

TRAINED FOR BETTER DECISION MAKING

A Doctoral Thesis by

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## Trained For Better Decision Making

“I’m saying that the decisive actions of men like me make second guessing possible. We’re the first guessers. And sometime that’s all it is: educated guesswork. We don’t know how bad it might get. We assess the risk, gage what the collateral damage might be, try to minimize it, and then hold to that course. I’m not saying it doesn’t make for some uneasy nights. But it’s what you have to do.”

The above line is taken out of the novel “The Troop” by Nick Cutter. The person in question has had to make some very tough decisions on not allowing anything on or off an island that a Boy Scout troop happens to be camping, where a very contagious situation of unknown source has developed. The island is cut off from everything while the decision on how to handle this is made.

Decision making is probably the hardest part of being a leader. Whether the decisions are made in business, family, religious situations, government or scouting, someone has to make the decisions. This is why I believe most adults new to scouting fear the leadership roles. It makes them responsible for decisions-decisions they may not be comfortable making.

What to do and when to do it? That’s something that’s always just a step ahead of the person in the lead. Do you turn right or left? Everyone will follow but you know there is always going to be that individual or faction of people that will second guess what you decide to do. And that’s uncomfortable.

In fact, it’s not even fair. If you are the leader, and the decision is yours to make, then no one should be questioning your decision. But that’s not the way things work, and that will usually always happen. The best defense against an action of that type is make the best decision you can.

While with age and maturity, you gain a little bit of knowledge that helps you with the decision making process. You have seen a few things, and understand that the best possible solution to most problems may require a few moments to think it through. Historically, there will most likely be a few precedents that you can recall or even review before the decision has to be made.

But being a leader will require you to make decisions. In any field or any situation, leadership will fall to those who can make the decisions. Small and large, a course of action will be required, and there will be second guessing.

In scouting, decisions have to be made. While some fear making those decisions, scouting provides plenty of training so that the best decisions can be made. While you will probably never have to decide how to handle a situation of a scout troop isolated on an island with an unknown pathogen, the decisions you make will have an impact and set the course for a safe and well developed program for youth.

The adults you bring in with you will have fun too: In Scouting there is a training course for almost everything. From Youth Protection to the safe handling of chainsaws, there are lists of do's and don'ts that must be followed. Having taken quite a few of them, some multiple times, I always find that I learn something new after completing one, and nine times out of ten, I can apply what I learned in many other aspects of my life. Yes, it does take a lot of time, whether the training is on-line or in a classroom setting, and again, time is that one thing that once we spend it-it's gone. Maybe looking at it as time spent is the wrong way to look at it. Perhaps we should look at it as time invested.

Every Scout Deserves a Trained Leader: We have all read or heard that phrase many times but what does it actually mean? Wouldn't an outfitter or guide know just about how to

handle any given situation in the woods? Don't most parents of a child know what's safe for their own children and couldn't they extend that knowledge while in charge of a small group of children for a while? Certainly. For a while. Scouting is not for a while. Scouting is an ongoing process where youth are taught many discipline's, in various settings and involving many people.

From teaching how to run a meeting, to where the best spot to set up camp is all something we pass on to youth. We need to do it with the correct knowledge behind us, in a manner that will be listened to by the youth. Winging it does not always work. Luck only rides on a person's shoulder for so long.

If a vocational skill were all we wanted to pass on, then we would elect to be merit badge counselors. And even merit badge counselors need to have a set of qualifications or a skill set to effectively guide a youth through one. So even a merit badge counselor is trained.

A scout deserves a trained leader because the scout has expectations that he wants fulfilled, and the scout's parents have expectations that the unit he is in will fulfill those while doing it safely. The scout leader then has the responsibility to insure that both sets of expectations can be met to the fullest of his or hers ability. To fulfill that responsibility, the scout leader needs trained.

Leadership Selection and Youth Protection Training: The first couple of decisions are made for you. Every adult must complete an adult membership application and complete Youth Protection Training. Creating a secure and safe environment for the youth on the scouting program begins with these steps. Back ground information you provide will be checked by the unit committee and the chartering organization. Once it reaches the council office, your

application is then checked again. High quality leadership is what we must provide for the program and safety of the youth.

Youth Protection training is required for all BSA registered volunteers. You cannot opt out of this and it must be taken every two years. You will learn the best methods to work with youth that are not your own, as well as the proven ways to insure that their safety is put first. It is continually updated to reflect the ever changing world in which we live. Failure to keep your Youth Protection training status current will result in you being dropped from a unit roster.

So when on the night before you leave for the much anticipated camping trip, you find out that the other adults scheduled to go with you are not able to make the trip, the best decision, albeit the least unpopular decision is to either cancel or postpone the trip or find others who can go with you.

