



## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT - COMMUNICATING COMMITMENT**

**HOW?** How do you get parental involvement in a Scout unit? While there are many things that could be offered on the subject, one thing that stands out in my experience is "communicating the commitment."

**IMPERSONAL & BLIND LUCK?** Too often when everyone is busy we resort to newsletters, letters of welcome to a Troop, and requests for help in meetings hoping that everyone will catch on to what is needed and jump right in. If the unit is lucky and some of the parents are experienced in Scouting or oriented towards participation anyway all goes well and nobody figures out that the communication effort wasn't all that successful.



**THE AUDIENCE:** However, there are many units where this is not enough. Parents are both working, some Scouts only have a single parent, there has been a divorce, the family has just moved and is new to the area, there is a health problem, the parents are newly arrived from another country, the parents are shy and uncertain, or you find other challenges. In these cases parental involvement starts to sound like a dream and really will challenge a leader to the max.





**A BETTER WAY:** What seems to work best is a one-to-one face-to-face session with the new parent(s) over a cup of coffee. Face-to-face it is harder to say no and easier for you to answer specific concerns and find unique ways for each parent to help according to their time and talents.

**SUGGESTIONS:** From among those who are participating; e.g. the Scoutmaster and active committee members, divide up the parents you wish to target and:



- ☺ Make an appointment to stop by at their home or a local place that serves soft drinks and coffee. Ask for about an hour of time and make sure you keep things moving.
- ☺ Spend about five minutes really selling the Troop. Show what the Troop has done. Explain how the Scouts really grow. Talk about advancement for a minute or so. Talk about the really great activities that the Patrol Leader's Council is planning.
- ☺ Ask how the parent's son is doing. How do they feel about Scouting?
- ☺ Do they have questions? Things they'd like to know?
- ☺ What are their hobbies? What special skills do they have? (Do your personnel resources inventory on the spot without paper in sight, while getting to know the parent.)
- ☺ Talk to them about parental commitment and how important it is to make sure their son has a good Scouting experience - hit home. Yes they will have a hundred reasons why they are busy. But remind them that by pooling talents with all the other parents it is a lot easier to make sure all the boys have a lot more great opportunities than if only the parent was trying to do it all alone. You do want the best for your son? You want to see him grow and stay out of trouble?
- ☺ As you begin to learn about the Scout and the parent, ask leading questions about how they could help in a particular activity - something where they can get their feet wet and enjoy a successful experience. The key here is starting them small.
- ☺ Start them out by just asking them to drive one way on a trip, helping set up an activity nearby, or helping counsel a merit badge once or twice with another counselor, but not in a lead position until they have confidence. You probably know of at least a dozen small things that could use a helping hand. Pick one that fits the parent, where they can't hardly go wrong.

☺ Immediately recognize their success and help!! Present drivers with a small matchbox type car with a Scouting decal on the top or something simple to say thanks or some simple homemade recognition appropriate to the task. Give a set of red and green cloths pins to somebody who has helped dry out tents, a varnished mounted pancake to somebody that helped with the pancake breakfast, etc. You get the idea.



- ☺ Now that you have the hook set, reel 'em in a little close with another more difficult assignment and again recognize what they do.
- ☺ All along the way communicate the committment by explaining, selling the program, and asking for personal help.

**DON'T BE DISCOURAGED:** Some of these people will move on before you get them very involved and you can't do much about it. But there will be some that will get the fever and jump right in.

**REMEMBER TO ASK INDIVIDUALS TO VOLUNTEER:** I always find that there are at least three parents out of a dozen that would love to help, if only asked. They don't volunteer for cultural reasons (for example, in Hispanic families it may be considered rude to assert qualification for leadership roles, but your invitation would be more than welcome), because of shyness, because they are not sure they can do it, etc. But once asked, these parents bloom and become the best of Scout leaders. So ask!



The opinions expressed in this web page are my own and not necessarily those of the Boy Scouts of America.