

ISSUES FACING SCOUTING  
THE VALUE OF YOUTH PROTECTION  
And  
CHANGES AROUND THE CORNER

Stephen J. (Steve) McCollister  
Former Council Commissioner, Mid America Council  
VP and Member of the Executive Board  
Central Region, Boy Scouts of America  
March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018

*I was asked to speak again to the College of Commissioner Science about issues that face Scouting as part of the luncheon program. I'm extremely pleased that my presentation was accepted as my thesis to attain the coveted Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science. Commissioners from the Mid-America Council, the Cornhusker Council and the Overland Trails Council were present. The College was held on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018.*

\*\*\*

It's a pleasure to speak to you about Scouting as part of the College of Commissioner Science for the Mid-America Council, the Cornhusker Council and the Overland Trails Council. I will share a few thoughts about the critical job you do and to applaud you for doing it, give you a few heads-up about what's in the heads of the folks at National BSA, talk about Youth Protection from a point-of-view that you probably haven't heard, and give you some thoughts about recruiting Commissioners and leaders in general.

First, you know this already, **the value of scouting** - in our society and across the world - is greater than ever. Who's going to argue that we need leaders who are ethical, bold, wise and respected? From the highest levels of government to the neighborhood association; from the Corporate board room to the foreman on the shop floor; from the mom and dad organizing the Blue and Gold banquet to the mom and dad teaching their kids right and wrong - Scouting can and DOES teach leadership, ethics, resilience, toughness and pride. Scouting teaches that recognition for success is a good thing; that's called advancement. Scouting teaches that it's OK to fail, to have to try again, and to accept help from others to get through the COPE course, make it on the hike, build a fire with wet wood, and to rely on your peers rather than adults; that's called youth leadership.

No matter what you do in Scouting - your job is to provide a quality program. That's especially true of the Commissioner. Your job is to help units meet their goals and expectations. It's to see problems (maybe before there is a crisis) and solve them. It's to recruit leadership and provide training to those who want to do a good job but need some of the skills.

I look back on my job as the Council Commissioner - many moons ago - as one of the best. Certainly, one of the most fun. And, like I said, our measure of success is when the kids have a good time, met new friends, and we trick them into becoming leaders, learning organizational and planning skills, public speaking and feeling good about their accomplishments through advancement and recognition. They thought they were just going camping.

So, to do this we need to prepare for the future. When I attend the National Annual Meeting (I've been to more than ten) and the two annual Central Region meetings; the common thread is what is on the horizon. Certainly, we discuss the "lagging indicators" like the Journey to Excellence scores, the KPI reports, the Central Region combined National

Membership Report, and the Central Region Re-Chartered Unit report. But, as important as those stacks of paper are, we spend more time discussing and planning for the future. Here are a few of the topics that are on all of our horizons:

- **Membership growth.** We are long past the strain of membership for gay scouts and leaders. No question that it's still on some folk's minds, but that topic is now years past and the BSA is moving forward. No question that it took up time and effort and our focus. We lost a few scouts and scouters, but we gained some too. My belief is that the BSA is doing a better job of reflecting the beliefs of the scouts and parents of a generation or two younger than me. My kids and grandkids told me then that it was no big deal, but I had to figure that out for myself. Membership loss has slowed and has showed gains in many areas. Even the United Way seems to be a bit friendlier in areas where we've been shut out.
- **Girls, Oh my gosh, GIRLS!** Family scouting is here. There are and will be Packs with female and male separate dens, but the cub program has had very modest changes. The books are becoming gender neutral, some of the patches are changing and the uniforms are becoming updated. Research tells us that the current curriculum for the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scout programs is relevant for both boys and girls. There is also high interest in joining the program at both the Cub Scout and Boy Scout level.
  - Parents of cub scouts today tell us that better than 2 out of 3 (67% in the central region) would be interested in registering their daughters if a program was available.
  - Among non-scouting families, 90% tell us that they are interested in the Scouting type of program.
  - At the Cub level, survey estimates indicate that adding girls 5 - 10 years old will bring in a significant number of new members.
  - Other data - We know that families have less free time, 60% of the parents work in a two-parent household, 27% of the households are single-parent, and scouting under-serves Hispanic and African-American households. We know that millennial parents want to spend more time interacting together with their kids. Not the boys doing one thing and the girls doing another.
- **What about Boy Scouts?**
  - In October, the BSA National Executive Board - with lots of data - voted unanimously to welcome girls to the Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting. You know, there are girls in other Scout programs already.
  - A program for older girls will launch in February 2019. I'd guess that there will be a pilot program and I'd also anticipate that girls in the cub program will be able to transition via Webelo's into the new older girl's program. The timing will be coordinated - just makes sense. I note that some people say there won't be a pilot for the older girls, so I'll be listening

with thousands of others at the National meeting in late May to hear 'wasss up'.

