where do you think management attention should be brought to bear.

2. More lapsed charters suggests that the problem may extend beyond the Unit Commissioners to the management skills of the Assistant District Commissioners. What could have gone wrong here?

3. Dropping support of District and Council activities usually suggests that there are deeper problems in how units are operating and that the Unit Commissioner is not there to monitor and help the situation.

a. What can be done to change this?

b. Do the Unit Commissioners need training?

c. Are the Unit Commissioners using the Unit Commissioner Work Sheet to evaluate units they visit?

- d. Are they visiting the units?
 - e. Are they reporting the results and getting help when needed?
4. Bad press coverage may have been reasonable in light of what happened, but why did it happen? The related note on training is there for a purpose.
- a. What should be done about the lack of training?
 - b. What is the role of the Unit Commissioner here?
 - c. What is the role of the Assistant District Commissioner and District Commissioner?
 - d. Should they be communicating this problem to the training committee?
 - e. Should they be emphasizing promoting training in the units?
5. Paramilitary activity is definitely prohibited and no Scout leader has authority to add anything to the requirements for any Scout award. This is a unit leader that really needs to be helped and the chartered organization needs to be involved.

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

What additional information do you need?

- 1. Do you have a good ratio of Unit Commissioners to Units?
- 2. Do you have a Commissioner recruiting plan in operation?
- 3. When was each unit last visited and what was learned?
- 4. You probably need to visit each unit and chartered organization to find out what is going on. This is a great strain on time, so how do you handle this? How much can be delegated?

What are your alternatives in each case?

- 1. Do you have priorities for action?
- 2. You may not have many alternatives, because you need to get these units back on line or is this true?

3. Should you be managing the crisis or is it managing you?
4. What needs to be done for a long term fix?
5. Who can help?
6. Who on the District Committee can be drafted into action?
7. Should you be doing some emergency recruiting?

What actions would you take?

1. Use your people resources and talk to everyone that can help:
 - a. Your professional staff
 - b. District committee
 - c. Roundtable staff
 - d. Prioritize worst cases for immediate action
 - e. Recruit people
 - f. Delegate when possible
 - g. Work personally on the problem Troop with the UC
 - h. Train your staff
 - I. Revise the Unit Service Plan to address the real problems
 - j. How are you evaluating the performance of current Commissioners?
 - k. Do you need to make staffing changes?
 - l. The rest of the options are up to you.



Scenario # 2 - Who's Minding the Store



What are the problems that you see in each Service Area?

1. The urban area has several struggling units that are in immediate danger. In many cases you almost need a Unit Commissioner for each unit to assure that it gets the service and support it needs to survive. This suggests a real need here for recruiting new Commissioners. Until you can get some help you won't be able to effectively monitor the units' problems and figure out how to help. However, in the meantime you are going to have to try. Can you get training delivered close by? Can you work out partnerships between weak units and strong units elsewhere in the District to promote "buddy" unit campouts with shared gear, etc.? This should be enough to get you started. Do you need to replace the ADC? What about the ADC's spouse? Should the spouse be recruited and trained to help?
2. The suburban area seems to be doing okay on its own. You can probably put it on the back burner for now. Sure you need to be concerned with the ADC's lack of organization, but is it critical?
3. The rural area is doing great too, but there is a problem and that is over reliance on a single individual. What will happen if your ADC quits or dies? Shouldn't there be two-deep Commissioner leadership for every unit? Is this an area where we should be focusing on development?

What are the weaknesses that you see with each ADC?

1. The Urban ADC has a problem in meeting the commitments he has because of conflicting demands on his/her time. This ADC may not be minding the store at all. Is this a problem? How can this problem be reduced? Could recruiting solve any problems? How about a alternate or back-up person for when he/she is gone? Should we be considering a change in staffing?
2. The suburban ADC is not well organized. Is this necessarily a problem? How can we get around this one? What are the dangers? What can be done to help? What can the District Commissioner do knowing that this person needs help with organization?
3. The biggest weakness in the rural area is also the strength. The problem is that this is all a one-person show. What happens when this one key person leaves? What will happen in the vacuum? What are the dangers of this person burning out? Is this person an effective ADC/manager? What kinds of skills does this ADC need to develop?

Which Service Area is in the most trouble right now?

1. The urban area needs immediate attention. Without expedited help, you may lose a significant opportunity to bring Scouting to a lot of boys.

Which Service Area is in the most danger - a bomb waiting to explode?

