

Retention Best Practices:

Cub Scout Packs, Boy Scout Troops and Parents

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Preface

This began as a seemingly simple objective to get the Cub Scout Program back in line with the type of program it was intended to be, focusing on methods to increase retention. It became a Wood Badge ticket surveying Packs in the District that were retaining scouts with some higher degree of success. Some of the Packs were large (100 plus scouts in a suburban neighborhood) and some small (fewer than 30 in a rural environment).

When the preliminary Power Point presentation was first presented, one of the Unit Commissioners present wanted to know “What about Boy Scout Units?” This created an “Odyssey” of sorts, searching for every item of retention help for all Cub Scout Packs and Boy Scout Troops.

Credit needs to be given to the Adult Leaders of Packs 190, 234 and 178 for their assistance in sharing the methods that help them keep (retain) their Cub Scouts. A thank you to Chuck Ezell, Department Manager, Program Impact, Boy Scouts of America, Council Operations for his counsel in providing a renewed direction. Suggestions were gratefully received from Mr. Joseph F. “Buddy” Crenshaw, Assistant Council Commissioner, Chickasaw Council, BSA and Mr. A. J. Jackson, Assistant Council Commissioner, Middle Tennessee Council, BSA. Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Emily Smith for editing this Thesis.

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Introduction

All of the Scouting units deliver the Scouting Ideals of character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness. Our goal of delivery of these ideals is not in question, however, we lose too many scouts as indicated by our Retention Rates. It is possible to improve the retention of our scouts if we were to change the way that we manage our Packs and Troops.

The training that is available to Cub Scout and Boy Scout Adult Leaders is well above par. However, while the training suggests the Who, What, Where, When and How to accomplish certain portions of the job being trained for, it very often provides flexibility or ambiguity in its direction and does not provide the Why something works nor the history that got Scouting to this point in time. As older Scout Leaders fade away, replaced by new adult faces, the history of what hasn't worked and why procedures have been changed also fade in memory. While 100 years of the history of the Boy Scouts of America has been covered in other publications, for the most part accurately, this document will focus on the parts of the Scouting program where we tend to lose most of our young scouts, the history of Webelos and the Webelos to Scout Transition.

In this document we will direct comments to Cub Scout Packs, Boy Scout Troops and/or Teams. If the attention is to be drawn to any or all of these, we will then refer to a BSA Division Unit or "Unit." If the comments are directed to only one type of BSA Division Unit, then this document will address either a "Pack", "Troop", or "Team."

*"You cannot change your destination overnight,
but you can change your direction overnight."*

Jim Rohn

Scouting Unit Environment or Culture

Let us start with the dynamics of a small group environment or culture (in this case a scouting unit) and a simple question: Who are the Key Three in your Pack or Troop? The Key Three are the steering group that provides direction and shapes the way a Pack or Troop operates and the environment or culture that it operates within. They are the Chartering Organization Representative, the Cubmaster/Scoutmaster and the Committee Chairman.

Key Three Reality Check: 4 Key Elements of Small Groups¹ (such as a Scouting Unit).

The following are rhetorical questions for the designated leaders and specifically The Key Three. The Key Three need to self-examine themselves and their Unit with the following four (4) elements, and reality check follow-up questions:

1. Have I gone out of my way to acknowledge or welcome each **scout and/or parent** of the Unit? What about new scouts and/or parents just joining the Unit?

When was the last time the purpose and goals of the Unit were clearly stated?

2. When I possess clarity on the **purpose** and goal of the Unit, how can I restate this to the Unit and refocus our Unit on our purpose?

Do the parents of the Unit accept ownership in the operation and economic health of the Unit? Is there an open environment in the Unit?

¹ <http://learningpursuitsblog.com/2011/01/26/4-key-elements-of-small-groups-why-do-we-care/>

3. How can I help create, establish, or maintain a safe and trusting culture where all parents and scouts feel genuinely welcome to contribute and interact with one another? How can I establish a **free flow of information** regarding the status, or economic health of the Unit so that every parent of the Unit takes ownership of the Strategies, Goals, Purposes and Objectives of the Unit?

Is an orientation of parents and Training of Adult Leaders a first priority in your Unit when dealing or planning for interaction with parents or adult leaders?

4. How can I help this Unit reshape itself by being willing and open to discovering new insights from scouting and one another? Am I **trained completely** and how do I get others in the Unit to complete their training?

What would a completely trained Unit of Adult Leaders and parents look and sound like?

Note: Every registered Adult Leader will need to be completely trained in their position by re-charter time of the unit in 2012 or they will be dropped from the charter/roster. Anticipate who your Adult Leaders will be and get them trained before they start a new position. Training is no longer an option. Complete Training is NOW a requirement.

Who is the single most important Adult Leader in the Pack? If your answer is anyone other than the person that works directly with the scouts, you have evolved into a death spiral.

“The program runs on Den Leaders. Do anything to keep them happy and productive. Don't let anyone pile extra

duties on them. They are not someone's personal messenger, or delivery boy and especially they are not your wait staff at the Blue and Gold Banquet. Their only job is to lead the dens of Cub Scouts."