- o Girls will earn merit badges, advance through the ranks and will be able to attain the Eagle rank. That's not going to be compromised.
  - o Troops will be single gender; a linked troop structure has been approved where Chartered Organizations and Committees may be shared between troops. It's perfectly conceivable, but not required, that the two linked troops will meet on the same night in separate locations of the same building. There will be potential changes with regard to Youth Protection - particularly wording (but not the concept), neutral gender wording in the training modules, handbooks and leader materials. I expect that there will be a picture of a girl and a boy on the cover of the handbook. Likely, there will be some potential changes in the OA.
  - o No changes with regard to applications, fees, adult or youth leadership positions. No changes with regard to advancement, training, national camping standards, tenting and showering policy, council and district structure and High Adventure program requirements. No changes are anticipated in Unit Service; Roundtables or the Commissioner College - except that there might be a whole lot more people.
- When is this all going to happen? It's happening now. I anticipate the National Meeting in late May is going to be a fire hose of information. I can hardly wait. We'll see the Cub Scout recruiting materials and hear reports from the early adopters. Hold on to your seats, this is going to be fun. Personally, I think we'd better be ready for a huge group of new scouts. Most conversation is about double-digit membership growth. Be ready for new units, new leaders and of course, additional commissioners. In order to be fair to all, I note that some say that membership growth will be slower and more controlled. Whatever, just think what will happen when we double the number of available youth that can benefit from Scouting.

**Training.** I was asked to touch on training as part of my presentation to the Commissioner's College. It's not my strong suit so I reached out to my friend, Ken King, the Central Region VP for Training. He provided a document to me and gave me permission to pass it to you. It's in the packet of material you have. I'll leave it at that.

BUT, things can go wrong. Let me talk about **Youth Protection**. I was the Regional VP of Membership Standards for years and now serve on the National Committee to review the cases, so I have a pretty good view of the issue. Some of you have heard the IV files. That stands for Ineligible Volunteer. When an existing or new Scouter or Scout does something not appropriate or fills out their registration form for the first time, the wheels start to turn. A background check is done; known as a CBC. If the box is checked on the form related to certain prior convictions or if the CBC shows certain prior convictions the applicant gets a close look by the Scout Executive and might be deemed ineligible.

If someone - a parent or anyone files a complaint- an existing leader or new applicant might be deemed ineligible. If there is a newspaper story and that person is a Scouter or Scout, that person might be deemed ineligible. It doesn't happen often, but it happens often enough. Unfortunately, there have been times when those stories have lead the news cycle.

If someone is deemed ineligible, they're sent a letter that their registration is not approved or its revoked. It sounds unfair, but we must protect the scouts. They are given the details on how to appeal their revocation. That is the appeal committee that I serve on. We must protect the scouts. Our guiding principal and motto is SCOUTS FIRST. That motto says: "Putting Scouts First is how we deliver the program that will keep youth safe and ensure the best possible outcomes. We will help to ensure a safe, quality program for all scouts. All other considerations are secondary. "

I have opportunities to serve at many levels within the Scouting organization; at the local council level, at the Area Level and at the Regional level. I enjoy them all. My passion for Youth Protection is reflected on the Membership Standards review team. As I said in my opening thoughts, I believe that Scouting serves to build strong, compassionate citizens who serve others. Youth Protection protects the youth and the organization, as well. Youth Protection protects the brand of Scouting.

It's not unusual to read and decide 12 cases from all over the country every month. Let me tell you some brief snippets about a few of them as examples. The cases are always highly confidential, complicated and some are long. I can give you an overview without names, councils or other identifications. We agree to shred every case (if it's been printed) and delete it from the computer when its decided.

