

LOST WEBELOS

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The successful transitions of Webelo Dens and Adult Leaders occur when the District Commissioner's trained staff provides effective service, resulting in Quality Boy Scout Units and Districts.

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LOST WEBELOS

Preview

The District Commissioner's staff must be trained and motivated to work effectively with units. A critical function of the staff is the recruitment and retention of youth and adults. The successful transition of the Webelo Dens and Adult Leaders occurs when the District Commissioners trained staff provides service, resulting in Quality Boy Scout Troops and Districts.

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

The Boy Scout movement came to the United States in 1910, and quickly gained membership over its competitors. In 1916, the United States Congress chartered the Boy Scouts, and the resulting organizational shape is recognizable today. The minimum age of twelve was established for the boys. By 1920, 167,677 boys were enrolled in Boy Scout Units. With the success of this program, a demand for a program for the younger brothers of Scouts arose. Some felt such a program would hurt the established program. However, in 1911, the National Executive Board of the Boy Scouts of America authorized the Cubs of America program, with "Cub Mom" and the motto "We do our best".

Because of the negative reaction in the established program against the Cubs, the program was stopped. Almost unnoticed, unofficial Wolf Cub Packs appeared, and in 1918, a sanction printing of the British Wolf Cub Handbook was available for the unofficial units. In 1920, the first National Training Conference for Executives highlighted the need for a younger boy program. Four years later the Executive Board

proposed “the adoption of a younger boy program at the earliest date,” to be kept separate from the Boy Scout program, but to prepare them for “graduation into the Scouting Movement.”

After a committee, with a full time executive, looked into the idea, a grant was obtained in 1927 for its research and development. Based on the committee’s report and recommendations, “experimental units were established in twelve regions of the National Council. These became the “Demonstration Units”. In 1930, units were authorized to qualify under “special permits” and to assure adequate resources and leadership were available. A book for boys and leaders was printed, uniforms designed, and then sold to 102 boys and 1,433 leaders. In 1933, the “experimental” restrictions were removed and by 1934, there were 64,739 boys and 8,269 leaders registered in the Cub Program 2. By then, the five cub ranks were established, and a substantial amount of boy and leader material had been developed.

CREATION OF THE WEBELOS

An effort to create a program for older Cubs led to the creation of the Webelos rank in 1941. In order to enter the program, a boy had to be eleven and half and hold the Cub Scout rank of Lion. A two-year study in the early 1950s recommended some changes in the Cub program, including the Webelos den for ten and a half year olds who had earned the Lion rank. This was implemented in 1954, and a Lion-Webelos handbook was published. In 1960, Cub Scouting lost 30 percent of the registered boys. Following another study, 1967 saw the creation of the Webelos as a separate rank providing the older boys with a unique set of achievements and tasks to prepare them for Boy Scouting. Since this age group is where scouting loses many of the boys, the Lion rank was

eliminated³. The movement continued to increase the numbers of boys and leaders, until 1973 when a participation decline occurred in both groups, which continued through 1977. In 1978, the Webelos rank and the Arrow of Light were added to the Cub program. During the decade of the eighties, registered Cub Scouts numbers remained at approximately 2,500,000 and leaders around 800,000. At the same time, the Boy Scouts were encountering the same problems.² I reviewed the National Annual Report Summaries regarding membership for the decade. These show that fewer Webelos were earning the Arrow of Light, and decreasing numbers of boys were moving to troops, with troops losing boys around the age of fourteen.⁴

The decades of the eighties and nineties saw scouting scrambling to rejuvenate their programs. These efforts included, on the Cub level, extended camping for Webelos, expanding it to a two year program for grades 4 and 5, adding Tiger Cubs and centering the program in elementary schools, addressing the five “unacceptable behaviors”, adding more activity badges, scouting for food to emphasize the good turn concept, renewal plans to recruit dropouts back, the Ethics in Action program to promote an ethical approach to decision making, a family program to strengthen the family from within, the Cub Scout Academics program, Train the Trainer Conference to train those who train the leaders, and the updating of the handbooks regularly. These efforts increased membership so that by 1998, 2.1 million boys and leaders were participating². However, retention remained a problem, especially the transition from Webelos to troops.

TRAILBLAZER DISTRICT

I became District Commissioner of Trailblazer District, Mid-America Council, July 1, 2001, having previously served as Assistant District Commissioner for two years,

Unit Commissioner for a year, Assistant Scout Master, Pack Committee Chair, and Webelos Den Leader. I completed the Administration of Commissioner Service at Philmont Scout Ranch before assuming the position. For the previous four years I had served regularly on Trailblazer Eagle district's Boards of Review and, subsequently have chaired the Eagle Board. As such I am a member of the Advancement Committee, and I am familiar with the advancement problems in the district.

