Parents' and New Leaders Guide to a Boy-Led Troop

Introduction

Welcome! Whether you have just crossed over with your son from Cub Scouts or just joined Boy Scouts, we appreciate your enthusiasm and encourage your participation in the troop. The three aims of Boy Scouting are character development, citizenship training, and mental and physical fitness. To accomplish these aims, Scouting employs eight methods: the ideals, the patrol method, the outdoors, advancement, association with adults, personal growth, leadership development, and the uniform. We encourage you to take the Boy Scout training offered on-line and by the District to find out what we are trying to accomplish and how you can help.

One of the major differences between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts is the very important method, leadership development. In order to teach leadership, you have to let the boys lead. In fact, one of the more vigorous debates you can have in Scouting is over the feasibility of a boy-led troop. Some adult leaders will argue that while a boy-led troop is the BSA ideal, it's not possible in their particular troop for any or all of the following reasons: the boys are too young, too lazy, too irresponsible, or just not interested. A boy-led troop is more work for the adult leadership, and therein is the problem, and our need for your cooperation and help. It is so much easier for the adults to just take charge themselves than to teach the necessary leadership skills to the boys.

All Scoutmasters and Assistant Scoutmasters are taught the basics of a boy-led troop and patrol in Scoutmaster Specifics. However putting that training into practice is often difficult without a mentor in the troop. This guide will hopefully bridge the gap between theory and practice. It covers some of the common pitfalls and offers suggestions for getting a working boy-led troop. The importance of a boy-led troop and patrol is emphasized in two chapters of the Scoutmaster's Handbook; chapter 3 "The Boy-Led Troop" starts with this strong statement:

> "Empowering boys to be leaders is the core of Scouting. Scouts learn by doing, and what they do is lead their patrols and their troop. The boys themselves develop a troop program, then take responsibility for figuring out how they will achieve the goals. One of our most important challenges is to train boy leaders to run the troop by providing direction, coaching and support. The boys will make mistakes now and then and will rely upon the adult leaders to guide them. But only through real hands-on experience as leaders can boys learn to lead."

As mentioned before, perhaps the most common reason for the existence of adult-led troops is that it is easier for the experienced adult leaders to run things; teaching leadership to boys is not easy. A second common reason is that the adult leaders may be afraid of failure; they want a smooth running troop. A boy-led project will occasionally falter, and adults may feel it necessary to take over to ensure success. A third is that the troop may have adult leaders that do not delegate well, and do not wish to give up control. In fact, many consider that the main barriers to a boy-led troop come from the attitudes within the adult leadership.

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Adult Leaders and parents work together

Always Rigidly Flexible

This guide is meant more as guidelines than actual rules. Just as every troop, scout, adult leader, and parent is different, what works best is not always the same. Also what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. We do not want change for the sake of change, but to meet the changing needs of the troop.

Adults are there for the Boys

The adults need to keep in mind that we are here for the Scouts. In Scouting parents will meet others with similar values and goals for their children. Parents will build good friendships with the others and they can provide support and parenting suggestions. Scouting is a way to become a better parent through association with and the help of like-minded adults. However, adults should keep in mind that they are there for the boys and should try to not let socializing dominate.

The Scoutmaster is in charge of the Troop

All parents should understand the structure of the troop. There is a "chain of command" within the youth leadership and also within the adult leadership. The Scoutmaster has to have a final say as the ultimate leader of the troop. He needs to work together with the parents and the other leaders toward the boy-led goal. The boys should understand that they have only as much authority as allowed by the adults, especially the Scoutmaster, and need to show the appropriate respect for the adults in their lives.

