

SCOUTS-L

BEHAVIOR

Date: Mon, 12 May 1997 17:03:47 -0600
From: Amick Robert <amick@SPOT.COLORADO.EDU>
Subject: Re: Totin' Chip and Hazing

I doubt that anyone takes the view that inappropriate actions are without consequences. However, in the spirit of Scouting, we are trying to instill appropriate behavior through good role modeling, and through appropriate and positive correction methods. There are still those who subscribe to the arcane philosophy of "spare the switch, and spoil the child.."; sadly, this never has worked and never will, but it takes folks a long time to wake up and realize that there are far more effective and positive ways to achieve behavior modification.

In the example given about the Eagle Scout who was inappropriately flipping a knife open with other Scouts, would it not have been far better for the leader to have counseled him privately rather than confronting him in the presence of the other Scouts? Even though the Eagle Scout's behavior was inappropriate, was it a good idea for the leader to threaten him with cutting off a corner of his 'totin chip in the presence of the other Scouts? Did the Eagle Scout's self-esteem not suffer due to this rather callous approach?

It is quite possible that if the Eagle were asked "what do you think the best way would be to correct the impression given to other Scouts about flipping a knife being dangerous?" The Eagle Scout might have thoughtfully said, "maybe I should go back and explain to them that this wasn't a good idea and that there are safer ways to handle knives, so let's practice some safety techniques..." In this way, he is given the opportunity to correct the misimpression if he chooses to do so, and to maintain his dignity and self esteem with the other Scouts. Youth are amazingly resourceful if given the opportunity; their methods and responses will surprise and delight you.

While the leader's intent was good, the impact of his methods were clearly inappropriate, so more damage than good was done, when just the opposite might have been the case with a little forethought. Too many folks just "wade in" without thinking about what impact their actions and methods will have.

Sometimes leaders take the view that public humiliation is OK because "that's the way they were brought up, so it must be right.." If leaders

are properly trained in counseling and IF they accept and support what they are taught, there should be no problem. Conflicts arise, however, when leaders refute the training, and revert back to their traditional negative reinforcement techniques. Those folks either need to be counseled firmly about that, or get out of the program if they can't change their methods.

If you help a youth discover his behavior is inappropriate without destroying his self-esteem and personal dignity, you have done him a far greater service than may ever know. Conversely, if you publically humiliate him and destroy his self-confidence and personal dignity, you will be hated for it; and quite possibly you will have reinforced the negative behavior you sought to correct because there is no respect or friendship for you as a leader.

We have to remember that we are "selling" a way of life, and the youth are our clients, so our product has to be presented in the best possible way, or the "clients" will find other "markets." If you read surveys about "what do youth want"...high on the list is association with adults that they like and respect, and that understand and respect them. They don't have to be in Scouting; there are plenty of other interest areas that compete for their time, so we need to do everything possible to keep them involved.

Negative reinforcement by Scout Leaders is certainly nothing new.. Baden-Powell wrote disparagingly of leaders who used these tactics on youth in the early days of Scouting, and his criticism is just as valid now as it was then.

Best wishes,

Bob Amick, Explorer Advisor, High Adventure Explorer Post 72, Boulder, CO

On Sat, 10 May 1997, Paul H. Brown wrote:

> I suspect that there are those who will say that any consequence, for any
> behavior whatsoever, is demeaning. Therefore hazing. Therefore
> forbidden. I hope that you didn't buy into it.