One of the first things I did was ask Lloyd Jerome, District Advancement Chair, to produce an advancement spreadsheet going as far back as he could. The picture was alarming:

YEAR	AOL	TENDERFOOT	SCOUTS
1990	70	77	
1991	97	81	
1992	64	59	
1993	65	50	
1994	55	54	
1995	59	52	
1996	51	70	
1997	91	54	
1998	59	84	86
1999	56	57	83
2000	68	80	91
2001	86	66	72 5

The implications are that the number of Arrow of Lights had been decreasing, although they seemed to be recovering in the last two years. I asked my Council headquarters to print as many of the old district charters as possible. In reviewing those, the increase in the Tenderfoot and Scout ranks appeared to be the result of recruiting, not Webelos advancement. The implementation of the Ideal Year of Scouting in the spring, and a new approach in the fall of 2001 exceeded expectations. However, what the chart and charters tell us is we have a retention problem. I acquired another chart entitled '1994

-2001 Sign Up for Scouting Results, Mid-America Council' (I did not have to ask for this; I was about to learn I was to be inundated with charts):

This spreadsheet shows for the same periods that all districts and Mid-America Council were experiencing the same problems, in both programs and Total Youth

Available:

TRAILBLAZER DISTRICT:

YEAR	CUBS	SCOUTS	TOTAL YOUTH
94/95	117/173	6/16	126/185
96/97	219/175	16/9	228/199
98/99	135/296	11/14	146/310
2000'	129	3	132

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Some of the factors in my district involved the method of recruiting. When I first entered scouting, units in their school areas did recruiting. This was helpful, as boys and parents knew each other. Then, both Council Bluffs and Lewis Central schools reorganized attendance centers, which meant boys and parents were often meeting with unfamiliar people. The District Commissioner at the time, established one school building where all units met to sign up for scouting. In this venue, boys and parents could be shuttled to units close to their homes, still creating the feeling of community. This process seemed to work, but in the Lewis Central area, it was not successful in the Pack/Troop 249 area, because the pack has always provided at least 15 boys for the troop each year. However, the other Lewis Central units, Pack/Troop 2228/528 who met at Krefl Elementary School, which drew from the surrounding neighborhood, became an all district fifth and six grade attendance center. Their boy population moved to the Pack 249 area, which was happy to keep them. This concentration required alert Unit Commissioners at the two schools to see this and make sure boys living in the Krefl

neighborhood were offered the chance to scout there. Another problem reared its ugly head - the Kreft boys made friends with boys in the Pack 249 area, where they attended school, and wanted to join Pack 249. This threatened the stability of Pack 228, and ultimately destroyed it.

We identified another problem, which initially was not realized. We have packs that do not have a partner troops. This was the unnoticed result of the school reorganizations, and this resulted in packs moving to other schools to keep their populations. Consequently we have Webelos and parents dropping out.

I would be remiss not to mention our rural units. We are more of a rural district than some realize, especially since the recent reorganization. Traditionally each community has had a Pack and Troop, and also recruits internally. As small towns become smaller, this presents new problems, especially at the Cub level, because if a pack suffers, so does the troop.

The district also has a number of LDS and Mormon, now Community of Christ units, and we have a close relationship with them. Traditionally the churches have made scouting a requirement for their boys and young men. However, experience taught me they have the same problems maintaining viable units, especially in rural areas.

WHY DO WE LOSE WEBELOS?

As a prelude to writing this paper I used the Internet. I found a wealth of information for the history of scouting. I put the "Why do we Loose Webelos" on several scout chat rooms, troop/pack websites, handed out surveys at Round Table, and I used books in my collection. I promised anyone who answered me would have his/ her name

included in this paper. I intend to keep the promise; they will be listed individually in the in the "In-Text Notes" section. The results of this effort are what follow:

The responses highlighted two broad areas with recommendations, and another mentioned by several Internet responders. These recommendations will be mentioned, but the solution to the last area of concern is better addressed at the National level.