The Parent Involvement

Parent support and involvement is essential. Unlike the full parent involvement in Cub Scouts, parents are asked to become much less involved with their own child and more within the structure of the troop as a committee member or assistant Scoutmaster. But few parents come in to Scouting with a good understanding of the program. To get all the parents on the same page and working toward the goals of Scouting, ask them to take the on-line **Fast Start training**. Parents coming on outings should work through the on-line **Youth Protection training** to understand the behavior that BSA asks of all adults. Committee members should take the on-line **Troop Committee Challenge**. It is useful for the Scoutmaster to occasionally meet with ALL parents to share his vision for a successful troop and to involve the parents in accomplishing the troop's goals.

The Troop Committee

From Fast Start: "If you haven't been involved in Scouting, you may think that the whole organization is the Scoutmaster and the youth members. The truth is, the success of the troop depends on a lot of adult volunteers who work behind the scenes to make it all happen. The troop committee is like a steering committee—volunteers who actually handle the business end of running the troop." From the Scoutmaster Handbook: "The most important responsibility of a troop committee is recruiting qualified adult leaders for the troop." "The Scoutmaster should be able to turn to the committee at any time for assistance, support, and encouragement." The troop committee must then step back and not try to run the troop. That is for the Scoutmaster to train the boys to do.

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Adult-led symptoms and impacts

Adults loudly asserting authority

Adults yelling at the boys in front of the troop is one characteristic of an adult-led troop where the adults have not transferred authority to the youth. Yelling at the boys has a toxic effect on the supportive atmosphere we want to nurture in a troop. Scouting is a put-down free zone. We use the Scout hand sign as a silent way to bring the troop to order for this very reason.

Also, the boys never learn to lead if the adults dominate. The only time an adult should step in is if there is an immediate safety threat. Otherwise, there is time to work through the youth leadership chain of command. The only way for boys to learn leadership is to actually hand them the reins of power, with plenty of instruction of course.

Adults jumping in with more enthusiasm than patience

Volunteers who take charge are usually a good thing except when they preempt the boys' responsibilities. It is hard to wait for a boy to do something that you could do better in much less time. However if you do something for someone, they will not learn the skill. Adults already know how; boys still need to learn. Scout meetings and outings should provide a hassle-free environment in which to learn leadership.

Adults operating in Cub Pack mode

Parents crossing over with their boys can often feel more comfortable modifying slightly the structure they know from Cub Scouts than to adopt the changes demanded by a boy-led Boy Scout program. They continue the parent-child authority structure and don't hand power over to the boys. This leads to an extension of the parent-child relationship into the teen years when the youth should be transitioning to independence.

Adults enabling codependency

Parents of scouting age boys are often comfortable with the roles they have established with their young children. They organize the program and the boys follow along. But the boys remain in a dependent role. Very young Scouts may be comfortable with a dependent role for a while. Adults feel useful and boys don't have to put out much effort. The troop operates like an adult-run outing club. But as the boys grow older, their lack of control of the program begins to chafe.

Adults contributing to older boy attrition

Boys can stay dependents only so long before they rebel from imposed adult authority. Adults giving the boys more control over outings can help solve an older boy attrition problem. Venture patrols or similar older boy patrols allow them to plan high adventure outings that increase retention.

Scouting trains boys in life skills. Removing "boy-led" from the program removes an extremely important aspect of Scouting: leadership and teamwork. Boys need to practice team leadership in the safe environment that Scouting provides. Without this practice, they are less prepared to enter the workforce, where mistakes have significant consequences.

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Boy-led advantages

Boys learn critical planning skills

Adults should involve the boys in the process of planning an outing. Boys need to learn how to set achievable goals. For example, planning a canoe trip can start with "Safety Afloat" as an outline to make them aware of safety concerns. Including the boys in the process allows the adults to teach the logistics of planning: setting goals and objectives; breaking the project into smaller tasks and determine deadlines when they need to get done; assigning responsibilities to individual team members; putting the plan into action and tracking progress; evaluating the outcome and modifying the plan. There is always the need to check in with others on the project to see if all is going well.

Boys learn to lead in a safe environment.