"In Cub Scouting, you're either a Den Leader or your main job is to help Den Leaders. There is no other choice."

Bill Smith, the Roundup Guy, *Baloo's Bugle*

It has become simple for new Den Leaders to become acquainted with their new responsibilities. One of the newest help sites is <https://beascout.scouting.org/WelcomeDenLeader.aspx>. This new site provides encouragement as well as resources for new Den Leaders.

Communication within the Unit

What are the 12 Tell-Tale problems of Group/Unit Communication²? If you can answer 'Yes' to even two of the following 12 communication problems, then you have communication issues that must be resolved.

1. You find it hard to get some people to cooperate.
2. Some people are being left out of the communication loop.
3. Replies to messages are being delayed or completely ignored.
4. Groups in the Unit are failing to reach their goals.
5. Mistakes or duplication are cropping up more and more often.
6. People are resorting to criticism and placing blame on other people.
7. Morale of the Unit, parents or teams is going down.
8. Productivity is dull or at zero level.
9. You continue to receive many complaints.
10. Moments of conflict result in expressions of anger or resentment.

² [http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What are the problems of group communication](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_are_the_problems_of_group_communication)

11. There is a significant turnover in Scouts, parents, Adult Leaders or volunteers.

12. There is a significant level of transfers to other Units or dropouts from Scouting.

Good communication skills are skills that facilitate people to communicate effectively with one another³. Not every household has the availability of Internet access, but just about everybody has a phone of some sort. In some places internet access is simply not available, in other areas people don't have the resources to require the access. Include every eventuality in your communication plan. Leave no-one out of the communication loop. Keep the message simple and revert to an old method of telephone trees, don't give anyone more than three or four phone numbers to call, after several branches, everyone gets the brief message.

Which of the 12 Tell-Tale Communication Problems above can you identify with in your Unit. How can those issues be resolved? How many have been left out of the Communication loop in your Unit during this last year? How many of those are still with you? Isn't it time to resolve your communication problems?

Parental Involvement

Cub Scouting is a family oriented endeavor. Training very often covers areas that parents have never been trained in. Is there anyone who thinks that Adult Leaders grow on trees or don't come to Scouting as parents first?

While many social groups and institutions have had their effect on the developing personalities of people, it is the family that shares

³ <http://www.goodcommunicationskills.net/>

the major burden of adapting children to society. For this monumental task, it is not very well equipped.⁴

In child rearing, parents are partners in the complex and confusing, often frustrating task of the socialization of their young. With commitment, that task shows that there are rich rewards present both now and in the future, but the rewards come only through parental participation in the full life of their children.⁵

Another source put it another way:

While many bemoan the decline of the traditional, two-parent family, the truth is that even two parents may not be enough these days. As Chap Clark argues in *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. "In a segmented, fragmented culture in which neighbors do not know one another's names and families are so busy that they don't have time for an evening meal together, even the best of parents cannot possibly hope to meet all the nurturing requirements of raising a postmodern adolescent."⁶

When parents won't vote and won't volunteer their time when it concerns their children, the whole community suffers. Children mimic their parents, and like it or not, parents are role models. It's up to parents to decide what type of role model they will be. Parents bring their boys to Scouts believing that there are good role models in Scouting, and there are. However, there are never enough good role models to handle the demand. Parents must be convinced that there is a personal benefit to their

⁴ Prime Time, A Guide for Parents in Family Life, by Elof Nelson, copyright 1972 by the Minnesota Jaycees, Pg 3

⁵ Prime Time, A Guide for Parents in Family Life, by Elof Nelson, copyright 1972 by the Minnesota Jaycees, Pg 42

⁶ Growing Up Right, Growing Up Strong: Parents, Kids, and Scouting by Dan Baker, Ph. D. & Mark Ray, 2009, published by the Boy Scouts of America, Pg.24, downloadable at <http://www.scoutparents.org/ParentingBook.aspx>

involvement, beyond the statement “It’s for the boys.” For many parents that is not enough to get them energized.

The Scouting program works. It’s up to the leadership in scouting to convince parents to be more involved in their son’s development. Scouting needs and requires people who are committed to doing all that it takes to nurture the young people in the home, in the neighborhood, in church, and in the community. It doesn’t take a big commitment of time, but a small first step is a good start. Before you can get parents to that first step, you very often must get past the objections to being involved.

Understanding Parents Resistance

Parental attitudes: *“It’s not my job.” Or “It’s my partner’s (husband or wife) job.”*

Response: Appeal to their sense of responsibility – if either a two-parent or a single-parent family, their part of their sons child development. Then stress the need for help with their unique skill set.

Safety implications: Some parents point out that they lack the skills and training to look after or teach children. There are implications associated with being responsible for other parents’ children when helping at extra curriculum activities. The media hype surrounding child abuse incidents in recent years has led to a real awareness of the requirement to go through the background checks before being permitted to work with children. Correspondingly, there is also an awareness that other parents may not wish their children to be in the care (under the instruction) of an untrained stranger which also contributes to a general lack of interest in helping out in Scouting. Resolution: Scouting insists on Youth Protection Training before it will accept an adult application,

and provides a background check to ensure that the right type of person is being permitted to work with its boys.