1. The area that is in the most danger is the rural area. As soon as this ADC burns out or leaves, you are going to have a vacuum and the driving force that has made this area succeed will be gone.

What should your priorities be in working on these problems?

1. Determine whether you need a staffing change with the urban ADC. You will have to weigh whether the loss of experience is balanced by someone who can be there and whether you can train a new one. Could you switch anyone from another service area into the position or trade between the urban and suburban ADCs? The suburban ADC may be great at working with units and the urban ADC may get on better where daily attention is not needed as in the suburban area.

2. You need to be recruiting in two different ways almost immediately:

a. You need to recruit a larger number of people for single or two unit Commissioner jobs in the rural area and all of these people are going to need training quickly

b. You need to recruit a small cadre of Commissioners to work under the ADC in the rural area with one of them to act as a back-up.

3. Finally, you need to be looking at sharpening up the management skills of each ADC to address the weaknesses you identified; e.g. delegation of responsibility, organization skills, etc.

What steps should be taken to improve each Service Area?

1. I'll leave this one for you to comment on and in later revisions I'll add the best answers.

Scenario # 3 - Eager Beavers

What problems do you see in this situation?



1. You sure get the impression that the Parents in this case are acting as though the Troop was just for them. Perhaps their only experience with Scouting was with the Cub

Scout Pack and they have no idea of what a Troop is supposed to be like. Actually their enthusiasm is likely to deprive the Scouts of significant leadership experiences and will ultimately destroy the patrol method and effectiveness of the Patrol Leader's Council as a leadership development ground.

2. These parents probably do not understand the eight methods used by Scouting to achieve the three primary aims of the program. This is when you should step in and offer to make a presentation with the Fast Start Video Tapes. Now this will be a little tough, because you don't want to destroy the enthusiasm they have.

a. Aims of Scouting: Just for the record, the three aims of Scouting are:

- 1] Growth in moral strength and character
- 2] Participating citizenship
- 3] Development of physical, mental and emotional fitness

b. Methods of Scouting:

- 1] Ideals
- 2] Patrols
- 3] Outdoors
- 4] Advancement
- 5] Adult Association
- 6] Personal Growth
- 7] Leadership Development
- 8] Uniform

What positives do you see?

1. This unit could have a wonderful future on the horizon because there is enormous enthusiasm among the parents to support the Scouting program, even if they do not yet have a good grounding in how it works.

2. This enthusiasm and desire to help can be channeled to adult leadership and unit committee positions, but has to be carefully crafted to avoid harming the chances for the boys to have the opportunity to learn leadership and other skills.

How can you use those positives to help the situation?

1. Invite the leaders to see an experienced Troop in action so that can get more ideas.
2. Invite them to Scoutmaster Fundamentals
3. Invite them to Roundtable
4. Ask the SM or CC to help you put on a presentation about using the Patrol Method and PLC for Troop Planning at a Roundtable. Nothing like teaching to force one to really learn.
5. Show them how it works and ask them to step back and give their sons some breathing room.

What needs to be changed?

1. The PLC needs to be given responsibility for planning the Troop's activities soon.
2. The SPL and leaders need to be elected by the other Scouts to foster leadership development.
3. The Scouts need room to be allowed to succeed and/or fail at their own pace. They will learn from both and without the experience they will not grow.

How can they make the changes?

1. This group is great with planning. Why not be their informal advisor (you already are) and help them plan to turn the reins over in say a month. Focus their planning on leadership training and support for what the boys are doing. Be the mentor to this group.

What resources do they need?

1. This is something you will have to determine as you get to know them. It may be that they need:
 - a. Literature
 - b. Training

c. A helping hand for a short time

What is your role in this situation?

1. Your role as always is that of powerless advisor there to help by sharing information and to guide from your training and experience. Of course you are neutral and an idea person as well. Be someone they can trust not to be judgmental, always encouraging, and full of good humor.
2. Perhaps you could share with them other successful experiences from other Troops (now where do you suppose you could learn about what 60 different Troops around the Country are doing and give tangible evidence of this? Try looking at the different Troop Web Sites, many of which were built by the Scouts and see what you find. You may be very surprised and do may this committee and the parents.)

What must you do to make sure that you will still be able to be effective as a UC in the months ahead?