Leadership is not only knowing what you need to do to succeed but also knowing what to do if things go wrong. Before each boy-led activity, an adult leader should sit down with the boy leadership and go over their plan, to make sure that the boys are not set up to fail. The adult leaders are responsible for maintaining a non-confrontational environment by letting the boys know the adults support them, and will be available if needed. Adults minimize the fear of failure by maintaining a supportive environment.

Boys learn from mistakes

It is hard to watch a process get done poorly, but if a boy-led troop meeting does not go as planned, there is no great loss. If a meal on a camp-out does not work out, it becomes a learning experience, a teachable moment to show how one responds to mistakes and still shows respect for others. It is very important to meet after each activity with the boy leadership to help them conduct a Start, Stop, Continue evaluation (SPL Handbook p. 97). How could this activity have been done better? Good judgement comes from experience, and experience comes from learning from your mistakes.

Boys learn to lead others and work in teams.

Working well with others is perhaps the most important life skill that youth can learn. Boys gain confidence by being entrusted with power and in leading their peers. Section Six in the Senior Patrol Leader's Handbook talks about leadership styles and developing your team. The youth leader learns that their leadership style needs to change from Explaining, to Demonstrating, to Guiding, and finally to Enabling as the group develops into a working team (the Leading EDGE in SPL Handbook page 88-89).

Boys learn respect when treated with respect

Adults should show respect by not interrupting or criticizing the youth leadership during a troop meeting, no matter how badly things may be going. Instead, the adults should praise youth leaders in public when they do well, which helps boost both their confidence and the troop's faith in them. If the troop believes in their Senior Patrol Leader, they will treat him with respect and listen to him more readily, which in turn makes the troop run more smoothly. The time for critique is after the meeting, in private. Sadly, it is much more difficult to build up confidence in others than to tear it down. The adults will earn the respect of the boys by their actions and example, not by demand.

Role of the Adult Leaders in a Boy-led Troop

Follow the lead of the Scoutmaster

Just as the Scouts need to know that their SPL is in charge, the adults need to know that the Scoutmaster is in charge! Scouts will follow the example of the adults, good or bad. Please criticize only when you can give a suggestion to correct the problem, otherwise it is nothing more than whining. This is crucial for the adults to follow as well as the Scouts.

Train patrol leader and assistant

This is especially necessary if the troop does not participate in district or council youth training. The boys need to know what is expected of them. Often a troop will do BSA's **Troop Leadership Training** (BSA publication #34306A) which has four sections. First is a section on how the Scoutmaster should train the senior patrol leader. Then Scoutmaster and the senior patrol leader jointly train the rest of the boy leadership in three modules:

Module One - Introduction to Troop Leadership (Know). The boy-led troop and boy-led patrol chapters in the Scoutmaster Handbook is discussed. The troop organization and overview of each position is next.

Module Two - How to Do Your Job (Be). The Scoutmaster shares his vision of success. This is followed by a discussion of the teaching EDGE (Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, and Enable) as the method used for teaching skills. Finally a troop progress discussion is held using the Start, Stop, Continue assessment tool.

Module Three - What is Expected of me (Do). This section focusses first on the position descriptions and expectations. The Scoutmaster then leads a discussion on servant leadership. It closes with defining success in your position and a Scoutmaster conference.

Mentor the patrol leader and assistant

Leadership mentoring must continue beyond the initial training. An important rule to remember is to praise publicly and criticize privately. It is best to start with simple leadership tasks first, so the boys are not set up to fail. An adult should always meet with the Patrol Leader before the activity to go over preparation. The youth leadership should be able to rely on the adults to provide the skills and resources for them to succeed. The Senior Patrol Leader Handbook and the Patrol Leader Handbook are excellent resources. Robert Baden-Powell in the Scoutmaster Handbook said, "Training boy leaders to run their troop is the Scoutmaster's most important job."

