



## The Patrol System

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We dont have it! Our troop is too big. Our troop is too small. Patrols in decision making.

- A Scout troop without a Patrol System!
- Setting our patrols as we want to
- Role of the Patrol Leaders' Council (Unit Council)
- A large troop!

### NO PATROL SYSTEM?

**Q - I have inherited a Scout troop that is not running on the patrol system. How do I go about rectifying the problem?**

**Obviously I'll have to retain the existing patrol leaders but the patrols are simply equal numbers of boys who are not necessarily friends. Furthermore some of the boys bus in - they are not from our suburb. They are the "Friday night only" brigade and won't be available for extramural patrol activity.**

I do not see how these out of town boys will fit into a patrol when it comes to extramural patrol activity. As I see it, the boys of a patrol must be from the immediate vicinity. The immediate problems, as I see it, are:

- How do I reorganise the patrols so the boys who want to be together are together?
- What happens if they all want to be with the same patrol leader?
- What do I do with the out of town boys and those who are not wanted by any of the patrols?

A - You are facing various specific problems:

1. You have discovered that your patrols are just "small groups" formed of equal numbers of boys, instead of real "gangs" of friends. You want to correct this situation in order to make your patrols and unit more dynamic.
2. However, you don't know how to form "real" patrols with young people who do not live in the same area. They

just come together for short events and don't have any opportunities to be together the rest of the time.

3. You are afraid to let Scouts decide by themselves how to form the patrols, because a large number could decide to be with the same patrol leader, and some others might not find a place in any of the patrols and be left out.

Firstly, I have to tell you that I do not have any "miracle" solutions.

Secondly, you should not think that a Scout leader should be a "magician" able to solve all the problems by him or herself.

Your Scouts are facing the most crucial problem of any human society: how to live together and form friendly communities open to all and able to co-operate together without rejecting anybody. Your Scouts are involved in the problem, so they should also be involved in the solution. Any group problem in a Scout unit is interesting in itself, because this is an opportunity for education.

This is what "learning by doing" means. In this case, you have a powerful tool in your hand to explain concretely to your Scouts what "citizenship" is and to make them real "citizens" of their communities: the patrols and the unit. Therefore, the only advice that I can give you is to present the problem to your Scouts and discuss with them how to find the best possible solution together.

Pay attention to one thing: if your Scouts are not used to being involved in decision-making, they could ask you to make the decision on your own. You should refuse, because they should be involved in finding a solution so that they develop a real awareness of "citizenship". You could proceed as follows:

1. Propose to your Scouts to do a "sociometric test" (the name is quite "pompous" but it is actually very simple). Go to the Leaders ToolBox and get "How to analyse interpersonal relationships in a group". This document explains how to do a sociometric test. This will help you to analyse how your unit is structured, who the most popular members are and who risks being rejected or isolated. The results of the sociometric test should NOT be given to Scouts. This is just for your information. You could see that people are spontaneously developing positive or negative relationships even in very short meetings. This means that even the "bus boys" could develop friendship with others they meet for a short period.

2. Organise a "unit council" with your patrol leaders. Explain to them why it is important that the Scouts are involved in setting up the patrols. They should understand this and also understand that at the end of the day it will be necessary to reach a compromise between two different requirements: allowing young people to make choices on the one hand, but not leaving any Scout out on the other hand.

Define a method to propose to the Scouts in order to set up the patrols in a democratic and balanced way.

3. Organise a "unit assembly" (with all the Scouts), at which the problem will be introduced (by you or one of the patrol leaders), analysed and discussed by the Scouts, and at which the method prepared by the unit council will be proposed, discussed, adopted (with some possible amendments) and implemented.

All the decisions during this meeting should be made in reference to the Scout Law, which is the fundamental law of the unit. It is your role to remind them of the values of this fundamental law if needed: for example, according to the Scout Law, "we should be open to others", "we should not reject anybody", etc.

This could be an opportunity for deciding together some common rules for the group life, in the light of the Scout Law. You can understand that the target is to reach a compromise which will be accepted by all: a compromise between the desire to create "exclusive gangs", where the most popular boys could be together, and the need not to reject anybody.

Such a compromise has in itself a high educational value: it shows young people how to build a democratic and caring

society open to all. It even has a spiritual value, because the experience of building such a "brotherhood" is in itself a spiritual experience (God calls upon us to create and develop such communities).

In the Leader's ToolBox, look at:

- Understanding the patrol system.
- How to prepare a council meeting.
- How to run a council meeting

## **SETTING OUR PATROLS AS WE WANT TO**

**Q - Our unit leader won't let us set up our patrol as we want to. Do you think he has the right to do this?**

A - This is not a question of having a right or not. Your leader should realise that if the patrols are not made by young people themselves, they will not be what they are supposed to be: "gangs" of friends who are happy to be together, strongly united, sharing common goals and keen to do great things together. Patrols created by adults may only suffer from a lack of dynamism and true Scout spirit.