"I don't have the time." Working parents are particularly short of time and feel that they lack sufficient free time to involve themselves in a regular commitment. There is not enough time to devote to every child (especially in families with more than one child). Parents frequently point out that a weekly commitment is simply too much for them to manage thus ruling out activities such as extra curriculum coaching activities or offering assistance to Den Leaders. Response: Start small. Get parents to commit to a small job in the beginning, and help that parent with training. Remember Scouting is a learning opportunity for both parent and child.

"I am not that type of person." Many parents feel that they are not the right type of person to be on a committee and that they are unable to identify with the other members. Response: Open channels of communication emphasizing the need for Parents opinions and input, and provide Bonding Opportunities that help the parent realize that they have much in common with other Scouting parents.

"It's always the same people." There are negative connotations which can be described as "closed", "elitist", "cliquey", and "formal". These incorrect assumptions infer that the Unit, committee, team, Den, etc. is not willing to accept new members or suggestions. Response: Open channels of communication, help the parent to understand what Scouting is all about, then be open to fresh ideas.

"I don't like speaking in public." Many parents feel very intimidated by the thought of involving themselves in these formal bodies because they believe that they would be required to stand up and speak in front of other people or they feel that they do not have

the skills or knowledge required to be able to contribute usefully. Response: Convince the parent that a commitment to a small job does not require Public Speaking talents but the casual sharing of ideas in conversation.

The benefits to the Parent that gets involved in their son's education or development is well documented.⁷ Research shows that when parents are involved in their children's education, the children are more likely to:

- earn better grades;
- score higher on tests;
- pass their classes;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills;
- show improved behavior;
- be more positive in their attitude toward school (and learning);
- complete homework assignments;
- graduate and continue their education.

Barriers to Parental Involvement in the Unit:

1. Lack of openness to the workings and operation of the Unit;
2. Failure to convince or inform parents of what they can do to help;
3. Lack of opportunities offered by the Unit;
4. Infrequency of social contacts or events;
5. Lack of opportunities for low levels of commitment;
6. Elitist (?) attitudes of 'some' involved parents or Adult Leaders;
7. Physical barriers.

If your Pack is guilty of throwing out any of these barriers, how can your Pack tear down these barriers to Parental Involvement?

⁷ <http://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/399-involvement-matters-what-to-tell-parents>

Many of the above reasons or excuses for not being involved can be rectified with logic, training or an orientation of parents. Training of Adult Leaders will very soon be mandatory. Review the list of little jobs that you might ask a parent to undertake (see Appendix "Ways to Involve Parents in their Pack"⁸, for ideas that might help). Select ten (10) or twenty (20) little jobs from the list, fill these positions (little jobs) with parents that are interested but have not previously gotten involved in the Unit operations. Constantly update the list depending upon the needs of the Unit and delete those volunteer positions that are filled. Then provide some training for parents on Unit operations (District operations as well) which should ease the job responsibility of the existing Leadership.

Note: If a Cub Scout Pack doesn't have a trained "Pack Trainer," get one immediately!!! You are now out of time.

Best Practices for Cub Scout Packs

Among Cub Scouts the highest drop-out or lowest retention rates is in the second grade or among the Wolves. This is attributed to low levels of Parental Involvement and low levels of Tiger Den Leader training. The next highest drop-out rate is at the crossover from Cub Scouts to Webelos. This low retention rate is attributed to low Webelos Den Leader training, the difficulty in finding Webelos Den Leaders and the change of Den Leaders at that level.

Commercial Retention Observations -- People buy a product the first time as a result of advertising – whether point-of-purchase, reputation, preconditioning,

⁸ <http://www.Scoutparents.org/Resources.aspx>

couponing, or other types of enticements. They will purchase the product additional times (the second and succeeding times) because of their satisfaction with the product.

Parents sign their sons up for Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts because of our reputation, and our program promise. These parents re-enroll their sons because, as Scout Leaders, we have delivered the promise. Boys join Packs and quit dens. They quit dens because they are not getting the program. They aren't getting the program because their Den Leaders don't plan and/or aren't getting trained.

Implications -- It is easier to keep a Cub Scout than it is to replace him. The best source of Boy Scouts is retained Cub Scouts. In fact, 90% of Boy Scouts were Cub Scouts and 70-80% of Boy Scouts were Webelos. If we can increase our Cub Scout retention in the first two years, particularly by training and then retaining Webelos Den Leaders, we can dramatically increase our Boy Scout membership.⁹

Annual Calendar -- During the summer (May or June) complete the planning of the Pack's ANNUAL calendar of meetings, Den day trips (Fire Department, Police Station, Media trip, Chucalissa Archaeological Museum), camping and events with the awareness that changes will need to be made. This is particularly important for Cub Scout Packs. Start with everything that occurred last year and those things your Pack didn't get to do then add the things that you and your scouts might like to do. Consult School calendars, your Chartering Organizations calendar, Council events, District events, and advancement objectives.