Back up youth authority

Your youth leaders will have to learn how to deal with problem people (SPL Handbook p. 95-96). Managing conflict is an extremely valuable skill for both youth and adults to master, that is why it is included in both National Youth Leadership Training and Wood Badge. If the Patrol Leader can't resolve the issue then it goes to the Assistant Senior Patrol Leader and the Senior Patrol Leader. In a well-run boy-led troop, if

the disciplinary problem has to be brought to the adult leadership, some feel that it is serious enough that the offending boy should go home.

All things are taught best by example. Just as there is a chain of command in the Scouts, there is a chain of command with adults. The better we follow this chain of command, the better example the boys have to follow. We can not expect the boys to follow a chain of command if what they witness with adults is chaotic and controversial. The adult chain of command should be similar to the Scout chain of command. This is why it is crucial that the Senior Patrol Leader be the leader of the youth and the Scoutmaster be the leader of the adults.

Step back and delegate

Often an adult will get asked a question from a boy in a patrol because the adult is viewed as the authority. It is best if the adult does not give the answer. One of the most important things a Patrol Advisor can say is "Did you ask your patrol leader?" By respecting the chain of command, you build the authority of your boy leaders. Some relevant quotes from Robert Baden-Powell in the Scoutmaster Handbook are, "Train Scouts to do a job, then let them do it." and "Never do anything a boy can do."

Set the supportive tone

Adults should not be yelling at kids, except in safety emergencies. A major part of creating a supportive environment is training the adults how to respond to the youth with patience and respect. The boys need to know that they will not be yelled at if they fail. Notice one way we set the tone is by silently raising the Scout sign and patiently waiting when we want order, rather than losing our patience and yelling for them to 'shut up.' Adult behavior should follow the Scout Oath and Law: teach good behavior by example. The adults need to know how to operate within themselves before they can function with the Scouts. Any adult should refer back to the Scout chain of command whenever possible. If the adults do not know how to operate within their own chain of command, they will not know how to respond to the boys appropriately.

Encourage the patrol method

The Scoutmaster Handbook states, "Patrols are the building blocks of a Boy Scout troop." It quotes Robert Baden-Powell: "The patrol method is not *a* way to operate a Boy Scout troop, it is the *only* way. Unless the patrol method is in operation you don't really have a Boy Scout troop." The patrol is the team that you train your patrol leader to build. This may be that Patrol Leader's first leadership experience, so he will need plenty of training and coaching. Patrol spirit, respect, and cooperation will help build that team.

Make sure the rules and regulations are followed

Safety is the primary adult responsibility. Adult leaders are responsible for the troop following the rules found in the Guide to Safe Scouting and in the Youth Protection training. The adult leadership trains the youth leadership to stay within the boundaries set by BSA, and is ultimately responsible to see the rules are followed. The better the youth understand the reasons for BSA's safety rules the more likely they are to cooperate and comply. Explain that the safety rules apply to everyone, boys and adults alike.

Transitioning to a Boy-Led Troop

Get adult buy-in first

The cooperation of the adults can make or break the troop. The scoutmaster needs to have all the adults on board with what he is trying to accomplish. The safe, nurturing environment that the Scouting hopes will be established in a troop can be ruined by one cranky adult. One take-charge adult can strip the boy leadership of the opportunity to lead. Basically, the boys can't lead if the adults are treating them as if they have no power. Even if your Senior Patrol Leader is fully trained, he cannot be effective with the boys unless he is empowered by the adult leadership. Any leader who is denied any actual power is set up to be ignored and eventually fail.

Train the adult leadership

Adults need to see the "big picture" of Scouting and there is no better way to do this than by taking more training. Your troop level adult leader training can be as simple as a small group working through the Scoutmaster Handbook. A simple start, stop, continue assessment can compare the troop to the ideals set in the Scoutmaster Handbook. If it has been a while since your adult leaders have taken **New Leader Essentials** and **Scoutmaster Specifics**, maybe it would be a good for them to sit through this one day training again. Also our Council does the **University of Scouting Arts** annually that covers many areas of Scouting. By far the best Scout training available is **Wood Badge**, which merges some of the best corporate leadership training with Scouting. If possible the Scoutmaster should be Wood Badge trained.

