

The March Roundtable focused on welcoming new members to a unit; either an individual completely new to Scouting or an individual transitioning into a new program.

When a group of members join, the easiest way to broadcast unit information is through a parent's meeting. Not only does it get everyone in one place, but it also ensures the same information is being distributed to the entire unit. Holding a parent's meeting once or twice a year (e.g. September and crossover) gives unit leaders a platform to educate a parent and announce expectations for the coming scouting year.

A parent's meeting may not always be practical. In such cases, having the unit leader sit down with the parent or small group of parents is a good way to help bring your new families into the fold. One method of ensuring all parents receive the same information is compiling a welcome kit. This kit can also be used at an annual parent's meeting to remind and reinforce.

The presentation has a rough checklist of what a youth member, adult participant, and adult leader should be presented with to start. Along with the basics, units should tailor the kit to their specific unit needs (e.g. calendar instructions, permission slips, gear list, uniform checklist).

Collectively, the group looked through the perspective of a scout, parent, and leader to brainstorm what might be important questions and factors that will arise in the onboarding process. The following are the results of the conversation and short remarks to capture the discussion that took place.

### **Scout**

- **Event Info** – Scouts want to know the when and where of the next adventure. A good first experience for any scout is summer camp. Broadcasting summer opportunities and unit sponsored events is a great way to excite a new scout.
- **Do I like being here?** – The scout needs to feel comfortable at all times. To ensure retention of a scout, have a senior scout check in and attempt to get feedback. If a scout starts becoming disinterested, engage the parent(s). Catching disinterest early on is key to ensure the scout comes back week after week. A scout wants to have fun.
- **Who can I go to?** – When a question comes to mind the scout should know who to go to. The same for when something unexpected happens. Creating a safety net in a scout's mind early on can build confidence that there is a support team behind him/ her to ensure they are succeeding and having fun with minimal worries.
- **Can I be with my friend?** – Of course! The best part of scouting is scouting with a friend. As leaders, our role isn't to separate friends the first instance they become rowdy. The scouts should be having fun, sometimes gentle reminders of what is acceptable is needed before separating scouts.
- **What if I make a mistake?** – A scout should always feel he/she can make a mistake without judgement. One of the great qualities of scouting is the environment for participants to grow. Make known to participants other scouts and leaders are there to support their efforts. We learn from our mistakes so we can be better for the next time. Practice makes perfect.

**Parent**

- **Make Mistakes** – This is in line with a scout's concern about making a mistake. Parents should be reassured their scout is in an environment where mistakes are expected and part of the program. Teaching moments are what build character.
- **Calendar** – Keep your parents informed by having an updated calendar with all relevant information. If you do permission slips for each event, maybe have an electronic copy attached to the event. A one stop place for parents to obtain information helps keep unit operations straight forward and saves time.
- **Money** – Never assume a parent will have an open checkbook. While some families can afford an abundance of high adventure activities, there are just as many families that don't have said resources. Two tips when talking money: be transparent where all funds are going and inform the family what they are receiving in return.
  - **Fees (where the money is going)** – There are two fees charged every year by the council – national registration and the activity fee. First time scouters may not be aware what happens to this money upon first registration. Remind them part of the cost is to register their scout into the organization and the other helps defray the cost the local council incurs while supporting the scout. Some units charge an annual fee. Make sure to tell what these funds are going towards. An annual unit fee can come off as a high cost to a parent.
  - **Trip cost** – Depending on the activity, trips can also be expensive. Make sure to lay out what the cost of a trip is ahead of time so parents can plan. For high adventure higher cost trips, make sure everyone understands the origin of the cost.
  - **Dues** – Units might have a weekly/monthly dues system; sometimes while having an annual unit fee. Dues are not solely meant to cover unit expenses. Scouts getting into the practice of paying dues is a way to start the conversation of money management (Personal Management MB pitch!!!).
  - **Parent Involvement Discount** – To encourage involvement, there may be a program implemented within your unit where the cost of scouting for the year is reduced for parent involvement. Make sure to have a fully developed program designed and everyone understands the details to avoid confusion.
  - **Budget/Financial Model** – Are you willing to show the unit's budget or how money is spent? There are parents who may want to understand, monetarily, how the unit supports their scouts. Even if parents don't ask this question, have a unit budget and create a financial model on how funds are spent. A unit may also build into their budget a fund to help scouts with financial difficulty. As scouters, we should try to ensure all participants are able to experience the program in full. This may require offering monetary assistance to a family. Remember to keep financial trouble in confidence. The rest of the unit doesn't need to know a family's circumstance unless stated otherwise.
- **Safety** – All parents should feel their scout should be safe. Reminders of YPT and parent observance may be necessary. Even having a parent take YPT is a good way to reinforce what efforts are taken to protect our youth. Make sure all safety precautions are followed during activities.
- **Culture/ Unit Personalities** – Lets face it, not everyone feels comfortable around others. The culture may be different than a person is used to experiencing. The personalities of the scouts or leaders may be too eccentric or not eccentric enough. The point? Encourage

parents to shop around when joining a unit. We all want to increase our unit membership. However, should we do it at the cost of losing a potential scouting family? When recruiting, keep in mind your unit might not be the best fit to support the needs of the incoming family. A scout has interests of their own. Units may gravitate their trips to a certain specialty area that don't align with what the scouts is seeking. Our responsibility as leaders is to deliver a quality program for those in our care. Sometimes the program we offer doesn't match what a family is looking for. Instead of losing a participant, see if there is a better fit in the extended scouting family.