Plan to modify the Annual Plan as the year progresses and changes are necessary. Remember, the Annual Plan of activities should be a fluid goal oriented management tool that works in concert with the Budget.

⁹ <http://usscouts.org/bsrt/rtkeepin.asp>, by Craig Bond, Mandeville, LA, Istrouma Area Council

Annual Budget -- Complete an ANNUAL Budget and circulate the Budget with monthly updates frequently among the parents so that they will be aware of the need for Fundraising. Include in the Budget Totems; Beads for every type of performance, participation and good turn; Belt loops and Activity pins. Start with the money spent from last year's checks and receipts and on for what was it spent. Then it becomes simple addition to figure out what money is in the bank and how much must be raised to make the Budget work. PLAN, don't operate out of today's pocket, it's not deep enough. Modify the Budget again in the fall to incorporate the program costs of operating the various dens.

Face the reality of how much the program costs and find the means to pay for it. If you are behind, or have overspent somewhere or on some trip, face the reality, build a bridge, then get over it. As the calendar will be modified or changed, plan on modifying the Budget to reflect a revised plan, a long range plan or goal coming to fruition. The Budget should be a somewhat fluid management tool.

Parental Orientation -- At least once a year immediately after Scout Nights show new (and existing) parents the 20 slide Power Point "*Mission Family*", "Cub Scout Parent Involvement Video" and/or "Scouting Orientation Guide" that are available from www.Scoutparents.org/Resources.aspx. Consider this Parents Orientation their training. Have the Den Leaders take the scouts and siblings outside for games so as to not distract the parents from the information being presented. The buzz ups sell the boy and the boy sells the parent on signing up on scout nights. When Mom and Dad are sold you can reasonably expect to keep their son in the program. Parents that

understand scouting are more likely to be involved. Let them appreciate the culture and learn to appreciate the program.

We must find ways to allow for and incorporate other distractions like sports and music into Scouting's objectives. Without a parents orientation, the parents are flying blind with only assumptions and hearsay. Share with them the calendar and the Budget. Parents that know what is happening in your unit are more likely to work through the sports and music distractions, keep their son involved and will find ways to help.

Within 10 days of the Scout Night or signing up their son, the scout parent should receive a letter or email from the Unit Adult Leadership and the Scout Executive. This missive should contain information on how to get help, website address, place and time of meetings, contact numbers and email addresses, etc. as well as a welcome and an invitation to a Parents Roundup or Orientation. A bilingual letter should also be available.

Follow-up this letter or email with a phone call a few days after (or within 14 days) to the parents to answer any questions they may have. Use a script on questions and if you don't have an answer, say you don't know but you'll get an answer for them. Then do what you said you'd do. This is your first (and maybe only opportunity) to make a good impression on new parents.

Find the most people-friendly adult in your Unit (more than one if they are available) and recruit them to be a "Scout Parents Unit Coordinator." Their job is to get to know parents, welcome them to the Unit, have face to face time with them, get to know their personalities, preferences and skill sets. Match them with little jobs (see

Appendix “Ways to Involve Parents in their Pack”¹⁰, for ideas that might help). As a Den Leader/Cubmaster or Scoutmaster works with the youth – a Scout Parents Unit Coordinator works with the parents. A Scout Parents Unit Coordinator does not require scouting expertise, only sincere interest, a glad hand and a friendly smile. Parents that have duties or little jobs that fit their talents are more likely to volunteer. Arm the new “Scout Parents Unit Coordinator” with a list of twenty (20) jobs that would help the Unit succeed. Update that list as the year goes along. “Scout Parents Unit Coordinator” Fast Start training is available on-line by creating an account in www.myscouting.scouting.org. A uniform is not required for this position, but if desired the “Unit Coordinator” patch can be worn on the uniform, hat or T-shirt.

Incorporate The BSA Family Award into the Awards and Recognition program of the Pack. It offers activities to help strengthen families – whether two-parent, single-parent, or nontraditional. The program helps families accomplish worthy goals while building and strengthening relationships among family members. All family members are encouraged to participate and may earn the award.¹¹ *The BSA Family Activity Book* is the primary resource for the BSA Family Award program and is available through the Council Scout Shop.

Every parent needs to feel connected to the group with someone to call to discuss an issue, problem or question. That phone call might be as simple as needing someone to talk with or vent some frustration. Make it easy, circulate a member roster (and associated parents) organized alphabetically and/or by den.

¹⁰ <http://www.Scoutparents.org/Resources.aspx>

¹¹ <http://scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/CubScouts/Parents/FamilyProgram/index.aspx>

See that parents are thanked and can see the payoff, not just in positive changes in their son (refer to Frequent Recognition below, i.e. Blue and Gold Banquet program). Above all stress, “You don’t need a Scouting background to help!”

Create Bonding Opportunities -- Camp frequently as a Pack throughout the year. Create Bonding opportunities like Camping and religious awards courses (‘God and Family’ or ‘God and Me’). Those opportunities bring the families closer together and closer to the Pack as a result.