Train the boy leadership

This can be as simple as BSA's Troop Level Training. One of the best boy leader training is NYLT, **National Youth Leadership Training**. It is essentially a Wood Badge course for youth. If possible your Senior Patrol Leader should be NYLT trained. However you do training, realize that youth leader training is a continual process. Often they will not succeed the first time they try to lead. The adult leadership may need to continually encourage and remind them until good leadership habits form. This continuing training may take quite a while, so the adult leader must have patience with the process.

Get the adults out of the Patrol Leader's Council

"Patrol leaders' council, not the adult leaders, is responsible for planning troop activities." - Fast Start: Boy Scouting. The PLC, Patrol Leader's Council, is run by the Senior Patrol Leader and not the adult leadership. If your PLC has kibitzing adults, try to have a separate meeting for them at the same time, so that the boys can lead their own meeting independent of adult interference. If there are behavior problems, the presence of just one or two adult leaders should be enough to remind the boys that their Senior Patrol Leader is in charge, and is backed up by the adult leadership. In a nutshell, the only adult that should attend the PLC is the Scoutmaster or his designate!

Check that the boy leaders are prepared.

It is very important that your Senior Patrol Leader make up an agenda for each activity. The Scoutmaster should meet before the PLC and the troop meeting to go over the agenda and make sure the youth leaders are prepared. The Scoutmaster handbook

says, "The senior patrol leader is in charge of every troop meeting. Help him plan ahead, coach him along the way, but stay in the background and let him be the leader."

Don't expect rapid change

It may take years before a fully functional boy-led troop is operating. There will always be boy leader turnover and new boys coming in. Every troop election requires a new set of boy leaders to be trained. One cannot allow setbacks to trigger a reversion to an adult-led troop. Good patrol leaders should be encouraged to move up to troop level leadership as Assistant Senior Patrol Leader (ASPL). The Assistant Senior Patrol Leader can be be a training position for Senior Patrol Leader, that way each SPL has had 6 months of troop-level leader training as ASPL before taking office. The speed of the change to a fully boy-led troop greatly depends on how fast the adults can change to a Scoutmaster lead organization! Without this, the boys do not have a proper example to follow!

Treat your Senior Patrol Leader very well

The Senior Patrol Leader is the leader of a boy-led troop, and you want other boys in the troop to really want that position because it carries status and power. You want the troop to respect and work hard for your SPL. The SPL has the best job in the troop! The adult leadership showing respect for the SPL and his decisions and input reinforces his status. If possible defer to your SPL.

Allow failure to be a learning experience

Within the bounds of a safe scouting experience, the adult leadership should allow the boy leadership to make, and learn from their mistakes. If the SPL shows up unprepared for the troop meeting, he will have to wing it and do the best he can. The adults should not bail him out by taking over and running the meeting themselves. **Adult-led is not plan B**. A teachable moment becomes plan B. Keep other adult leaders from interrupting the troop meeting, no matter how badly they think it is going; it is the SPL's show, not theirs. The Scoutmaster should talk with the boy leadership after the activity to evaluate what they can learn from the experience. Keep these meetings short and to the point. Set an encouraging tone if something did not go well, and keep the boys place from blaming anyone. Failure can be a better teacher than success.

Encourage Patrol Activities

The only way the Patrol Leader will get experience is if the patrol actually does something that requires his leadership. There should be a patrol meeting within the troop meeting. Patrol activities should be planned within troop outings also. Patrols can even plan outings independent of the troop. (See Chapter 4 "The Boy-Led Patrol" in the Scoutmaster Handbook.)