- **Will my scout have fun?** – Of course! Scouting creates unique opportunities for all willing to give it a try. The program has enough diversity in its offerings a scout can explore various subject areas; whether it be advancement or through adventure. Remember, not all scouts will be into advancement. There will be some who only want to go on trips. Is this a problem? You tell me! Is a scout who is having fun and in a safe advancement a problem? (Answer is no if you're still wondering)
- **How do I know what's going on?** – I mentioned above "A one stop place for parents to obtain information helps keep unit operations straight forward and saves time." Try to keep all unit resources in one place. Set an expectation on when parents will be communicated to and the topic. Sending a scout home with fliers every week doesn't always make it into the hands of their parents. Implement a system where everyone can stay up to date. For some units this could be email, for others a file sharing site.
- **How much to I need to be involved?** – Please don't say one hour a week. If your unit has an expectation for parent involvement, make it known. When you need help, ask; especially if an activity is in jeopardy. You will encounter parents who can be right by the unit leaders' side when needed, others occasional, and some parents aren't able to give any kind of commitment.
  - **Physical vs remote** – Reinforce there are two types of involvement, physically and remotely. For the parents that can help out with fundraisers, trips, or meetings awesome! However, not every parent might be able to. Are there tasks that can be completed without a physical presence? Ask parents if they would be willing to help out on small tasks here and there. When engaging parents to be involved also be flexible.

### Leader

- **What do you need help with?** – I like the leader who asks this question. Said person isn't offering to do anything you need, but they are inquiring about where you need help the most. Make known to potential leaders where more support is needed. Each person has a certain skill set. Associating the skill set with areas needing support brings a person of experience into the fold. Four great questions were mentioned during our discussion"
  - **What do I do?** – Make sure the leader understands their role and responsibilities. Not ever position is cookie cutter to the guidebook. Give the leader a base understanding of what is expected.
  - **How intense?** – Make known the level of commitment. Supporting a unit in a specific capacity may be too strenuous for the person to balance with their personal life.
  - **For how long?** – For as long as you like! No, for two reasons. One, burnout does exist and serving in a position too long can cause a unit to lose a leader. Two, a leader should be able to grow and encouraged to move on. The needs of a unit

will change. As such, unit leadership positions and responsibilities sometimes need to be adjusted. Bringing on new leaders to fill existing roles can help bring new ideas. When a leader moves from one position to another, there is a unique opportunity for said leader to be a mentor for a period of time.

- **Who am I working with?** – It would be difficult to do any job if you don't know who you are working with. Ensure the new leader has the contact information and meets who they would be working with (youth and adult).
- **How to get out of a scout's way?** – A scout needs to explore! The level of exploration and guidance varies depending on the program. A leader needs to understand when to intervene and the reasoning behind the decision. The Guide to Safe Scouting and position specific training is a great place to start.
- **Take training** – Make sure your leaders are trained! Yes, training may seem cumbersome or overwhelming for a new leader but it will present the needed knowledge to be successful.
- **Lead or support role?** – Taking the lead or leading from behind depends on the person. We each have different strengths and weaknesses. New leaders should evaluate which type of role would be more comfortable. This also feeds into our next question.
- **Am I a good fit?** – If you aren't a good fit someone will tell you, seriously. Scouting programs have more than enough to keep volunteers busy. When a bump in the road comes about, others will feel it. Don't be afraid to tell a leader they aren't a good fit for a position, but also make sure to see if there is a better position for the leader. Give feedback to new leaders, especially if they are great in their new role. Reinforcement and mentoring are key.
- **Cost** – Nothing comes without a cost. For volunteers, we categorize our cost in time, money and energy.
  - **Time** – Not only is this the commitment each week/month/year, but also for how long the commitment will be. Keep your leaders informed on what is expected. No, a leader doesn't need to be on every trip or at every meeting but should know how long the event will last.
  - **Money** – Whether it is gas money or finding a new sleeping pad to hold off the cold, leaders incur a cost. The basic cost is for the field uniform and activities that are not free. Leaders, just like parents, also need to plan their money accordingly. Always try finding a way around financial difficulties for leaders who want to help. Their willingness to show up and lend a hand should not be stopped because of cost.
  - **Energy** – The energy a leader puts into a program varies. Some units might count this by quantifying time, others based on the level of difficulty of an experience. Tell stories about unit activities and be candid of the results. Ultimately the person will need to understand how much energy is committed, but gaining a mental idea doesn't hurt.

Thank you for taking the time to read or skim the recap! I hope our discussion is of some use to your unit. As always, never be afraid to reach out with questions.

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