1. Be careful not to get over enthusiastic and insert yourself as the de facto leader.
2. Let them learn and change at their own pace. They may not get it right immediately, but they have to own the change for it to work. Give them the resources, knowledge, and support and back off.
3. Above all else be patient and always there to listen and from time to time offer a friendly suggestion.
4. Remember that you are a guest and that you should act like a guest. Be thankful for every courtesy and every kindness extended. Likewise, be sure to be a friend in your relationships. Demonstrate that you can be trusted to be of help and that you are not there to pass judgment or to take over.
5. At every opportunity to provide positive reinforcement for the good things that are happening, give praise and a pat on the back. I don't know many people that don't appreciate being recognized for their efforts. Be generous in your praise and stingy with criticism.

What can you do to help?

1. See # 8 above. I have lumped the two together for ease of presentation.



Scenario # 4 - The Troop From Hell



This particular scenario has generated the most discussion to date. Here I will share a lawyer's response followed by a response from a great Scouter and fellow Wood Badge beaver living in London.

View #1

What do you do?

1. As the ADC in this situation, you have probably realized that you need to find out a lot more before you or the Commissioner's Staff can be effective in this situation.
2. Your first problem is to advise Jumpin' Jim on what to do immediately or he'll probably figure out something on his own and it may be guns ablazing. You can make him part of the crisis team in this situation by laying out your plan of approach and asking him to help you in the fact-finding with specific areas (maybe limited) before action takes place.
3. As ADC you can tell Jumpin' Jim that your plan of action is something like this (more comment on the hypothetical after this):
 - a. Fact-finding - answer as many of the important questions as you can.
 - 1] Jumpin' Jim can go through the records with the District Training Chairman to see which troop leaders received what training at what time. This should probably be couched in terms of reviewing all units that Jumpin' Jim has to avoid singling out the old troop. Or it can be a special project to review all of the units in your service area with Jim leading the charge. Won't hurt to keep it general and non-specific an can avoid rumors.
 - 2] Jumpin' Jim can continue to go to the next meeting or two and listen and ask a few questions that are not accusatory, if he can work them into conversation (this is a judgment call); e.g., he can find out which leaders were on the campout, where it was, dates, and get a feel for what boys were there.
 - 3] You may want to check around to see who knows the SM or any of the ASMs and see what the grapevine says. This needs to be pretty subtle, because you don't want to signal that the Commissioner Staff is on the hunt - It is not.
 - b. Team review - That's you the ADC, your Unit Commissioner, the District

Commissioner and the Senior District Executive (especially if you suspect that YPP issues are involved). Review the facts known and not known. Tell Jumpin' Jim that the team will develop a team plan at this point with specific responsibilities for each player and reassure him that you are not going to

overstep into his relationship with the troop (you don't want to anyway).

- c. Actions decided by the team. Suggest to Jumpin' Jim that these actions may include more questions that he will have to ask, contact with the SM, contact with the Committee Chairman, or the Chartered Organization. However, stress that the questions will need to be pursued in a definite order. It's a good time to point out that, if we get too far ahead of ourselves when we can polarize the situation and find that the Chartered Organization is backing the SM until death.

4. Now here are some of the questions that I thought needed to be answered when I designed the hypothetical (and I know that there were a lot of other good questions raised in discussion that should be added):

- a. Who were the adult leaders and other adults present at the Campout?
- b. Was the Scoutmaster there?
- c. Who was in charge and when?
- d. Were any of the other leaders present trained?
- e. When was the last training for each?
- f. Have any of those leaders attended YPP Training, if so when?
- g. When did this Campout take place? (Was it recently or a long time ago?)
- h. Where was the Campout?
- i. Was it within 50 miles of the troop's meeting place?
- j. If not, did the troop get a tour permit? (If they goofed here, their liability could have been much greater, if something went wrong or had gone wrong - this gets attention)
- k. What did the Scouts plan as the activities for the Campout?
- l. Who approved the Patrol Leader's Council's plan for the campout?
- m. Did the PLC's plan include Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) and/or the hazing?
- n. Regarding D&D - its popular among early teens as a game - what do you know about it? Does it teach any Scouting values? Is it appropriate for a Scout activity? (You may need to use your resources to find out more, before you are ready to take this on - there are several web sites where you can learn more.) Opinions on this are fairly divided that its okay, if the Scouts wanted just a fun weekend and that it should be allowed at all.
- o. Did any of the alleged events take place?
- p. What were the circumstances?
- q. If they did take place, which adults, if any knew in advance?