Frequent Recognition -- Monthly Pack meetings that feature advancements, belt loops, pins, achievements and recognition of birthdays, good turns, & good grades. Recognize new leaders, new parents and their new scouts, make a big deal, this IS a big thing to the parents that have not been involved in other organizations.

Include in the Blue and Gold Banquet program: Rank Advancement, Adult Recognition and Father (or Guardian) & Son Cake Bake. Incorporate everything you can think of into the Blue and Gold Banquet Program. Find a way to get everyone there.

Recruit Frequently -- Participate in a late spring recruitment of Kindergarten students who will participate in the Summertime Program of the Pack, District and Council, and will be Tigers in the fall. Establish and conduct a Summertime Program of at least monthly activities during the June to August period.

While schools are and have been a great source of new Cub Scouts, don’t let an additional source go without notice. You may be chartered by a church and there are many of the Sunday school kids that might not go to the local school or live in the neighborhood that might love to be invited to join. This is only part of what we try to

accomplish with attending church on Scout Sunday - the promotion at church of the existence of a Scouting Unit.

Increase involvement in District and Council activities -- Increase the Pack's involvement in Day Camp (District). Make Day Camp a goal for 60-70% of the scouts in your Pack. Add this into the Packs Budget and provide the resources to make it happen. Increase the Pack's involvement in Resident Camp (Council). If you haven't been to Resident Camp at Kia Kima, you have no idea how much fun the scouts have over those three days.

Create a Summertime Program, for everyone that is not on vacation or out of town. Find a way to make a Rain-gutter Regatta a District competition.

Acknowledge Absences -- Don't let a single absence go by without a Den Leader getting on the phone, calling the scout's parent saying something like, "We missed Tommy at the Den meeting Monday." or "Tommy wasn't at the Pack meeting, is he alright?" or some other thought acknowledging the absence. If some other interest got priority, remind them (scout or parent) that Tommy can make up his assignments. If the absence is due to sports, try to work out how Tommy can do both.

Keep parents updated on the program, their boy's involvement and his need of the unit.

Den Operation -- The Wolf, Bear, Webelos I and Webelos II dens should begin meeting within 10 days of the start of school in the fall. If the Pack recruited in the late spring among the Kindergarten boys so that the Pack would have Tigers to-be during the Summertime Program (refer to Recruit Frequently above) then this den should also begin meeting within 10 days of the start of school in the fall. The Tiger Den should not

wait until Fall School Nights has been completed and additional Tiger Scouts have been recruited (refer to Parents Orientation above), since the majority of the fall recruiting will among the First Grade boys. Make it a policy to follow the programs laid out in the *Cub Scout 2010 Leader Book* and the *Cub Scout 2010 Den & Pack Meeting Resource Guide*. The program has been simplified and the support mechanisms for the previous program all but eliminated.

Webelos -- Webelos was intended as a transition between the adult led Cub Scouts and the boy led Boy Scouts, teaching the scout how a Boy Scout Troop or Patrol operates. The primary difference being that the Webelos scout is being led from a family based program in which 'Akela' (parents, teachers, pastors and Adult Leaders) approved their work to a unit leader led program where the Webelos Den Leader must approve the Webelos scouts advancement. This transition is from a simpler Cub Scouting program and ideals to a more challenging program of Boy Scouting and the more complex ideals of the Scout Oath and Law. The Webelos Scout gets the chance to decide for himself which elective pins (in addition to the required pins) he wants to work toward. Primary to the success of a Webelos Den is the Webelos Den Leader who is most influential in the boy's preparation to be a Boy Scout.

The Webelos Den Leader must accept the need for a good, well rounded outdoor program, have the knowledge of outdoor skills, fire building, cooking, wood tools, knots, camping, sanitation, tents, equipment and Leave No Trace and be willing to impart that knowledge. Similarly, the Webelos Den Leader must be trained with Scoutmaster Specifics and Outdoor Leader Skills. The goal of the Webelos Den is to hold a boy in

the Cub Scout Pack and prepare him to graduate into a boy led Boy Scout Troop environment. That is why the quality of the program is so important.

The roles played by the Webelos Den Leader are primarily as follows:¹²

1. The Webelos Den should function as a Patrol with an elected (twice a year) Patrol Leader,
2. Ensure that the boy's attend Day Camp and Resident Camp,
3. Verify the presence of the necessary Scout Skills,
4. Attend Roundtables and get to know Scoutmasters,
5. Attend Troop meetings and recruit a Den Chief,
6. Promote the Troop(s) coming summer activities including camp plans and fees,
7. Help the Webelos complete the Arrow of Light by March of the second year (a 22 month program, February if a 21 month program),
8. Plan or be a part of the planning of a bridging ceremony in March of the second year,
9. Help the Webelos Arrow of Light scouts find a Troop to transition to during the February to March window of opportunity,
10. Ensure the accuracy and verify the transfer of the boy's documents.

Understanding the Webelos age group

As nine and ten year olds, a group of boys can be a challenge, but they are also a lot of fun. The Webelos program allows boys of this age group to stretch themselves, be challenged and have fun.

Nine year olds are very inquisitive by nature and want to be challenged. The program a Webelos Den Leader provides should fill their needs, yet be not so difficult as to discourage them.