Some leaders may be afraid if the most experienced and dynamic Scouts want to form a patrol together. They think that the other patrols will be too weak and there will be an imbalance within the unit. They would prefer more balanced patrols, so they prefer to distribute the Scouts among the patrols according to their age, experience, skills, etc.

The risk in doing this is simply to kill any dynamism in the unit. True balance comes through action and movement (like when you ride a bike). If the patrols are not properly balanced, this is not such a big problem. If the most experienced Scouts are in the same patrol, this is OK. It will be a challenge for the younger "gangs" to show that they can do better and then they will make progress more quickly.

Another danger would be to have very stable patrols without any changes apart from welcoming a new Scout from time to time. Old patrols run the risk of becoming like old institutions, which are completely rigid and ossified. From time to time, it is good to open the windows and let some fresh air in. Traditions are respectable, but they are not aims in themselves. Changes and improvements are also needed.

However, your leader should also consider the risk of some new Scouts or shy boys and girls not being integrated into any patrol. Therefore, if Scouts are given the freedom to organise their patrols as they want, the Scouts and leaders need to discuss how to ensure that nobody is forgotten or left out. If each patrol is to be formed of a "gang" of mutually chosen friends, each patrol also has a duty to welcome those who want to join them, even if they are not part of the "gang" of friends at the beginning. A patrol which is closed in on itself cannot be a good patrol.

## **ROLE OF THE PATROL LEADERS' COUNCIL**

**Q - What exactly is the role of the patrol leaders' council in a Scout unit?**

A - To understand the role of the patrol leaders' council - e.g. the meeting of the patrol leaders and adult leaders - it is firstly

necessary to understand what we call the "patrol system" in Scouting. Generally a Scout unit - whatever the age range - is formed of several teams of 6-8 young people, traditionally called "patrols" in the adolescent section (Scouts from 11-15).

Many people think that the "patrol system" is just a way to work in small teams. In fact, it is much more than that.

In the book that he wrote to explain the Scout method to adult leaders (Aids to Scoutmastership) Baden-Powell, our Founder, explained: "The object of the patrol system is mainly to give real responsibility to as many of the boys as possible" and also: "It is the patrol system that makes the troop, and all Scouting for that matter, a real co-operative effort."

In fact, thanks to the patrol system, the Scout unit works like a small "republic of young people". The teams or patrols are the small communities bringing together young people who share similar views and interests; each patrol is led by a patrol leader appointed by the adult leaders in agreement with the patrol members.

The patrol leaders' council, bringing together the patrol leaders and the adult leaders, is the "executive body" or the government of this small republic. It is in charge of managing the unit, organising the programme of activities, examining decisions about equipment, finance, the meeting place, etc. The adult leaders should not take any decisions without the approval of the patrol leaders' council.

The assembly of all Scouts is like the "legislative body", making the big decisions, evaluating the group life and deciding upon common rules according to the Scout law. Thanks to the patrol system each Scout has a say about the functioning of the unit. The patrol system is an effective way of involving young people in decision making and training them to become active and responsible citizens.

You can get more information by downloading the ToolBox handout "How to make the team system work"

## **A LARGE TROOP!**

**Q - We have a problem in our troop it has recently grown to over 60 members before it has always averaged at about 45. found that keeping control over the boys was extremely hard to do especially a few. I need to know some ideas on systems for running such a large troop (program planning etc), as it seems to be still growing. One of our problems was that large patrols couldn't be handled well enough and splitting up the troop to 8 or 9 patrols has problems on the troop leader (TL'S) side. Any ideas please? Are there any other troops I could be put into contact with that are also handling large numbers, either affectively or not?**

A - To respond to your question, I can only quote our Founder, Robert Baden-Powell:

"The formation of the boys into permanent Patrols of from six to eight and treating them as separate units each under its own responsible leader is the key to a good Troop. The Patrol is the unit of Scouting always, whether for work or for play, for discipline or for duty." (Aids to Scoutmastership)

You are right in saying that "large patrols couldn't be handled well enough". Working in small groups is an essential part of the Scout method. However the patrol system has another purpose which is really crucial: it is a system of youth participation. Baden-Powell wrote also:

"The patrol system has a great character-training value if it is used aright. It leads each boy to see that he has some individual responsibility for the good of his patrol. It leads each patrol to see that it has definite responsibility for the good of the troop..." (Aids to Scoutmastership)

I realise the difficulty that your troop leader has in working with 8 to 9 patrols. Maybe the solution is to split your troop into two different units. Let me also quote what our Founder wrote about the size of the troops:

"The numbers in a Troop should preferably not exceed thirty two. I suggest this number because in training boys myself I have found that sixteen was about as many I could deal with - in getting at and bringing out the individual character in each. I allow for other people being twice as capable as myself and hence the total of thirty-two." (Aids to Scoutmasterhip)

Please explain to your troop leader that running a troop of 60 members means that you think you are four times as capable as the Founder!

You can get more information on the patrol system by downloading the ToolBox handout "Understanding the team system".