- r. Did any of the adults know about these activities when they were taking place?
- s. If they did, what did they do?
- t. Was their action an appropriate resolution (meaning you really don't need to add more)?
- u. Is the adult leadership now aware of the problems, if the allegations are true?
- v. What has the adult leadership done since the campout?
- w. Is their post-campout action an appropriate response?
- x. Has the SPL or any youth leader taken action (I've seen an SPL take a whole troop to task after an event for poor conduct without the SM asking)?
- y. Was any Scout hurt?
- z. Was any Scout molested by an older Scout?
- aa. What has been done?
- ab. What still needs to be done?

5. Depending on the answers to these questions, you as the ADC will have to decide who needs to be involved at what stage in the resolution of any problems discovered. You may decide that unit has discovered its problem and addressed it appropriately. If so, it wouldn't hurt to just to run it by your District Commissioner and District Executive, just in case something else comes of the events that you didn't know about (nobody likes surprises!).

6. Assuming that there are problems that need to be resolved, as the ADC you probably will want to involve both your District Commissioner and District Executive in the process. However, you don't want to get too many folks involved. The more people involved, the more who talk, the more the rumors and pretty soon you no longer have any control and damage is being done. Back to the main point here. You want your District Commissioner involved to give you support, advice and act as a sounding board. He will want to be involved, because he's responsible for every unit's health. Because he will not in all probability have any relation to the unit, he can give impartial and independent advice and help make sure that emotion doesn't get ahead of reason. Because of the potential for YPP problems and perhaps other policy issues, the DE needs to be aware of what you are doing. The worst thing that could happen is for you to develop a great plan only to find out that a distraught parent has called the DE and that he's already confronting the Chartered Organization's Institutional Head, the Committee Chairperson or SM, based on a very one-sided view (So much for all your hopes to do it right). Instead show him that you have a good grasp on the situation and that you are going to help him get to the bottom of the situation. There are things he can do to make your job easier too; e.g. records in the Council Office, information on prior complaints (if any), ideas, knowledge about Council, Regional and National policies, etc. In most cases the DE will be relieved that you are going to do some of the tough stuff and happy to have input. (We all know that no DE, DC, ADC or UC is perfect and that some may want to jump the gun, but this is going to happen anyway, so why not do your best to cut down

on the chances or minimize the risk by taking the team approach? Once folks acknowledge team membership they're less likely to take independent action.)

7. Now that you have a team assembled and know what questions to ask, what are you really going to do? Situations like this always require a lot of judgment and each of us sees things a little differently. So please realize that there are many right answers depending on the circumstances. As a minimum I think we can probably all agree that the situation needs to be followed to a conclusion. If we can get Jumpin' Jim to understand that we don't fire SM's or any other leader and can get him to calm down, he can be our best asset. He can be coached to have a very private conversation with the SM. He can use several approaches. He could start by alluding to a problem similar in nature that he's heard about

elsewhere. This approach has the advantage of not being accusatory and allowing the SM to raise his own questions. However, it has the danger of being too thin, if the SM already knows about the problem and suspects that this is the issue. Another approach is ask the SM for advice on what the UC can or should do, given that he has been presented with some allegations that he's not sure about. This allows the SM to explain misunderstandings, if there were any. Suppose for example that the Scouts were trying to do a Nickolodean style event and all the new guys in the new patrol lost the tug of war and got drug through peanut butter and moss - no hazing, just "clean" fun. It wouldn't do to have made an accusation only to have the peanut butter on your own face. Pardon the unforgiveable pun. On the other hand Ivan may reluctantly welcome the opportunity to figure out the mess (especially, if he wasn't on site) or at least to tell you that he has it under control (we can decide later if it is under control). And there's always confrontation. Not usually the recommended approach, but if we end up with pretty strong evidence that something is really amiss and get a wire brush from the SM, we may have no other choice. The downside is that we know will also have to involve the Committee Chairperson and/or Chartered Organization. This could lead to a stalemate, if not carefully handled.

8. Now what? Well, if we decide the problem is still real, we need to figure out what needs to be done. Here it pays to demonstratively place trust in the real decision makers. We can let the Committee Chairperson know what we know and what our concerns are and ask for him/her to address the issue. A good many Chairpersons will do just that and pretty fairly too. After all their son's welfare is at stake too.

9. Suppose we get the wire-brush from the Chairperson? There's always the Chartered Organization, but this is a step that demands extreme caution. The Chartered Organization wouldn't have approved the SM, ASMs, etc., if it didn't have a lot of confidence in them. Before you go this far, you'd better really have your facts straight and not have a handful of allegations that are unsupported. If you really don't have a strong case, you could end up alienating them and they could decide its too much trouble to charter a unit. The boys get hurt and the problem still isn't solved.