- There was a Leadership case where an adult leader got into a huge and apparently violent altercation with another adult, his brother. It wasn't the first time. Brothers fight, right? No scouts were actually present, but "F Bombs" and threats were flying, and scouts heard it all. The leaders are no longer serving but I'd bet that they're still fighting.
- There was another Leadership case where a Chartered Organization representative was described as terse and intimidating to both Scouts and leaders. Scouts described him as Disturbing, a Control Freak and Threatening. He told scouts who to vote for in OA and Troop elections. The Council recommended not to reinstate, and the committee agreed.
- There was a CBC case where prior misdemeanor convictions of DUI and possession of a Pot Smoking device were disclosed. Those cases were 10 and 15 years ago. The individual and support letters described him as 'not the man he was' and an effective and valuable leader. The council was in favor of reinstatement and the individual is

currently serving. I note that the membership standards rules for DUI have changed in the new program and that recreational pot is even legal in a few states. This - and social media - have made many of our cases more complicated. More on social media in a minute.

- There was a case of criminal child endangerment by a scoutmaster. Individual was accused of abusing his domestic partner's three children and his own daughter. The sheriff's office reported that there was no evidence of the charge, medical exams found no evidence of abuse, the Council was in favor of reinstatement. The sheriff is investigating charges of false allegations. He was reinstated.
- There was a case of a two-deep leadership violation. On a bike hike, a scout got a half mile ahead. The adult at the head of the pack repeatedly told the scout to slow down and stay with the group which he ignored. The leader chose to stay with the scout even though he knew it was a violation of the rules but a better choice than leaving the scout alone. The scout was reprimanded, and the adult was reprimanded and reinstated.
- There was a Youth Protection case where an Asst. Scoutmaster sent a scout inappropriate sexual pictures - including his genitals - and texts via snapchat to the scout. The scout disclosed the exchange to his father who contacted the council. That was an easy case to decide.
- Sometimes business conflicts turn into scout issues as when an unhappy real estate client accused an agent (and scout leader) of inappropriate things that turned out false. He was reinstated.
- There was a case where a young military guy with awards and recognitions had sex with a girl who looked and claimed to be older but turned out to be 17. He found out on her Facebook account. Even though he turned himself in, he spent time in jail for sexual offences against a child and was on probation. Even though there was no criminal intent, he cannot serve as an adult scouter with a criminal record and included on the sexual predators list.
- And finally, let me mention that social media has caused the downfall of many a scouter and scout. There are cases where an adult's hateful political views on Facebook were the background for revocation; where scouts and scouters alike were removed for hateful and threatening views on LGBT issues and it's very important to remember that photos of drunken parties and inappropriate relationships are never completely deleted from the enormous data bases the next morning.

I think you can understand that appropriate leadership style, two-deep leadership and Youth Protection is a big deal. If you ever have a question regarding any of the standards we set for ourselves in the BSA, go directly to the Scout Executive or the senior staff. There is a web site, as well. Remember SCOUTS FIRST. If you or any of those you mentor

as commissioners need guidance, try the Scout Oath and Law; that's a pretty good guide.

I should mention, as well, the votes in the appeals committee are not always unanimous, and each case is carefully and completely reviewed.

New subject and a much happier one. Let's talk about **recruiting leadership**. We are always in the recruiting business. Whether you are lining up your replacement, adding more commissioners, or upgrading the leadership of a Pack or Troop. Here's an anecdote about the process of choosing a new leader that I like. It's called the Oreo Test; it's not original to me but I like it a lot and I like to share it. There is a message here in addition to a little humor.

- A Scoutmaster always asks a group of adults to bring treats for the troop's next meeting. Here is what he observes.
  - If someone agrees to bring treats but forgets and makes excuses - forget them.
  - If someone brings some Oreos but just the minimum number - thank them. They did the minimum of what's expected.
  - If someone brings two packages - more than just enough - of Oreos - thank them and keep their number handy. They did more than the minimum of what was expected.
  - If someone brings way more than required, double stuffed and juice boxes. They way exceeded expectations. Sign them up to be the next commissioner or scoutmaster. I think that the characteristic of 'exceeding expectations' is a personality trait and I love people like that.
  
- So, I hope you can relate to the Oreo Test and I thank all of you here for how you exceed expectations in Scouting.

Thanks for the opportunity to talk with you.

And, thanks for your commitment and service to Scouting. Together, we are volunteering to grow scouting and bring our programs to girls as well as boys; we're influencing a whole new generation of kids and parents. We will share the benefits and advantages of Scouting and we'll put the Scouts First. We'll protect them and lead them with our skills, dignity and our talents. It's hard to find people that are more important than those of you right here.

Thanks for everything you do for scouting and I hope you continue to have a great day.

#

 #