Ideas for Mentoring Leadership

Use The Senior Patrol Leader Handbook

The Senior Patrol Leader Handbook should be read by not only your SPL and ASPL but also by the adult leadership. This new handbook incorporates important new material from National Youth Leadership Training (and by derivation from Wood Badge).

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Leadership Tips to Get You Started (excerpted from SPL Handbook page 20-21)

Keep your word. Don't make promises you can't keep.

Be fair to all. A good leader shows no favorites.

Communicate. A good leader knows how to get and give information so that everyone understands.

Be flexible. Meetings, campouts, and other patrol events will not always go as planned.

Be organized. Time spent preparing for troop meetings and events will be repaid many times over.

Delegate. Among the greatest strengths of a good leader is the willingness to empower others to accomplish all they can.

Set the example. Whatever you do, Scouts in the troop are likely to do the same.

Be consistent. When the troop members know what to expect from you, they will be more likely to respond positively to your leadership.

Give Praise. Offer honest complements whenever you can.

Ask for help. Do not be embarrassed to draw on the many resources available to you.

Criticize in private. Pull the Scout aside and quietly explain what he is doing wrong. Add a suggestion on how it should have been done correctly.

Have Fun. Most of all, have fun learning to be a leader. Your joy and enthusiasm will spread to other Scouts and will help energize the troop.

Use Scenarios

First aid courses like Wilderness First Responder spend a lot of time in running scenarios in addition to lectures. Boy Scouts uses scenarios to teach youth protection. This is primarily because people learn by doing. Leadership can also be taught that way. The **National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience** at Philmont uses scenarios like search and rescue to teach leadership. Closer to home, the SPL Handbook has five example scenarios (page 90-91) but any seasoned adult leader probably has many more real-life examples to use. Consider taking time with your boy leadership to work through known challenges, so that they will feel prepared if a similar situation arises. Discussing alternatives ahead of time with an adult leader will help build a youth's confidence that their responses would be correct. Scenarios can also allow the Scoutmaster to train the adult leadership in the proper responses to boy-led challenges.

Conclusion

Like many things, working on a functional boy-led troop is a journey to be enjoyed and not necessarily a destination that will be achieved. Troop turnover guarantees that it will always be a work in progress. Working toward a boy-led troop will give you a platform to teach leadership and the satisfaction of watching boys mature into good leaders.

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Resources:

In print from BSA:

Senior Patrol Leader's Handbook
Patrol Leader's Handbook
Scoutmaster's Handbook
Troop Leadership Training
The Boy Scout Handbook
Guide to Safe Scouting
Fieldbook

Other books and magazines:

Scouting Magazine
"The Scoutmaster's Other Handbook" by Mark A. Ray

Additional training

BSA web training:
Fast Start: Boy Scouting - an excellent overview of the Scouting program
Troop Committee Challenge
Youth Protection Training
New Leader Essentials - is designed for all new adult leaders entering Scouting.
District roundtable
University of Scouting Arts
Wood Badge

Boy-Led Wiki on the web:

www.boyledtroop.org

Scouting Magazine articles available on the web

http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/
Jan-Feb 2009 "Let Your Scouts Lead"
Mar-Apr 2004 "Strictly for Scoutmasters"
Sept 2003 "Front Line Stuff" "How can a large troop be boy-led?"
Nov-Dec 2000 "Front Line Stuff" "some strategies for realizing the important goal of boy-led troop leadership"

Attached reprint from the web

"Lessons and Suggestions on Boy-Run Troops"
by Barry Runnels, ed. by Chuck Boblitz
http://bsaroundtable.org/boyruntroop.html

Additional handout attached from Col. Red Dog Maynard

Boy-led model - stairway to a full boy-led unit

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Col. Red Dog Maynard for giving me material to get started on this project and Mike Labarre, Scoutmaster Troop 50, for reading the draft and making suggestions. I would also like to recognize contributions from my son Matthew, who served twice on NYLT staff, as an SPL for his troop, and is an Eagle Scout.