10. Now its clear after walking through these possibilities that maybe another approach would be to focus on making sure that all of the leaders have current training including YPP. It might also be useful to invite the SM to participate in SM Fundamentals instead of taking him on. You know the old wisdom that nothing teaches like having to teach others.

11. One other thing that I have deliberately left until last, because the facts were not meant to directly suggest a true YPP problem is the issue of YPP. If we find that the information gives us reason to believe that abuse or molestation did occur in the hazing, etc., at any point in the resolution process, then it is mandatory for the Scout Executive to be informed and he in turn must contact appropriate youth protection agencies in the jurisdiction(s) involved. If this is so, it will have a profound effect on how the matter is resolved. From that point on, the Scout Executive will have to run the show. There is no way that you want to interfere in any State investigation or inquiry. In fact, if you do, you may be subject to criminal sanctions. Once the flag goes up on this issue, the Commissioner Staff will still have a role to play in assessing leadership, training, etc., and in working with the Chartered Organization and Committee to help keep the troop on its feet, but this will have to be coordinated with the Scout Executive.

12. Remember that this was a hypothetical situation and solution. Each situation you confront in the Commissioner's Service will be unique. And while there are some things that we can learn from an exercise, each situation also will require judgment. And finally, I must also remind the list that in formulating the hypothetical and the hypothetical solution(s), I am not speaking on behalf of the BSA and am simply offering my own observations for the purposes of discussion. In a real situation, I would be the first to strongly urge you to discuss the matter with your District Commissioner and District Executive and to obtain any professional advice warranted. I appreciate your contributions, ideas and thoughts on this case. I think that we all profit from the many different viewpoints on the list and this is no exception.

View #2

What do you do?

Well Jim... As I see it this hazing issue needs to be addressed. I'm assuming that the story checks out ? You've asked the kids how camp went and heard some stories that concern you ... What I hear you say is there has not been a " complaint " but a few kids are unhappy. I know you have built up a relationship with Ivan, but this could be a tough counselling job. Are you OK dealing with that ?

You will need to work out a line you are comfortable with. But try not to be too judgmental. This guy has good points,too. OK, he's a bit of a dinosaur and not the most

sensitive of characters. But he's got a big troop, which means he must have something the kids like.

Why not get Ivan round home, just the two of you. Take the phone off the hook or switch on the answering machine. Sit him down and ask him how the last campout went. Hopefully he would say something about the " initiation " which would show what his feeling were. If not a question like " What's this I heard about swamp monsters ? " might be an opening gambit. I'd then point out that BSA has strict Youth Protection Guidelines - how did he think that they applied in this situation ?

Of course Ivan might say something like " Yeah, I know, don't shower at the same time as the kids. What's that got to do with the kids having a bit of fun and initiating the new kids. Makes a man of em ... never did me any harm, why when I was a lad ... "

If it were me { and I nearly said those forbidden words " If I were you" then ... } I'd tell my true personal story about how as a young Scout I was the victim of such an experience, and was so upset that I very nearly quit and had my parents bring me home. The stress also brought on an asthma attack. I might add that I still despise the Scoutmaster who condoned it nearly thirty years on, so deep was the impression it made on me.

[Incidentally, I swore at age eleven that if I ever became a Scoutmaster this bullying would not happen in my troop. It didn't. I'm fairly easy-going, but all my Scouts knew that this sort bullying <would> get them on the next train home.]

I guess if I were talking to Ivan I'd also point out that if a kid got injured or somebody complained he's on his own. BSA won't back him if he breaches YPG. He's up sticky creek without a paddle. Very messy. These days juries in the US can make some very nice awards for " psychological distress " and parents know this. Or what if one of the guys smeared in peanut butter is sensitive to bug bites or gets bitten by a critter ? Or, like I did, has an asthma attack ? Can you imagine taking a kid covered with peanut butter and moss into the emergency room ? That would get the troop noticed.

But you will have to work out an approach you are happy with. I nearly used the words " if I were you " a few minutes ago. Don't do that with Ivan. I'm not you, and you're not Ivan. There are a lot of right ways to do things in Scouting, but what works for me might not work for you or Ivan.