¹² www.usscouts.org/cubscouts/W2BS.rtf

Exposure to skills does not necessarily mean mastery of skills, just a challenge, a learning experience and fun. Some boys at this age have a terrible time with skills. The desire is there, but the ability may not be. Remember, any real effort on their part is a challenge and even the reward. At this age a boy needs a compliment for a job well done to the best of his ability.

At nine, boys can be unpredictable. One week they love the current activity. The next week the same activity bores them. The key is to keep them busy, and to keep all of the boys involved. Have the bored boy show the others or the Webelos Den Leader how he is doing his project or skill. Two-deep leadership is an important factor here. Two adults helping and guiding works well.

The ten year old is generally more mature than he was during his first Webelos year. His self-control is greater. His willingness and ability to lead is better. His strength and self-confidence are higher. The poking, teasing and silliness generally decreases. The unit becomes stronger as a result. As this happens, the Webelos Den Leader should hand over more of the Den responsibilities to the boys. 'Taking roll, collecting dues, deciding which activity pins to work on, Den activities planning, etc. that may have been done by or with the Webelos Den Leader in the first year should now become the responsibility of the boys.¹³

¹³ http://macscouter.com/CubScouts/PowWow08/Webelos/Webelos_2008_Program.pdf Pg 2

The second year Webelos Den could hold several elections during the year electing a boy leader or “Denner” who will take over some of those duties. This helps to further ease the transition to the boy led environment of Boy Scouts.

The Arrow of Light (AOL) Ceremony in Cub Scouts equates to the Eagle Scout Ceremony in Boy Scouts. The AOL badge is the only badge to transition with the boy to be worn on his Boy Scout uniform and is the only recognized youth achievement knot from the Cub Scout program to be worn on an Adult Leaders uniform. The AOL qualifies the scout for the Scout Badge in Boy Scouting. An impressive ceremony will instill in the scout the desire to continue in Scouting. Afterward, ask the District Executive to write a congratulatory letter to the AOL recipient.

Webelos to Scout Transition

The Webelos-to-Scout transition has always been the goal of the BSA, since Cub Scouting officially began in 1930. In the beginning, it was fairly simple: When a Cub Scout reached the age of 11, he transferred out of his pack and into a Boy Scout troop. This could happen at any time during the year, based simply on the date of the boy's 11th birthday. Ideally, the boy would have earned his Bobcat badge, then his Wolf, Bear, Lion, and Webelos (what we now call the Arrow of Light) badges, along with Arrow Points, and he'd move on. Later, when the Webelos Scout program was made an official component of Cub Scouting, the Lion rank was dropped and the Webelos and the Arrow of Light badges were established as a two-year program, beginning in September of Webelos year one and ending in May or June of year two. However, the attrition was enormous! Of 100 Webelos Scouts who completed their Arrow of Light at the end of their fourth school grade in May or June, by September BSA was lucky if 20 were still actually members of the troop they'd ostensibly joined just before the summer began. The BSA national office folks observed this

happening all over the country, and realized that something needed to be done. You see, what was happening was that even though these boys "crossed over" and joined the troop of their choice in the May-June "window," this was the same time that troops stopped having troop meetings, and went to summer camp for a week or two, so these new Scouts never had the opportunity to attend many, if any, troop meetings, and it was too late to sign up for camp, and so their summers were spent elsewhere and by September, with no integration into or bonding with their new troop, Scouting was more-or-less a distant memory, rarely brought back to life.

After some experimentation with pilot programs in various councils across the country, BSA formally introduced the 18-Month Webelos Program in 1989, designed to complete all requirements for the Webelos and Arrow of Light badges between September of year one and February of year two, with a graduation and cross-over in late February or, at the most, early March. By doing this, these new Boy Scouts would have the opportunity, in the months from March through May or June, to attend troop meetings, form their own patrols, go on hikes and campouts, and sign up for summer camp along with the other Scouts in the troop. The results were dramatic: Instead of losing 80% of graduating Webelos Scouts, we were retaining 80% or more of the graduating Webelos Scouts!

The program was first presented at the Philmont Training Center in the summer of 1989, and rolled out to every BSA council in the country in the early fall of 1989 (Having been to Philmont that summer, I returned to become one of the presenters in my local council, at that time).

Andy McCommish, Ask Andy, USSSP/usscouts.org, NetCommish.com¹⁴

¹⁴ www.usscouts.org/, email response from Andy McCommish, Ask Andy, NetCommish.com

Educate Adult Leaders and Parents -- Make sure that every Adult Leader and parent understands the responsibilities of each of the Leaders in the Pack and therefore has the resources to call upon when a question or problem comes up. Use the “Ways to Involve Parents in Their Pack” (see attachment) to solicit additional help. Further, get the registered Adult Leadership of the Pack involved in District program operations and attend District Roundtables, if for no other reason, than to network with other Adult Leaders who have similar responsibilities.

Note: The more resources that are understood to be available, the better grounded the Adult Leadership and parents will be.

