

**“I Don’t Care About Square Knots – I’m Just Here for the Boys!”**

**By**

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**February 21, 2008**

In Trailblazer District, we are hoping to eliminate part of the problem by offering a combined Cub Scout Leader Specifics class. Instead of attending a 2.5 to 3-hour class each time a leader transitions to a new position, as frequently as each year, a leader can attend our 5-hour class and receive training in each of the five positions: Tiger Cub Den Leader, Den Leader (Wolf and Bear), Webelos Den Leader, Cubmaster and Pack Committee Member. This method will also introduce the first-time leader to the other functional positions and allow them more interaction with those other leaders, as opposed to when they are being taught in a closed group of Tiger Den Leaders, for instance. Refresher sessions or update workshops will be offered as needed, especially when curriculum changes at the National or Council level.

Success has been limited so far. The initial Combined Cub Leader Specifics class (July 2007) contained 12 participants. A class scheduled for October 2007 was cancelled due to a lack of registered participants. A class (November 2007) was presented by a Pack Trainer to his unit leaders, which contained seven participants. Additional classes are currently scheduled for February and March 2008.

### III. Adult Awards

#### A. Square Knots

The criterion for square knot awards differ for each position and actually is a list of steps to take in order to be a quality leader. When adults earn square knots and other awards, such as the Den Leader Award, the Cubmaster Awards, or the Scoutmaster's Key, other adult leaders will recognize the accomplishment and also pursue the awards; thus, more leaders will become trained. When adult awards are presented at Pack or Troop meetings, the boys will view the accomplishment as important and consequently they put importance on their own advancement. In both examples, that's called Leading by Example. At the same time, the boys are benefiting from the training and experience that the adults are receiving.

When adults are NOT progressing towards the completion of training or other awards, they may not be accomplishing all the requirements in order to be a trained leader. If adults aren't trained, they may not be delivering a quality program, which may lead to the boys not advancing, getting bored, and dropping out.

As an example, let's look at the newest adult position, the Pack Trainer, and its associated Square Knot Award:

#### **TRAINING:**

Complete Fast Start training for the Pack Committee.

Complete New Leader Essentials and be able to explain the key elements of Leader Specific

Training for all volunteer positions in the pack.

Complete Youth Protection Training.

Participate in a Training Development Conference.

#### IV. Results of having trained unit leaders.

Rapid turnover among leaders is often the result of the lack of training, especially in Cub Packs. A parent, sometimes new to scouts, gets persuaded to becoming a den leader, or maybe the cubmaster. They don't go to training, so they don't know what to do and then get frustrated and end up quitting relatively quickly. Among the reasons for not becoming trained are: the distance to a training class, or the training class conflicts with something else on their calendar. Other reasons are that they didn't know they needed training, they don't know how to find out about training, or that they thought they were trained. These are the worst, because there are others who share the blame. The Commissioner, the unit committee, the pack trainer, the district committee, etc., all share the responsibility of getting new leaders informed. Trained and informed leaders tend to stay in the program longer.

I asked the following questions in a survey to unit leaders in the district:

1. How long have you been an adult volunteer Cub and/or Boy Scout Leader?
2.
  - a. What is your current registered Scout leader position?
  - b. How long have you been in your current registered position?
  - c. Have you completed all training required for your current registered position?
  - d. If not, why?
  - e. Have you received the "Square Knot" Award for your current registered position?
  - f. If not, why?
3.
  - a. If you have another current registered Scout leader position, what is it?
  - b. How long have you been in this current registered position?
  - c. Have you completed all training required for this current registered position?
  - d. If not, why?
  - e. Have you received the "Square Knot" Award for this current registered position?
  - f. If not, why?
4. About your most recent registered Scout leader position, which you no longer hold, if any:
  - a. What was your most recent previous position?
  - b. How long did you hold this position?
  - c. Did you complete all training required for this position?
  - d. If not, why?
  - e. Did you receive the "Square Knot" Award for this position?
  - f. If not, why?

I sent out the survey request via email to a mailing list of 130 unit and district leaders, plus an unknown number of resends to leaders within units. I received 11 returned surveys, about an 8% return rate. Respondent's tenure as leaders ranged from just over a year to over 62 years.

