



Leaders' Role, Support and Training

?????:Andres Morales

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Overloaded? Delegating to / involving young people in decision making. Scouting and politics. Encouraging retirement.

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THE GROUP LEADER

Q - I am a Scout leader and I am just enquiring what exactly the position of group leader in any troop is and what job parents and friends should do?

A - I would like to say that according to my experience the local Scout Group is very important. It is the only place in the Scout Movement where Scouting's educational proposal can be made to children and young people of all ages. The full educational programme of Scouting is not limited to one age range: Cub Scouts, Scouts, or Venture Scouts. To be able to understand and evaluate it correctly, you need to consider its development from childhood (Cub Scouts) to Venture Scouts or Rovers (young adults) in a given community.

This is the very important function of the Scout Group: to deliver the Scout programme to a local community through the various age groups in a way which is adapted to the local needs. Therefore, the Group leader should form a real "educational team" with the leaders of the various units (Cub Pack, Scout troop and Venture Scout unit). This team has to evaluate the educational needs in the local community and provide a relevant response through Scouting. A good example of this kind of work can be found in an excellent document published by the Interamerican Scout Office : "The Group Plan". You can order it from the Interamerican Scout Office: interamerica@scout.org

The problem is that sometimes the Group leader's function is described or understood just as a purely administrative job e.g. to manage finance, equipment, meeting places, etc. This is very necessary but not sufficient. The Group leader should firstly be an educator, able to support the unit leaders in assessing the needs of children and young people and identifying relevant activities to meet these needs. When a local Group works in this way, there is no problem to involve the parents.

They discover that the Group is led by a real educational team with clear educational objectives and they are motivated to give support on practical matters (equipment, money, etc.). A good way to involve everybody is to set up a Group Committee

comprising the unit leaders, the Group leader and parents' representatives. This committee can meet every two months, for example, to discuss all the problems faced by the Group. However, a smaller educational team involving the unit leaders and the Group leader is necessary to examine educational problems more closely.

OVERLOADED LEADERS

Q -Over the past years I have been associated with Scouts, I feel that as a leader, one is put under a great deal of pressure. With all the regulations, legislation, political correctness etc. It is no wonder that Leaders leave when they are continually on their guard and trying to do the right thing. One must remember that we are ordinary citizens, and in some cases family parents. We have enough to worry about just being parents without having extra problems thrust upon us. During my training nothing was said about political correctness, or reporting child abuse etc. How far does a volunteer leader go in this regard? Talk about frustration?

A -You are not asking a question, you are giving a testimony and I share your point of view. I think that Scout associations should not forget that the Unit leader's position is the most important one in Scouting because it is the only one where you are dealing with children or young people directly.

What would an educational movement such as Scouting be without educators?

All the other positions in Scouting should support unit leaders and facilitate their role. Unfortunately, people think too naturally that to be a district commissioner or a trainer, or a member of the national board is more important than being a modest local leader, and sometimes they just forget them.

Scouting would not exist without unit leaders and the quality of a National Scout Organization depends upon the quality of the unit leaders it is able to recruit and keep.

This is why most of the efforts of district and national leaders should be aimed at valuing and facilitating the role of adult unit leaders in order to be able to attract and keep first class people (mature, committed, efficient, etc.) in this role.

Unfortunately, in some associations, practice is very different. Unit leaders receive weak support and have to solve a number of problems by themselves while being put under high pressure from more and more regulations. Furthermore, every time a leader is successful at the unit level, he is often proposed another position at district or county levels.

In many Scout associations, decision makers should be more aware of this situation. They should consider that the only way to increase the quality of the programme is to keep good leaders in their position for a longer time. That saves a lot of resources in terms of recruitment and training. By giving good and experienced leaders opportunities for sharing their experiences and their good practices, it will also be possible to improve the quality of the Scout programme.

Finally, Scout associations should do their best to make the Unit leader's role recognised as a very valuable social role in the community. Adults, men and women, who commit themselves as Scout unit leaders should be recognised and praised by the community.

This is why I have decided to recommend to the World Scout Bureau to create on this website a special page for Unit Scout leaders in order for them to express their concerns, share their experience and receive more support.

Although I understand your frustration, I am sure that in giving your time for young people, helping them grow and making them happy, you have also enjoyed this fantastic and unique role of Unit Scout leader who is most often, for his/her Scouts both a friend and a hero.

ONLY ONE LEADER!

Q - What happens if in our section (Rovers) there is only one leader. Is it possible to use the program correctly?

A - If there is only one leader in your Rover unit, this is certainly not a reason to close the unit! Scouts should not give up when they face difficulties. (Do you know the story of the two frogs told by Baden-Powell?).

1) In Rovering, the teams should be autonomous. Therefore, the team leaders (Rovers) should be able to lead team activities and to help the unit leader in managing the unit.

2) The activities should not be selected and organised by the unit leader but by the unit council formed from the team leaders and the unit leader. Look at Leader's Toolbox.