Many new and long existing units fail to re-charter due to a key Adult Leader, that for whatever reason, has decided to step down. Most often this happens because there is no other person willing to assume the leadership. Establish a succession plan, identify at least two key leaders in every unit and get those leaders trained.¹⁵

Re-Charter -- Most unit leaders know when the unit is due to re-charter. In fact, most units will re-charter December 31 of the current year. Into the religious holidays, re-chartering can become quite difficult. Begin doing an inventory of your scout roster 60 days ahead of the re-charter date and start requesting re-charter dues from the parents. By 45 days from the re-charter date a unit leader should have the units Re-charter package/envelope. Plan on completing the re-charter in 45 days (by December 15 or 15 days before the re-charter is due) including collecting the money to turn in to council and obtaining the appropriate signatures. Most of the early re-charter

¹⁵ Many of these ‘Best Practices’ come from Chuck Ezell, Department Manager, Program Impact, Boy Scouts of America, Council Operations

paperwork can be done on-line but when you are finished with re-chartering on-line you still have to collect the fees, write a check to council and get the appropriate signatures (all turned in by the re-charter date).

If you are unfamiliar with the re-charter process call your assigned Unit Commissioner for help. If your unit doesn't have an assigned Unit Commissioner, call the District Commissioner to discuss the matter and request help with the re-charter process. I would bet that you will get the help you want with re-chartering and soon have an assigned Unit Commissioner in the process that can help with other aspects of the Units program.

Best Practices for Boy Scout Troops

Where do Boy Scouts come from? Eligible Webelos Scouts join Boy Scouts, they join with their Webelos Den, they join with a friend, they join the Troop at their church or school and sometimes they may join because of an invitation from a school mate (we still get a few of those). In fact, 90% of Boy Scouts were Cub Scouts and 70-80% of Boy Scouts were Webelos.

For a Boy Scout Troop to survive it must have a Cub Scout Pack that sends graduating Cub Scouts (Webelos and/or Arrow Of Light recipients). That Cub Scout Pack is a "feeder Pack" for the Boy Scout Troop. If a "feeder Pack" doesn't exist for some reason then the Troop in question must develop one or more "feeder Packs" in order to survive. The quality and preparedness for Boy Scouts of the graduating Cub Scouts is directly proportional to the ability of the new scout to progress through the Boy Scout ranks within a boy led environment.

*“The more responsibility the Scoutmaster gives his patrol leaders,
the more they will respond.”*

Lord Robert Baden-Powell

It's incredible, but, we still have Boy Scout Troops that are not operating within a boy led environment.

Several years ago, as a relatively new Unit Commissioner, I had a first meeting with a newly assigned unit's Scoutmaster and his Committee Chairman of a very small Troop. As the conversation went along, I asked what the Scoutmaster was doing to increase the membership in his Troop. I'll never forget the absolute horror on his face as he blurted out, "You mean, I have to recruit scouts?" For all I know he might have thought that Boy Scouts rose from the dust or grew on trees. That Boy Scout Troop lasted another 15 months or so until it failed to re-charter. You see, the Troop awarded two Eagles, the Scoutmaster's son and the Committee Chairman's son, and after that point there was nothing more to do but fold.

Annual Calendar -- Add district or council Webelos events to the calendar, such as District Day Camp, District Webelos Encampment (Webelos Woods, Webelos-o-ree, etc.), Council Resident Camp, etc. and make sure that the Troops best, brightest, First Class or above and 14 year old or older scouts have the opportunity to staff these events (most often these events work toward service hours). This will place your best Boy Scouts with the available pool of Webelos or AOL recipients (refer to Recruit Constantly below). Assist in finding Den Chiefs for Webelos Dens.

An Eagle Scout is quite often idolized by just about all Cub Scouts. That idolatry can often bring new recruits to a Troop in addition to the normal feeder Cub Scout Units that a Troop may have an association with.

Parental Involvement -- Look for ways that the new parents can get involved. A partial list is in the Appendix "Ways to Involve Parents in Their Troop/Team".¹⁶

Webelos Parental Orientation -- Sometime during the fall, before the Webelos scouts reach AOL, hold an invitational reception for the second year Webelos and their parents. This will orient them on the Troops plans for the summer, which scout camp, costs, necessary preparation, etc. This orientation might include the Troops expectations of new Boy Scouts and how Boy Scouts differs from Cub Scouts in regard to parent's participation.

Create Bonding Opportunities -- While the Webelos Parents orientation is an excellent start, other ideas might include a cookout (BBQ, Fish Fry, etc.), an invitation to camp (separate but close enough to observe how Troop camping is organized) or an invitation to an event that honors the flag, patriotism or our military. Courts of Honor can allow parents to mingle and get to know one another if time and circumstance were a part of the planning.

It is important that new AOL Boy Scout recruits have several opportunities to camp or hike along-side other members of the Troop prior to attending Summer Camp. It is extremely important that new AOL Boy Scout recruits go to Summer Camp during the first summer that they are Boy Scouts. BSA National says that we as Boy Scout Troops have a 300% better chance of keeping a Boy Scout if he attends summer camp the first summer with his new troop, rather than waiting until the second summer.