Written as a University of Scouting Arts Ph.D. Thesis by Paul H. Scudder Troop 50 Sarasota, Florida 2009

Attachments follow:

Lessons and Suggestions on Boy-Run troops

(Excerpts from "Boy Run Troops Part II" by Barry Runnels, edited by Chuck Boblitz)

Lessons and Suggestions on Boy-Run troops http://bsaroundtable.org/boyruntroop.html

While scouting is for boys, it is under the guidance of adults. The adult's control 100% of the direction of the Troop, and it is their responsibility to develop a boy-run program. This may seem complicated but it really isn't. **Guidance**, **Vigilance** from a distance, **Patience**, **Understanding** the boys point of view, **Trust** in your skills as a trained leader, **Trust** in the Boy Scout program as it was designed by the BSA, and **Trust** in the boys themselves, are the 7 keys for adults helping to foster a Boy Run Troop.

Here are some habits that help a troop grow towards a boy run program.

• **No matter what his age or experience; the SPL runs the troop meetings**. Adults should, ideally, be outside the room. Several times adults of new troops have told me they will wait until the scouts are mature enough to take responsibility to run meetings before they let the SPL plan and run it. But all scouts to some degree can run a meeting. The sooner your program starts developing the habits of a boy run program, the faster everyone learns how to make changes towards a boy run program.

• **It's not the job of the adults to take the responsibility for the scouts, but to guide the scouts in their responsibilities**. The more the adults take responsibility for troop management, the harder it becomes for them to hand that responsibility back to the scouts, and it takes all that much longer for the scouts become accustomed to shouldering this responsibility.

• **The PLC and SM must look at troop activities, situations, and meetings and ask, "If the adults weren't here, could this part of the program still run with only the scouts?".** When you say no, it's time for the SM to work with the PLC to develop habits that would bring the troop to that point. It's a slow process--solid boy-run programs take months and years to develop, not days or weeks.

• **The SPL runs the Troop, so there is no reason for an adult to assume the role for any reason. Any concerns by adults should be addressed through the SM and SPL.** Adults are allowed to guide, to suggest, to coach--but not to do scouts' jobs for them. It's very difficult for adults to keep from helping scouts (out of a sincere desire to be helpful and friendly).

• **All behaviors, good and bad, are the scout's responsibility. Most boy-run programs have very few behavior problems where adults need to get involved.** That's because each scout is held responsible by all the other scouts. Until safety becomes an issue, the PLC should be held responsible for taking

care of bad behavior. The PLC should also report misbehavior to the SM so he can talk with the scout if needed. That is one of the Scoutmaster's jobs. Bad behavior should be seen as an indicator of a scout needing guidance. Too many adults see bad behavior as an embarrassment of their program, rather than a part of the program--but if scouts were perfect, why would we need the Oath & Law? Adults must be passive in their guidance, but fearless in their objectives.

• **Adults should never lead a group of scouts. I am always amazed watching adults lead their troop around at summer camps and camporees.** Scouts are the leaders, let them lead. I can't imagine anytime where the adults should take the lead. If you can't trust the scouts, then something needs to change. The adults' place is well behind the scouts. (I am also amazed at summer camp when I see troops that don't trust their scouts to get to merit badge classes without adult guidance).

There are some clear signs of when adults are over-involved in running the troop:

• **All scouts are dressed perfectly**. While I am sure there are some good boy run Troops with all the scouts in perfect uniform, I have not met one yet. I am using the uniform as an example here, but it can be anything where adults force the scouts to conform as a group when the scouts don't understand. From the adult's perspective, a boy run program is where each scout is guided individually, not as a group. What we adults need to understand is that every boy growing up questions the logic of many things that don't make since to him, especially at this age. A scout may rebel against the norm to force some kind of response because they he doesn't know any other way. Adults in boy run programs should not force a scout back to the norm, but instead guide his understanding of the situation so that he voluntarily changes. Usually when we understand a logical purpose for anything, we voluntarily conform to it. If the reason for the situation is not logical, then maybe it's time for the adults to consider change. I have always challenged my PLC's that if I can't identify how a part of our program helps build better habits and character, I will throw it out. Only pride could get in the way of making changes. It's the scouts program; they should be allowed to ask questions. The troop should be a safe place to do that.

