

**SCOUTS-L**

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**SCOUTMASTER  
TRANSITION**

**Date:** Fri, 31 Jan 1997 12:30:17 -0700  
**Reply-To:** Amick Robert <amick@SPOT.COLORADO.EDU>  
**Sender:** Scouts-L Youth Group List <Scouts-L@tcu.edu>  
**From:** Amick Robert <amick@SPOT.COLORADO.EDU>  
**Subject:** Re: Scoutmaster transition strategies techniques

Paul, et al,

I am aware of a similar situation with a long-term Scoutmaster who announced retirement. While there was adequate time to select a replacement, initial efforts by the "search committee" were not very fruitful. The first option was to find an "internal" replacement from members of the existing Scoutmaster's staff or committee.

There was much consternation about trying to find someone who had been assistant in the troop to step up and assume the role. Many of the folks who were proposed, had, for various reasons, declined the offer. Finally, a relatively new, and young assistant came forward and said he would like to try it. His name had not been on the list of possible candidates even though he was a member of the Scoutmaster's staff. He is an Eagle Scout and well-liked by the Scouts. The committee was of course very pleased, greatly relieved, and immediately confirmed his appointment.

He has done an remarkable job in the almost two years since the transition. So, I guess the lesson here is don't overlook the possibility of young and relatively inexperienced folks for the "big" job, and try to find folks who are already involved in your program. If they can be in an "apprentice" capacity for the retiring SM, for a while and learn some of the "drill" before the current SM retires, so much the better, but even if not, you can be pleasantly surprised at how well a new and "inexperienced" young Scoutmaster will work out.

One of the new SM's first moves was to appoint an "executive" first assistant SM to be his "second in command" and assume his role if he were unable to be present or otherwise available at various functions and meetings. The 1st ASM in this case was also a dad of one of the Scouts.

A second and inspired step he took was to recruit some Eagle Scout College Students as additional ASM's and they have been just delightful,

because they are very saavy on outdoor/high adventure talents such as rock climbing, river rafting, backpacking, mountain biking, and love to go on trips with the Scouts, so it is a wonderful opportunity for the Troop and the Scouts think they are "ten feet tall."

Make sure that the new SM has plenty of support and encouragement from staff and the committee, have regular scoutmaster staff meetings to go over problems and cover arrangements for trips. See that they get SM fast start and woodbadge if they don't already have it, and share your collective wisdom and resources freely with them. If you notice they are getting "overwhelmed" or frustrated, be sure to be there for them and assist in delegating some of the things that are becoming burdensome.

Never discourage the new SM from trying new and innovative approaches. Too often the "old hands" say "..yes, but..we have always done it that way.." which is a real downer for a new person and worse yet, their ideas may be vastly superior to the old ways, so don't be afraid to encourage new approaches.

Often new folks are reluctant to delegate authority for jobs, for fear of "losing control" or appearing to be unable to "do the job themselves." Big troops especially are never a "one-person show" and those that are, can be in for a "big surprise" if the SM suddenly "burns out" or resigns. Remind them that the "bottom line" is the success of the troop and the best way for that to happen is for everyone to share the workload.

Lots of redundancy and failsafes are needed to avoid inadvertant oversights or problems. If you think your new SM should delegate more authority to other staff members, don't hesitate to suggest folks who might be able to assist in various functions and jobs. They will still be accountable to the SM for their roles, and should frequently consult and review their progress with the SM. The new SM will probably be very grateful because it may have been assumed they would have to accomplish those tasks personally.

We all need to remember that one of the perks of the SM is/should be to have fun and "quality time" with the Scouts. If the SM is overwhelmed with detail and administrative trivia, he may not be enjoying himself and consequently the Scouts may not be having a good time either; and this is not the way it should be!

Be sure that the new SM gets recognition. Too often we forget to praise

and say thanks for doing a great job! It is certainly appropriate to invite the SM out to dinner before a committee meeting, go over the agenda, and reflect about successes, problems, concerns, issues, and the "big picture" of where the troop is going both now and down the road a ways.

Don't forget to nominate the SM for the Scoutmaster Award of merit after they complete 18 months, and get them started on the Scoutmaster's key and Scouter's training awards. These are little perks that don't seem like much, but again say to the SM, "we think you are doing a great job and really appreciate your dedication and love for our Scouts!"

Sometimes former Scoutmasters elect to stay on in less demanding roles as assistants, and can be very valuable resources for occasional advice, recommendations, help on trips and campouts, but should never "overshadow" the new SM. Be sure that if they do stay on, they always defer to the new SM for decisions and consultations from Scouts and parents. If the new SM delegates those responsibilities to a former SM, so be it. The best leaders are those who are good followers.

The old adage that it takes the "whole tribe to raise a child" is appropos for a Scout Troop in particular, so the more help that can be provided, the more successful the new leader will be.

Best wishes.

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