Of the 11 respondents, only four had been in their primary current position over two years. Two of them were fully trained and two were not. Of the two untrained, one listed time constraints (a cubmaster could not find time to get trained in five years?), while the other listed "unknown." Only one of the four had received the training award ("square knot"). The other three listed

People in Lewis & Clark District generally have the shortest distances to drive to training locations, but distance would not seem to be a negative factor in Goldenrod and Nischa Nimat. In Trailblazer District, 15 of the 26 Cub Scout Packs are located in Council Bluffs proper, an urban area.

A variety of reasons come into play regarding why leaders do not attend training:

Distance to training classes, as discussed earlier.

Unwillingness to travel very far to a class.

Lack of transportation.

Lack of knowledge about how to get trained.

Classes conflict with other activities.

Training is a low priority.

Belief that other training makes them trained for a new position.

Financial reasons – many training committees charge a nominal fee.

Here are some solutions to these excuses:

Distance to training classes: hold training classes in various parts of the district.

Unwillingness to travel very far to a class: have unit committee members take new leaders to class; carpool; trained Pack Trainers or Troop Training Coordinators can give classes in the unit's "home turf." (First, pack trainers and troop training coordinators need to become trained, which is itself a problem, as many units choose not to fill these positions.)

Lack of transportation: carpool.

Lack of knowledge about how to get trained: provide training and contact information at the time an Adult Leader Application is accepted; more involvement by Commissioners, Pack Trainers, Troop Training Coordinators, unit committees, and district training team.

Classes conflict with other activities: district training team can offer classes as frequently as possible; trained Pack Trainers and Troop Training Coordinators can also give classes during scheduled Scout nights.

Training is a low priority: more involvement by Commissioners and unit committees to MAKE it a priority; explain how trained leaders make for a better scouting program.

Belief that other training makes them trained for a new position: more involvement by Commissioners; provide training and contact information at the time that a NEW Adult Leader Application is accepted; monthly district training committee newsletter.

Financial reasons: units may be able to pay the new leader's class fees.

## B. Awards

Recognition of leaders, as well as youth, is very important. Everyone needs recognition for the job they are doing or have done. The Unit Commissioner should monitor the progress of the leaders in the units she is assigned. She should also keep a supply of Award Progress Records on hand, assist the leaders in completing the forms and get the forms turned into the District Training Committee in a timely manner. The second half of the thesis of this paper is, "the adult leaders that do complete training often do not receive completion certificates and training awards in a timely manner." One reason for this is the phenomenon in Boy Scouting where a signed piece of paper and certificate travels from hand to hand and person to person in order to reach its destination. The den leader doesn't know who to give the form to, so she gives it to the Pack Trainer, who may give it to the Cubmaster, who may give it to the Unit Commissioner, who may give it to the District Training Chair, who may give it to the District Executive, who may give it to the Scout Services Office for processing. The certificate and award will then reverse its circuitous route back to someone for presentation at the next pack meeting or court of honor. This process may take weeks, or longer, depending on whether the pertinent individuals are present at the next court of honor.

The computer era has provided some advancement in this area, but it requires the people involved to become more computer-literate and take advantage of technology. Of course, there is a money issue involved, but this can be overcome with some resourcefulness. After all, everyone at least knows someone with a computer, even if it's the local library. Here's one method I recently began using to speed up the process: As the District Training Chair, I am the last person to sign a training award form. I then scan and email the form directly to Scouter Services, with a request to process the application and give the certificate and award to the District Executive (who is usually at the council office once or twice a week). I include the DE on the email to keep them in the loop. I then have the certificate personalized and get it to the appropriate presenter. Another improvement implemented at MAC Scouter Services in October 2007, was ensuring that all adult awards are input into ScoutNet. This is mainly the result of one or two persons taking an active interest and doing the work. Prior to that, record-keeping of adult awards was sporadic and primarily confined at the district level.

The Unit Commissioner can play an integral part of this process, by ensuring timely turn-in of applications and timely presentation of the awards.

## VI. Impact on the District

The Number One impact of Scouters earning "Square Knot Awards" is the presence of a quality Scouting program in the district. When Scouters are trained and experienced, they practice good Scouting techniques, they provide activities, and the Scouts have fun and learn and stay in the program. Units earn Quality Unit awards. Districts earn Quality District awards. (And councils earn Quality Council awards.)

Another impact is that by making public award presentations at Courts of Honor or Roundtables, other leaders, especially new leaders, see the recognition and become more enthusiastic. While it may be true that most Scouters are indeed "here for the boys," most people are also motivated by

End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from Mid-America Council monthly training reports.