¹⁶ <http://www.scoutparents.org/Resources.aspx>

Frequent Recognition -- Troops must provide recognition of achievement on a timely basis. There should be no less than two (2) regular Courts of Honor in addition to any Eagle Courts of Honor during the year. Everyone, including parents, grandparents, friends and certainly scouts need to be invited to attend.

Recruit Constantly -- The Troop and its scouts need to look at every occasion from the perspective of a potential recruiting opportunity. Every District or Council encounter with Cub Scouts may bring graduating Webelos to the Troop. Every time a uniform is worn may produce a friend or acquaintance that might be interested in Boy Scouting.

Increase Involvement in District and Council Activities -- (Refer to Annual Calendar above)

Acknowledge Absences -- Don't let a scout slip away unnoticed. Call the scout or parent when a second or even a first absence occurs. Try to determine why the scout didn't make the meeting, and whether anything can be done about it. If its sports, work to achieve a compromise. If it's a bashing issue, deal with it promptly.

Cultivate Webelos Den Leaders -- Find someone who will make the acquaintance of Webelos Den Leaders. Invite the Webelos Den Leaders to be a part of the Troop. Hold a pre-summer camp orientation of Scout Skills in the fall for Webelos Den Leaders and second year Webelos scouts. Assist in finding Den Chiefs for Webelos Dens.

The Scoutmaster's role in the Webelos to Scout Transition¹⁷

1. Include the Webelos in summer camp reservations;
2. Provide assistance to the Webelos Den Leader in planning and conducting outdoor activities;

¹⁷ www.usscouts.org/cubscouts/W2BS.rtf

3. The most important result of the Den/Troop relationship is the experience of joint activities;
4. Discuss camp and Troop activity and personal equipment costs with the Webelos parents;
5. Have the Webelos and their parents attend Troop meetings;
6. Become a part of Webelos graduation ceremonies;
7. (for the third time) Assist in finding Den Chiefs for Webelos Dens;
8. Ensure that all forms are completed, recorded and turned in;
9. Ensure that an AOL is recorded with the Council Registrar for the scout before accepting that AOL's application (after a scout becomes a Boy Scout he is only eligible for Boy Scout ranks and achievements);

Best Practices for Teams

The Northwest Mississippi District chartered the only Team (Team 97) in the Chickasaw Council during the 2011 spring. There has not been enough time to evaluate the basis for Best Practices. However, how well Team 97 operates and whether it re-charters will set precedence for future Teams. The value of a Team is when the following conditions exist: (1) there is no desire for a co-ed unit since a Team is an all-male unit, (2) There is a top heavy ratio of older scouts, Eagles and Eagle candidates that still want to be challenged with more adventurous pursuits, and (3) There is a desire on the part of the adult leadership of the Boy Scout Troop to retain these older scouts as leadership examples and instructors for the younger group of scouts still advancing in rank and climbing the leadership ladder.

Journey To Excellence¹⁸ provides a great operational profile for a Cub Scout Pack interested in Peak Performance.

1. Advancement

¹⁸ <http://www.scouting.org/scoutsorce/Awards/JourneyToExcellence.aspx?rel=external>

2. Retention
3. Building Cub Scouting, membership
4. Outdoor Activities
5. Trained Leadership and an engaged Pack Committee
6. Day/Resident Camp
7. Service Projects
8. Leadership Planning
9. Webelos-to-Scout Transition
10. Budget
11. Pack and Den meetings
12. Reregister on-time
13. Annual Assessment

Similar operational profiles are available for Boy Scout Troops and Venturing Crews at [www.http://scouting.org/scoutsource/Awards/JourneyToExcellence](http://scouting.org/scoutsource/Awards/JourneyToExcellence).

Summary and Conclusion

"If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten."

Tony Robbins

In the Fall of 2010, a colleague and former employer delivered the results of a major marketing research study to the Chamber of Commerce of an eastern Tennessee tourism destination. While the details of the marketing research study that was presented are proprietary, the general recommendations can be shared.

The Chamber of Commerce members needed:

1. a Customer Service Mentality within a central mental culture;
2. bonding together, pulling in the same direction, Centricity is the METHOD;
3. customer service instruction as a culture, is the VEHICLE;
4. better customer service, is the DESTINATION.

While this is true for a business and a tourist destination, it is likewise true for a scouting unit. With a Customer Service Mentality, scout leaders manage their units by considering the scout and the parent first. They are the customer, and without them, there would be no reason for a Pack or Troop.

This Thesis has explored the optimum environment or culture for small groups such as Cub Scout Packs and Boy Scout Troops and the Best Practices or methods that can positively affect Retention in our Cub Scout Packs and our Boy Scout Troops. There is no single "gold coin" or "silver bullet" that has been discussed that will magically develop better retention rates or numbers in our units. Rather the unit Leaders must adopt all of the methods contained herein as a "bag of coins" or a

“bandoleer of silver bullets” in order that we retain more of the scouts in our units and provide our scouts and parents with better customer service.

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Appendices

Appendix A -- Ways to Involve Parents in Their Pack

Appendix B -- Ways to Involve Parents in Their Troop/Team