3) The Rovers could and should make efforts to find one or two adults able to help their Scout leader. They could discuss and write the profile of a young man or woman they would see in this role and then look for people corresponding to this profile among their relatives or neighbours. When 2 or 3 people are identified, the Rovers could invite them to a meeting, explain to them what they are doing and ask them whether they would agree to help them in developing their activities and projects. Those who accept should be introduced to the Group leader or the District Commissioner to be selected and appointed as Rover leaders.

CAN A SCOUT LEADER BE A POLITICIAN?

Q -I want to know if a Scout could be a politician.

A - In the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (Article I,2) the purpose of Scouting is defined as follows:

"The purpose of the Scout Movement is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials, as individuals, as responsible citizens and as member of their local, national and international communities."

You can see that Scouting does not want to help young people achieve their full potential only as individuals but also as responsible citizens and members of various communities from local to international levels.

One of the principles of Scouting is "Duty to others". It is defined in the Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (Article II, paragraph 2) as follows:

"- Loyalty to one's country in harmony with the promotion of local, national and international peace, understanding and co-operation.

- Participation in the development of society with recognition and respect for the dignity of one's fellow-man and for the integrity of the natural world."

That means that Scouting wants to educate young people for active participation to the development of the society. A Scout is not a spectator but an actor.

Now if you look at the definition of the Scout Movement, still in the Constitution of WOSM (Article I,1), you can read:

"The Scout Movement is a voluntary non political educational Movement for young people open to all without distinction of origin, race or creed..."

You can conclude from these quotations that:

1. The Scout Movement wants to stay independent from any political party, because it must be open to all. If, in a given country, the Scout Movement is linked to some political party, obviously people close to other parties will refuse to join Scouting.
2. While independent from any political party, Scouting wants to educate active and responsible citizens able to be involved in actions and projects to "participate in the development of the society..."

Scouting wants to make young people aware of problems existing in society and encourage them to be committed, with other people, to finding solutions. However, young people should be trained and encouraged to make choices by themselves. The Scout Movement refuses to manipulate young people or to dictate to them.

3) Therefore, as a Scout leader, you can be involved in a political party.

However, if you are a Scout leader at national or regional levels and if your function is to represent the Movement, it is quite impossible for you to be a politician who also has the role of representing a political party at the same time. There would indeed be a risk of confusion between your function in Scouting and your function in the political party. And from this confusion, some people could make the conclusion that the Scout Movement is not independent but linked to or influenced by a political party.

A KINDER METHOD OF RETIREMENT?

Q - Help! We have a lady who has been with our group for 30 years. She is now 75 years old. Despite repeated hints that she should retire (we have actually had a retirement do, but she came back to help) she still goes on hikes, outings, sausage sizzles, etc.

Although fit and healthy, we feel that, over the last few years she is not as tolerant of the boys and is always 'nattering' them, forever fussing over favourites and does not like girls in the pack. She will start to clean up and pack away activities and crafts before Akela calls time, will countermand orders and therefore undermine the leaders authority, Don't get me wrong, she has been a great asset to our group, a keen Scouter, and Scouting is her life. It will come down to telling her to go, unless we can find a kinder method of retirement.

Any suggestions? Nobody wants to hurt her feelings, but the atmosphere on pack nights is becoming fraught.

A -In order to avoid the problem you are facing, many Scout organisations have set an upper age limit for unit leaders: if you are more than 50, for example, you cannot be a unit leader.

Apparently, this is not the case in your association. However, I have noted that this lady is no longer a leader: "she comes to help". The problem is obviously that she needs the kind of activities provided by Scouting.

There are two possible approaches:

1. The soft one: organise a meeting with the other Scout leaders and look at this lady's situation: What family does she have? What kind of social life does she have outside Scouting? Does she have any hobbies? etc. Then try to identify a role

that would fit with her capacities and prevent her from interfering in the leaders' functions. Is there any task which is not covered in your group and which you could give her? For example, to manage a group of supporters to raise funds, maintain the equipment or prepare the annual Group festival, etc.

2. The rough one: If you have already tried the soft approach without results and you think that it will not work, there is no other solution but to use the rough one. The objective is that this old lady receives and clearly understands the message that her involvement in the Scout unit cannot continue. You can either tell her the message directly, for example in a meeting with the other leaders, or you can use an indirect (less aggressive) way of asking a person that she knows and respects to convey the message to her in a kind but very precise and definite way.

Whatever the chosen approach, afterwards you should organise a party in her honour, to thank her for all the support she has given to the group and give her a farewell gift.

One final piece of advice: resist the temptation of being too kind. You have to be clear and make her understand that she has to stop. The longer you hesitate or wait, the more difficult it will be and the more it will hurt her. Because the day will come when you will no longer be able to accept her and then maybe you will react in a nasty way.

Above all, remember the story of this old lady and do not behave in the same way later... The motto "Once a Scout, always a Scout" is misleading. There is a time for involvement and there is a time for retirement, because younger people have to play their role too.