Position Specific: What will your role be? Most of the time, it depends on the age of your son. If he is in first through fifth grade, you will be in a Cub Scout pack. Leadership positions vary from den leaders to Cubmasters. The program is there for you in books and the literature provided, and it's up to you on what you want to do, outside of certain requirements. The age of the youth determine what level or rank they are working toward: First graders are Tigers, second grade youth are Wolves, third graders are bears, and fourth and fifth graders are Webelos scouts. Each one is grade specific and each level is written for the capabilities of someone that age. The role of a den leader is working with five to eight boys on a small level, as compared to a Cubmaster who works with all of the boys no matter the grade level.

When a youth becomes ten and a half or completes the fifth grade, he is eligible to join a Boy Scout troop. Here the level of rank is not age specific. Every youth works at their own pace from Scout rank through Eagle. Not every youth goes as far as Eagle, but all have the

opportunity, as long as they complete it by the time they are eighteen years old. Merit Badge Counselors, Assistant Scoutmasters, and Scoutmasters are needed. Since you are working with youth who are older, you will need training on how best to teach them the skills they need. While this involves working with youth indoors at meetings and outdoors like summer camp, the skills you will need are varied. You do not have to be a hardened outdoorsman to be a scoutmaster. In fact, that may not be a good thing at all. You must have good judgement and be able to work with all of the boys, as well as your fellow adult leaders fairly.

I want to point out a fact taken from the mission statement of the Boy Scouts of America. It does not say anything about attaining any rank. It does make abundantly clear that the end result is to have the youth be able to make ethical choices, or decisions if you will, over a lifetime.

There is some type of training available on-line for all positions. Beyond the on-line training, the council offers classroom like training as well as training done outdoors at camps. Where best to teach the values of compass and maps, and GPS than outdoors where you will in turn teach it to the boys in your troop.

Unit Administration: Every pack and troop is run by the unit committee. From committee members to unit leaders and your chartered organization representative, everyone has a role to fulfill. It is up to the unit committee to decide on a pack's calendar, or to approve a troop's calendar. Each unit has a committee chairperson who runs the unit committee meeting. This person decides what is on the agenda for the meeting. The committee members all vote yea or nay on activities, decide how to fund the approved activities, plans a budget to insure that funding for the activities exist, and gets the approval of the chartered organization representative.

There is always paperwork and planning involved with anything of importance, and along the way, tour permits must be completed to insure that all travel plans have been thoroughly thought through. Each year a unit must recharter with the local council, and decisions must be made as to who will be on the charter document and who will be responsible for completing this document.

To have a good program, you will need funds to pay for it. You can ask for money from the parents, or you can raise funds through a variety of ways approved by the BSA. Selling popcorn in the month of October is one of the traditional methods. Even the best salesman will need to learn the ins and outs of an effective popcorn sales campaign. What you can do and why it must be done that way takes a lot of the decision making process out of it.

Should a unit-pack or troop-wish to raise funds utilizing others sales, the BSA has rules and guidelines that must be followed. It's not that they want any money from the proceeds, it's only that they want the Boy Scouts of America brand represented in a positive light.

Program and Shooting Sports: Once you have reached a decision on what to do, and how to fund it, you must decide how you are going to accomplish it. The program will vary greatly between Cub Scout packs and Boy Scout troops. You may decide to attend a district event where the activity you want to do is run by volunteers, allowing the adults in your group to enjoy the day rather than spend the day in instructing the youth how to do it. You can choose to take a pack out to a camp for a day or a troop out to a campout for a weekend. Where you go and what you choose to do will be up to you. While you do this, you should have some kind of idea of the goals you want to achieve. There is a publication called the Safe Guide to Scouting that will prove beneficial. There are also program guides available to help you decide on the activities.

Some council's hold an event called University of Scouting. It is held annually. These can also be tremendous resources in which program planning can be aided.

We hold out the promise those entering as cub scouts the opportunity of bows and arrows and bb guns. For youth of this age, only approved and trained Range Officers are allowed to run those kind of ranges. And they can only be done at certain kind of camps. Boy Scout age youth may participate in archery and at summer camp, and move onto small caliber rifles and shot guns. Again, on this level of youth only trained range officers can run the events. You may be an avid hunter and know all you think you may need to know about archery and rifles, but it is the responsibility of the trained range officer who will make this a safe activity.

Boy Scout troops can engage in even more adventurous outings. Canoeing and high adventure bases are great examples. If you decide to go canoeing, float plans must be filed with the council office. Float Safely training is required. In that training you will learn how to properly plan and execute your canoe trip safely. While being on the water does have some inherent risks, this training will minimize it.

The BSA offers several high adventure bases you can travel to. Proper planning and fundraising is usually all you will need to go. It can be a big decision, but the experiences are worth it. You will want to see what is required before you go.