OK, I think you share my personal view that any adult who permits this sort of bullying is a pretty poor Leader, and needs to be straightened out or else thrown out. You feel he must be pretty insensitive not to realise the risk of emotional damage to kids who may already be apprehensive, if not actually homesick, and are not used to camp routine. This

is the reality with most boys on their first Scout camp, even if they hide it. And the tough guys often hurt the most inside.

But you won't help him by yelling and screaming. Keep calm. Listen. Try not to get mad ... and if you <do> get mad back off. Say you need to go to the bathroom and cool off there.

But remember your job is to help him , not to dump on him like a ton of bricks. He may genuinely not know, or understand, how what in " my days " were traditional troop initiations are now regarded as hazing and even as psychological abuse. It sounds like the whole unit leadership would benefit from YPG training. I'd ask the Chairman if you could arrange a session for them all, the Committee and the Leaders. Possibly go to a PLC (by prior invitation) and discuss the issue of YPG with the Scouts.

If after that Ivan still doesn't get the message and initiations continue he may have to go ... but that's not our decision. But we'll talk about that if the problem arises.

Now then , Jim. regarding the dungeons and dragons ... Let me say that I can't see a problem if the Scouts <decided> to have a weekend away without any advancement. You look surprised. Well, I see it this way :

Many kids today are under immense pressures to do compete and succeed. They are expected to be A grade students, on the winning sports team, sing solo in the choir and if they are a Scout to make Eagle before they are thirteen. OK, I exaggerate ... but some parents do pressurise their kids. Some kids are so programmed they never stop running from one activity to the next. And a few crack up under the strain, or take drugs or sniff glue.

So I believe that at times it is quite legitimate to have a " fun " weekend away with your friends at camp, just being buddies and having a good time. Did the PLC <plan> to have an easy weekend ? If so, that is fine provided that elsewhere in the troop program there are opportunities to advance.

OK Jim, <get up of the floor>, have another coffee and let's look at the facts ...

Do you think there is actually an " advancement problem " with troop 666 ?

Get out the Advancement Reports for the past six months. Have about 75% of the Scouts earned a rank or a merit badge ? I'd say that was good. Less than 50% I'd be concerned and ask questions about their program planning.

Look at the number of Eagle Scouts the troop has produced ... there must be some advancement. Although I'd be worried if all the Eagles were the sons of Leaders or

Committee people, because that might suggest that some kids were being coached and pushed, whilst the other kids were left bouncing basketballs in the school gym. Sadly it does happen.

Look at the troop's camping record. Have they participated in Camporees and Council activities ? Are there adventurous activities for the older Scouts, maybe a Venture Crew ? Have all last year's new Scouts been away on at least one weekend camp ? Or most of them ?

But it's worth keeping a discrete eye on things. Maybe ask Ivan and the SP/L what their camping plans for the year are. Turn the conversation to last year and see how they thought it went.

You might want to talk to the ASMs quietly. They are keen , but they need to realise that if you push Scouts too hard they often burn out and quit. I like the support vs challenge theory. If you are teaching a kid to swim and throw him into twelve feet of water that's pretty strong on challenge. Often he will start to swim. But if not, you'd better be prepared to jump in quick, and get wet in the process.

But if you put him in the three feet end with a rubber ring and hold his hand that's pretty good for support, but at some stage you have to take away the rubber ring and let him swim on his own. Otherwise there's no challenge.

Well, I guess being a Scoutmaster is like that. If you don't challenge the boys they get bored and quit. If you put on too much pressure the challenge becomes an insuperable obstacle - and they quit. You need to know the kids and challenge them to reach just beyond their grasp.



Scenario # 5 - The Ancient One

What problem(s) do you see here?



1. This relationship is not open and will not foster good communications when and if a problem arises. To date our Unit Commissioner has not been able to gain the acceptance and trust of the Scoutmaster.
2. Similarly, if the UC here is not in a good working relationship as a partner and team member, it will be hard for him to communicate information from the District to the Troop and to provide the best opportunities to the Scouts in the Troop.

3. But in reality these are really more in the nature of challenges than real problems. This is something that can be approached in a more leisurely manner than most of the crisis type stuff we always seem to think is there to drive us. Relax and let the relationship grow.

What are the likely causes of this problem (these problems)?

1. Does the Scoutmaster understand what the UC's role is?
2. Did the UC communicate to the SM that he is there to give advice? This may have sounded a little odd coming from a fellow that is much more junior in experience! It would have been better to stick to being there to pass information and to help in anyway the SM desires within reason.
3. Has the SM had previous bad experiences with a Unit Commissioner?
4. Has the SM ever had any experiences with a Unit Commissioner?