First noted was the lack of a solid tie between packs and troops. Without this connection, several negative events occur. Parents and boys feel the Arrow of Light is the end of scouting. With increased pressure from organized athletics and other school sponsored extra curricular activities for participation at a high level, they move on to what they understand. This includes knowledge of the activity where the benefits of participation also include the physical, character building, recognition, and rewards.⁹

The second area concerned the attitudes exhibited by both the youth and adult leader in troops. Among these attitudes is the belief that it is the Webelos' responsibility to contact the troop, youth and adult condescension to cub youth and adults, and poor activity planning when Webelos do visit the scout troop. Many of the former Cub leaders who contacted me reported troops separated adults and boys. The adults were talked to, not with; there is a difference. The boys felt belittled by the scout youth, who simply ran a typical meeting, with nothing special for the visitors, and no explanation of what was happening. As a result, the boys were bored. On the other hand, former Cub leaders who reported positive experiences, stated boys and parents were kept together and a fun project involved all. Parent-to-parent discussions occurred, as did boy-to-boy talks ⁹. One troop worked on designing a new troop neckerchief, with each patrol working on a design. The Webelos were spread through the patrols, and they were allowed to vote on

the design. All the boys and parents came to this unit. Also noted was this troop had visited the pack several times during the year, with the scouts in full uniform and a scout project to several scout skills were demonstrated as the dens moved from event to event.⁷ Other examples of this approach were also reported.⁹

The third problem is Webelos boys almost always complete all requirements for the Arrow of Light within the first year. My experience supports this. Several respondents suggested that second year Webelos be treated more as Scouts, with a different designation.⁹ A Trailblazer Webelos leader stated in response to my survey question, that the "Cubs have become too young for scouts; they get tired of doing the same old things over and over again. By the time they get to Webelos, it has become work, and work is not fun. At the age of 9-10 they are still trying to find a path to take, and it is when they need us the most. The older boys think they act mature (and they do)." His solution at the Webelos level is the "keep the boys moving so they don't know they are doing achievements, try to get as much accomplished in the first year, so you can have fun in the second year." He also realized the need to keep them busy in the summer months, so they do not drop out (he put it, out of sight out of mind"). During the second year, he recommended contact with the troop as much as possible. This young man put these words into action. He moved his den to a troop, became a Unit Commissioner, District Membership Chair, and is now a Scout Master.¹⁰

The LDS has recognized this problem and have the Blazer program, which is sanctioned by the Boy Scouts of America. Here, they form a troop patrol, but do not attend troop evening meetings. They have their own day time meetings, conduct patrol activities, participate in advancement work, and attend daytime troop activities. At age

twelve they join the troop. I have no statistics as to how this helps retain boys in the transition. This would be a good topic for another candidate's paper.

IMPLEMENTING A SOLUTION ORIENTED PLAN

When I assumed the position of District Commissioner, my predecessor had the year planned through December. I spent the intervening time preparing my own Annual Commissioners Service Plan. I continued the commissioner-training schedule at my commissioner meetings, with one of my staff designated to train a designated topic. The topics were always setup so that what the commissioners would be doing with units in June was the topic in May.

I also did some staff reorganization, moving strong Unit Commissioners to struggling units and moving the weaker Unit Commissioner to strong units. Both benefited from this change. Unit Commissioners were also placed with pack/troop pairs. This may seem obvious. However, some troops and units were separated by distance, the pack for example, in the North ADC area and the troop in the West ADC area. So I also reorganized. The purpose was to task the Unit Commissioners to ensure that regular contact was established; which, encouraged leaders, parents and boys to know each other. The use of Den Chiefs was recommended.

Mid-America Council, Boy Scouts of America, established a table of organization for both troops/packs, which is available at the Council's Website.⁸ Units who fill all the positions with active, trained leaders thrive. Each unit is owned by a Charter organization, with an Institutional Head, and a Charter Partner Representative, who is the liaison between the unit and the charter organization. The governing body of the unit is Pack/Troop Committee, which handles the administrative needs of the unit. An effective

Pack committee consists of the following people: Charter Representative, Committee Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Advancement Chairman, Public Relations Chairman, Membership Chairman, Outings-Activities Chairman, Friends of Scouting Chairman, Scouting for Food Chairman, and Popcorn Kernel. The Cubmaster is a non-voting member. Other positions are Pack Trainer, Den Leader Coach (es) (non voting member(s)), and Assistant Cubmaster. Other pack leaders are Tiger Cub Den Leader, Adult Tiger Partner, Cub Den Leaders, Webelos Den Leaders, Assistant Cub Webelos Den Leaders, and Den Chiefs.⁸ Pack meeting are open to anyone.