Remember that it is our duty to provide a safe environment for our scouts. Not all environments you find yourself in may be safe. You may find your group outdoors in inclement weather sometimes. Knowing how to read the weather and what to watch for will help you decide when to camp and when to get out of camp, and is explained in Weather Hazards training.

Everything Done Safely: The boys want adventure. We want adventure for them. They thrive when they are doing something they have never done before. Many will learn to do it so



well, that they will teach the skills they learned to others. And to be honest with ourselves, there's a level of fun in things that have an element of risk involved.

When we go hiking, swimming, or climbing, anything can happen. While we can never take the all of the risk out of these activities, we can see that certain standards are met so that good decisions are made prior to doing them. A plan to go hiking into the woods without a map, destination, provisions, and informing anyone can only end up in disaster. Jumping into a lake after a day of being in the sun can lead to broken necks if the depth of the water is not checked. Climbing on boulders, or even climbing towers without the proper gear and instructors can result in many types of injuries. That's why the trained leader will do all he can to make certain those actions are not taken, and better decisions are made. Trek Safely, Safe Swim Defense, Climb On Safely and many others available will take the guess work out of your decisions.

**Experienced Leadership:** No one is expecting a new den leader to make life changing decisions. A lot of your better decision makers are experienced and veteran scouts. Seek them out at camps, district roundtable meetings, and even at neighboring units. Chances are they have some very good advice they can share with you. You may be trying something new, but similar to something they have done before. They have been down the road longer than you and can tell you what may be a pitfall to watch out for. They can be a wonderful resource should you need a skill taught, or maybe even provide some needed equipment.

**How to Think like Youth:** Since scouting is a something we teach, then we best learn how to teach it correctly. There is not a better course than Wood Badge for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In this course you will be divided up into small groups called patrols, and operate as a scout troop with someone serving in almost every leadership position there is. You will share ideas as well as meals. You will learn to function as a scout patrol within a troop. Your patrol will have

service projects, and each member of the patrol will leave with a set of goals called a wood badge ticket that must be completed. If the youth is working toward a specific rank, then completing the wood badge ticket is your rank.

Completion of this training, along with Scoutmaster Outdoor Fundamentals will put you in better position to guide youth in scouting. It will also be one of those mountain top experiences when you look back at it.

**You're Unit Commissioner:** There is a group of scouters who have made the decision that the best way to give back to the scouting program is through being a commissioner. While this person is not a member of any particular unit, this person is experienced and trained in many different areas. This person can help those who find themselves for the first time having to complete the annual recharter papers, or help them find a solution to most any given problem. You will come to rely on a good unit commissioner for their wise counsel and guidance.

Part of the training a commissioner takes is to look at different scenarios, real or imagined, and come up with viable options and in most cases, the best possible decision. Your unit commissioner may understand exactly what should be done in most circumstances, but the training they take helps them in allowing you to come up with the answer that best suits your concern.

**You're going to make a Bad Decision:** It's going to happen. You're going to think you thought everything through and that one little item you forgot is going to stand out bigger than a nose on a circus clown. Admit it, learn from it and move on. Chances are in your favor that whatever has gone wrong will not cause injury to someone. It may be something as small as not checking the facts on when a youth can join Cub Scouts if he is home schooled, or in finding out

that no one made the decision as to who was to bring the Dutch oven for the camp out. Get over it, adapt, and move on. Let the second guessers shine for a while.

You're going to Make More Good Decisions than Bad Decisions: If you have thought everything through, and you have checked with all of the available resources you have available, you'll be fine. Sure, there will be those glitches that you did not foresee, but those glitches are inconsequential in the bigger picture and can be overcome. When asked to lead, know that those who are asking you are confident in your abilities. Those abilities include decision making.

To sum things up, the decision making process is one of the things we do most often, and yet the least thing we actually think about in our lives. It becomes second nature to decide how best to get to work, or do any of the endless tasks we do every day.

But there are those days when we are deciding for others that we must stop and really think about what we are deciding on. George W. Bush, in his book "Decision Points" writes about the decisions he made as President of the United States for eight consequential years. He writes about his decisions he got right, as well as the decisions he got wrong. He also lists the reasons he made all of those decisions, good or bad. Reflecting back on it after his presidency, he believed every decision he made, no matter how it turned out, was made in the best interest of our country at the time it was made.

As a scout leader, you will have to make decisions: The purpose of this paper is to ease your fear of making decisions, knowing that someone has to do that and it may very well be you. Go into every decision you can with as much knowledge as you can, assess the risk, eliminate the collateral damage by practicing the standards of safe scouting, and hold the course. At least until a better course develops. Be aware of the fact that someone may second guess your decisions. That's what reflections and tribunals are for.

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