What can your Unit Commissioner do to improve his relationship?

1. Be patient and keep quiet except to pass on information or praise. This one is going to take time. Continue to give praise when appropriate, but don't over do it. The SM will get a little suspicious of unearned praise. Stick to the basics until the relationship matures and the SM realizes that the UC is not there to muck up his Troop.

What facts does he/she need to get?

1. The UC needs to learn as much as possible about the Troop, but it will have to be gradual and indirect.
2. Check with the professional staff for past information on rechartering, training, attendance at camporees, advancement, etc.
3. When the SM is wazing proud, ask if they have old newsletters or a scrapbook you could look at.
4. Listen! If you are around a Troop meeting as the Scouts arrive or as they depart, find a place to stand just outside the door and listen to what they are saying. You'll find out a lot more here than you expect. If they leave excited, great! On the other hand, if they leave complaining or making fun of the "dorky" Troop, you'll get the picture as well.

What should he/she be looking for or evaluating?

1. Keep the big picture in mind. Are the three aims of Scouting being served?
2. Are the Scouts growing and having fun in the process?
3. Is attendance steady or falling off?
4. Is there a high turnover?
5. What is the average retention length? Do they quit after a year or so?
6. Are the Scouts advancing?
7. Do they have activities and frequently in the Outdoors?
8. How about uniforming?
9. A lot of things you can determine just by keeping an open ear and a watchful eye. Smile and enjoy.

What could have caused the Scoutmaster to become suspicious?

1. Boy, do I really have to answer that? Your guess is as good as mine, but it may well be that the Scoutmaster felt awkward having a youngster there to advise him on what he has been doing very well for nearly 30 years. And if the UC attempted to show any authority, the SM may have wondered why the UC was there.

What role should the Unit Commissioner have in such a unit?

1. See the above. Be all eyes and ears, smiles and praise. Pass on information and wait for trust to develop. When the relationship matures, you can move on to more, but for now its simply time to be patient.

If the Troop is running well and the Scoutmaster doing his job properly, what's missing?

1. There may not be anything missing and this may well be a non-problem. My concern would be that if the relationship gets in the way of communication that the UC may not be able to pass on information about program opportunities via the SM to the unit and that as a result the Scouts may be cheated out of a lot of great fun and activities.

Any other observations?

1. The Unit Commissioner in this situation may have started out with extraordinary enthusiasm after going through training. Almost every training I've been to (Scouting and career) has breed some degree of enthusiasm to go back and make things better. In Scouting this is particularly true and I've seen many people really get excited at training only to get frustrated when old bad habits die hard.

2. In a perfect world, everyone would be excited to know what the newly trained person learned to take advantage of great new ideas. Not so in most places unfortunately. There's always a lot of resistance to change from the outside. People normally want to feel things out a bit before making a change and to have a voice in the change, especially when they can't understand (weren't at training and wouldn't go anyway) why dynamic Dan is running around with his hair on fire - after all things have worked fine the way they were. And much of their program probably was just fine at one time or another, but could always be improved.

3. Probably the greatest weakness in our training is that we can get so excited that they can't wait to try out the newly learned ideas without helping them develop a strategy to sell the ideas.

Maybe the kindest thing would be for an old hand to temper the newly enthused Scouter with some words of wisdom about nudging change instead of charging into what could be a wall. Some of the things I've shared with those coming back from Wood Badge and other training course follow:

- a. Remember that the people you are serving haven't had the same great experience that you just had and won't know what to make of your sudden change of outlook.
- b. You've got to work a little smarter now and exercise one of the harder parts of leadership - selling ideas by effective communication - to get the group ready to follow suggested changes.
- c. What really turned you on at training? Would the same sort of thing work in the unit or help change how people see things?
- d. What kinds of communication were used effectively? Can you use these techniques to sell the ideas at home?
- e. Pick and choose what you think is the most important thing to work on and focus your efforts on one or a few ideas at a time - don't shotgun a hundred ideas.
- f. Take time to build a consensus for change, if it is for the better.
- g. Before you start to change something, be sure its needed. Sometimes we need to temper a desire for "perfection" with the need to have a program that delivers.
- h. Involve others in your ideas - start with one or two and build.