The recruitment of new commissioners is an ongoing process in each district. I established a written record for each member of my staff by asking them to provide their personal scouting histories, including positions held, dates of service in those positions, awards received, and training completed, with dates. Every commissioner provided the information. New recruits were given the form to complete. From this start, I continued the records for each commissioner on a yearly basis, while keeping my own as well. This allowed me to track training and eligibility for recognitions. These two things are critical in motivating and retaining staff. I used the usual ways to recruit, using the Assistant District Commissioners, to fill their vacancies, but frequently at Round Table meetings I would ask the unit leaders if they knew who their unit commissioner was. If not, I handed out my roster and mentioned if they wished to know what to expect from a unit commissioner, to enroll in commissioner training. This was a motivator to current staff, and over the years, a number took me up on this. Many are still commissioners on my successor's staff. I required, as much as one can require volunteers, to attend the College of Commissioner Science and earn degrees. Many did this. Another training

innovation was to bring training to the Round Tables, and to offer Youth Protection and New Leader Essentials on a rotating basis. This increased Round Table participation, as shown by sign-in sheets. It did pull those attending training away from Round Table activities, but the sign-in sheets show who came back to subsequent Round Tables.

I ended my term of District Commissioner after three and a half years. I recently asked Lloyd Jerome, Trailblazer Advancement Chairman, to provide a spreadsheet on crossovers from 2002 to 2006:

YEAR	AOL	TENDERFOOT	SCOUT
2002	59		78
2003	73		56
2004	72		104
2005	51		56
2006	66		89 5

This shows a steady increase, except for 2003, which was the year the staff was reorganized. Both Lloyd and I feel these figures represent two concurrent activities: increased crossovers and increased recruiting activities on the part of troops. I would like to believe these figures are the results of increased emphasis on the training provided to all leaders. It also reflects the results of an engaged commissioner staff. This hard work on the part of the Trailblazer Commissioner's staff over the years has resulted in the balanced growth of healthy units achieving Quality Status, and a Quality District.

SUMMARY

The Boy Scouts of America has historically striven to recruit as many boys and adults to its program as possible. There have been periods of growth and contraction, to which the Boy Scout program responded by testing new ideas and approaches, after

periods of trial. The program as now constituted starts with Tiger Cubs on through Webelos, ending with the Arrow of Light, at the Cub Scout level, followed by the Boy Scouts, ending in the rank of Eagle. The Explorer and Venture programs attempt to retain youth through special topic programming, and by extending the age limit to 20 with Venturing, which also includes young women. The on-going theme is retention of members.

The focus of this paper is the effective recruiting and retention of Webelos boys into Scout Troops. There are many reasons they do not transfer after earning the Arrow of Light, among them: competition from sports and other school related activities, a belief the Arrow of Light is the end of scouting, poor information about the Boy Scout Program, and no previous contact with a scout unit. After examining these aspects of the phenomena, the solution to most of them is the cultivation of meaningful and on-going contacts between Packs and Troops. These do not occur on their own, as leaders at both levels may have preconceived notions about the process. Some of the problems of retention by troops have also been mentioned, including what amounts to poorly planned and executed meeting with visiting Webelos and parents, and not treating them in ways that would cause them to want to join the unit.

Therefore, the resolution to these retention challenges comes when the Commissioner's staff provides the service to units as the core of value of their mission. The District Commissioner's staff and adult leaders must be trained in this process annually. Properly handled through the Great Expectations process, quality units at all levels offer well-planned programs, which are fun, challenging, and well understood.

Packs retain boys and leaders. Troops attract youth, leaders and families who remain involved, and districts are improved.

IN-TEXT NOTES

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7. Troop 249 meeting Trailblazer District personal observation as Unit Commissioner October 1999.
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10. Rob Reeve, Adult Scouter, Trailblazer District by email dated December 6, 2002, Subject; Lost Webelos.
11. Individuals who responded to my requests for input: Rick Poirot, Eagle Patrol C-39-02; Wayne Cooper, District Commissioner, Pioneer District, Capital Area Council; Joseph E. Brown, District Commissioner Far East Council, Korea District; Kevin Shanahan, Eagle

Class of 1978, Assistant Scout Master Troop 204, Den Leader, Pack 201, Unit Commissioner, Dan Beard District, Occoneechee Council; Ed Mori, Scout Master Troop 1, Peter 4:10, Pittsburgh, PA; "firtpusk (forum nickname), Minnesota; "sctmom (forum nickname) Georgia; "redfeather" (forum nickname) St. Joseph, MO; "Twocumdad" (forum nickname) location not given; Bob White, Midwest; Mike F., Houston, TX; "Rooster 7 (forum nickname) Maryland; Scott Robinson, Scout Master, Troop 276, Las Vegas, NV; Rob Reeve, Adult Leader, Trailblazer District, Mid-America Council; Steve Jacob, Adult Leader, Unit Commissioner, Trailblazer District, Mid-America Council. All shared their knowledge and time. The back-and -forth this topic generated stunned me. Their input laid the foundation upon which this paper rests. I am indebted to all.

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