Percentage of **Direct Contact Leaders** Trained

	As of:	12/31/2006	6/30/2007	12/31/2007	# of Leaders	1-Yr Chg
1	Goldenrod	68%	46%	48%	123	-20%
2	Nischa Nimat	61%	47%	49%	86	-12%
3	Lewis & Clark	50%	47%	43%	298	-07%
4	Petah La Shauro	50%	41%	45%	74	-05%
5	Wagon Wheel	45%	35%	38%	265	-07%
6	Thundercloud	43%	42%	35%	99	-08%
7	War Eagle	40%	35%	37%	227	-03%
8	Ohwahnasee	38%	32%	30%	131	-08%
9	Diamond Dick	36%	31%	39%	134	+03%
<b>10</b>	<b>Trailblazer</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>-04%</b>
11	Soaring Eagle	34%	35%	38%	560	+04%
12	Twin Lakes	27%	25%	28%	101	+02%

Percentage of **Top Leaders** Trained

	As of:	12/31/2006	6/30/2007	12/31/2007	# of Leaders	1-Yr Chg
1	Ohwahnasee	97%	86%	78%	36	-19%
2	Nischa Nimat	97%	79%	97%	29	0%
3	War Eagle	96%	89%	90%	67	-06%
4	Lewis & Clark	94%	95%	89%	112	-05%
5	Petah La Shauro	94%	85%	92%	26	-02%
6	Thundercloud	94%	87%	76%	34	-18%
7	Goldenrod	92%	92%	100%	40	+08%
8	Twin Lakes	90%	77%	93%	29	+03%
9	Diamond Dick	87%	70%	98%	45	+11%
10	Wagon Wheel	72%	56%	72%	72	0%
<b>11</b>	<b>Trailblazer</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>+08%</b>
12	Soaring Eagle	67%	56%	75%	136	+08%

Percentage of **Total Leaders** Trained

	As of:	12/31/2006	6/30/2007	12/31/2007	# of Leaders	1-Yr Chg
1	Goldenrod	36%	27%	26%	475	-10%
2	Nischa Nimat	34%	28%	28%	287	-06%
3	Wagon Wheel	33%	29%	29%	1148	-04%
4	Lewis & Clark	30%	26%	24%	1135	-06%
5	War Eagle	30%	29%	28%	778	-02%
6	Thundercloud	27%	27%	23%	340	-04%
<b>7</b>	<b>Trailblazer</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>-02%</b>
8	Diamond Dick	26%	21%	24%	442	-02%
9	Petah La Shauro	26%	24%	25%	275	-01%
10	Ohwahnasee	26%	24%	23%	456	-03%
11	Soaring Eagle	21%	21%	22%	2095	+01%
12	Twin Lakes	19%	17%	17%	265	-02%

## Internet References

### Official

BSA Forms: <http://www.scouting.org/forms/>

BSA Online Learning Center: <http://olc.scouting.org/>

Mid-America Council Training Site: <http://www.mac->

[bsa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=29&Itemid=115](http://www.mac-bsa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=29&Itemid=115)

National Council's Commissioner Site: <http://www.scouting.org/nav/enter.jsp?s=cm>

National Council's Training Site: <http://www.scouting.org/nav/enter.jsp?s=ba>

### Other Useful Links

Boy Scout Trail: <http://www.boy scout trail.com/>

BSA Square Knot Guide: <http://knots.boy-scouts.net/>

Cascade Pacific Council's Training Site:

[http://www.cpcbsa.org/training/awards/training\\_awards.html](http://www.cpcbsa.org/training/awards/training_awards.html)

Detroit Area Council's Awards Site: <http://www.dacbsa.org/Awards/Awards-home.htm>

Gilwell.com Training Site: <http://www.gilwell.com/training/>

Knot Trax Series: <http://trax.boy-scouts.net/knottrax.htm>

MacScouter: <http://www.macscouter.com/>

NetCommish: <http://www.netcommish.com/uc.asp>

Scouter Forum: <http://www.scouter.com/>

Scouting Awards and Recognitions: <http://usscouts.org/awards/knots1.asp>

U.S. Scouting Service Project: <http://usscouts.org/>

Virtual Cub Leader's Handbook: <http://www.geocities.com/~pack215/home.html>