- I. Realize that others have pride in how they have been doing things and are probably hesitant to do anything that lessens that pride.
 - j. Ask how you can help others to discover ideas that they will then use or promote.
 - k. Remember to be patient.
 - l. Remember that nobody likes a know-it-all one-man/woman show.
 - m. Take time to observe and develop rapport.
 - n. Take time to compliment and recognize those who are trying!
4. There probably are no really right answers, because so much depends on the people and their circumstances, but a little kindness and understanding always go a long way.



Conflict of Interest?

What did go wrong?



1. This may be the wrong question. Do we have enough facts to know whether any of these Unit Commissioners did anything wrong? Could it be that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time?
2. There is a possibility that the first UC may have shown preferential treatment to his child. There is an equal possibility that the reject project really didn't meet the criteria for an Eagle Project.
3. The first UC made an error in participating in any activity where it would appear that he had conflicting interests. His effectiveness may well be compromised now.
4. The second UC is in about the same situation. He apparently was trying hard to make sure the kids were having fun and forgot that it was not up to him to make decisions. This was up to the unit leader. Now he has compromised his effectiveness.
5. The third UC appears to stepped much further over the line in taking control of a unit. This UC is out of control and may not ever be able to work with this unit again as a UC.

What are the dangers of having a Unit Commissioner that is "too close" to a unit?

1. Parents tend to be protective and sensitive creatures - ask one! I know that I can get that way when it comes to my own children. It is real easy for a parent to misunderstand

the motives of a UC when they can get the impression that the UC is acting to further the interests of his own children or a friend instead of being their as BSA's commissioner representative to help.

2. If there is a flair up, relationships are usually victims to the anger and mistrust that can be engendered.
3. A UC in such a situation has to conduct himself/herself in such a way that it is abundantly clear that his/her only interest is to promote Scouting for each and every Scout. Sometimes this is harder than it seems.

What can be done to repair the damage?

1. From a management perspective, it is a tough call. There are two alternatives that have to be considered and probably more:
 - a. Can the relationships be repaired through open discussion, apologies and developing a working understanding of roles? If so, you may want to consider keeping the individual in place.
 - b. If the relationship is severely damaged or distrust high, then keeping the individual in place is counter-productive. The UC starts to hurt the program and consequently starts to hurt the Scouts. In such a situation, it is imperative to make staffing changes. In fact it may be better not to have a UC than to have one that creates more irritation in the unit leading to others quitting or doing less than their best for the Scouts.

In which situation(s), if any, should the Unit Commissioner be replaced?

1. Well now you know the primary alternatives. So how are you going to decide?
2. If it were me, I would be inclined to investigate the circumstances before drawing any quick conclusions.
3. Absent any other information, I would suspect that the problem with the second UC probably can be talked out and attributed to misdirected goodwill. This will probably be forgiven once. This UC is on probation. In the case of the third UC, I'd probably be inclined to pull him from the unit. The first UC is the hard case. How do you know what is right? I'd have to hear both sides before even thinking one way or the other. We just can't even get a hunch on this one.

What would you do differently, if you could do things over again?

1. Arm-chair quarterbacking isn't the answer here. You can't go back and unmake the situation. We can learn that this is a difficult situation, which suggest the need for extra care. See below.

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?

1. In many areas recruiting a good UC is just plain hard. It may be near to impossible to find a good UC without getting one close to a unit particularly in a remote or rural area. Similar problems may exist in urban centers. In either case, having a UC on site is often much better than not having a UC.

2. So what are we to do? I would suggest that the DC make it a policy to give some personal guidance to any UC in this situation that might include:

a. Discussion about being sensitive to parental perceptions of abusing the position

b. Discussion about the need to remain independent and detached

c. Discussion about what the limits of the UC are

3. At the same time the ADC is going to have watch more carefully and talk to the UC more often to make sure that things are going well and that the UC isn't getting on dangerous ground.

4. Some Districts make it a policy that a UC cannot service a unit where he/she was a leader or where he/she has a child registered in the unit.

5. You guessed it. There are no real easy answers here.

And oh by the way, don't forget the successful UC that has really earned the thanks of the unit and the people he/she has served! Before you get caught in the morass of unsorting problems, take a minute to make sure that the wheels are set in motion to see that this wonderful volunteer is recognized for their outstanding efforts. This investment is one of the best you'll ever make.



Final Note

Well that's it. You've come to the end of the seminar. I hope that you have enjoyed your stay and that you will find the materials useful as you go out and do your best to deliver the Promise of Scouting to youth. Let us know what you thought of this course by responding to our evaluation questions.



[Click here to go to the Evaluation Page.](#)



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