• **Adults who stand with scouts or in front of scouts during activities are usually a sign of a more adult run Troop.** The Boy run program works well because the struggle of leading, planning and managing the Troop naturally motivates a scout to seek out knowledge to stop the struggle or failure. For that to work, adults must stand out of the way of the scouts. Let the scout make the mistakes, take the wrong trails, cook food wrong and so on. Some of the worst examples of adult run that I have seen in our Troop are High Adven-

ture Treks. An inexperienced adult often thinks he knows more than the inexperienced boys do.

• **A troop focuses on advancement, to the exclusion of other elements of the program.** Adults are afraid to fail, afraid to get hurt. They are also protective by nature against their children's suffering. Because of these reasons, adults sometimes tend to push advancement within a troop program, because it's safe. Earning patches is a relatively low-risk way to achieve self-confidence and stature. But without real challenges and real risk of failure, awards lose their meaning.

• **A troop focuses on outings, to the exclusion of advancement and leadership.** Here too, adults are afraid to fail, afraid to get hurt. They are also protective by nature against their children's suffering the loss of FUN time. Because of these reasons, adults sometimes tend to push for outings only within a troop program, because it's fun. Having the adults Plan and execute the outings is a relatively low-risk way to achieve full control by the adults since they become the center of attention for all of the fun stuff. This is great for Adult Egos but not the Boys Egos. Without the true challenge presented by having the boys plan and execute the events, and the real risk of failure, troop outings lose their meaning. When the scouts are not provided the opportunity to plan and work their own advancement trail with guidance from troop members and adult Scouters, the feelings of achievement, and success are lost too.

• **Watch for these other signs of adults taking over the program:**

Who sets the time to wake up or lights out, adults or scouts?
Who picks the places to set up the tents, tarps and eating area?
Who sets up the times to eat, and program activities?
Who loads the Troop trailer, and who says when it's time to go?
Who counts the scouts in the cars to make sure everyone is there?
Who decides what kind of camping gear the troop should buy?
Who decides when it's time to go home from the campout?

Having a boy-run program is simply giving boys trust to manage their activities and actions in the troop. Imagine everything you the scouts to do without them standing in the room. That could be as little as just saying the pledge of allegiance, or as much as letting the SPL run the whole Troop meeting. Imagine a circle defining that area of trust. That circle is your boy run program. The area outside the circle is the area where the scouts grow in their struggle, and we adults grow in our trust that the scouts can manage their actions without our guidance.

That circle is worth little if its limits never expand or grow. We adults must push the limits of the circle so the boys grow in their ability to manage life's skills. This takes courage from the scouts, to keep trying and learn from new experiences. It also takes courage from the adults to let the scouts go beyond

their limits (our limits!) so they struggle in their troop responsibilities and become motivated to learn the skills to ease their struggle.

An adult-run troop is not necessarily one with a small circle of trust. An adult-run troop is one where the adults are not comfortable allowing the circle to grow, because they are afraid of failure.

Allowing our boys to struggle in their activities is not natural for a parent. We want to make it easier even up to the point of holding their hands. But our scouts are young men on the verge of being sent out into an unforgiving world. Scouting is where they will learn the skills of men in a safe and controlled environment.

Your goal should be that every scout and every adult goes home saying, "I like Myself when I am with the Troop".

Teach the adults how to watch and recognize the moments when the earth moves. You know, when the young scout's eyes get big because he figured out how to tie a knot. Those times when the Patrol all of a sudden acts like a patrol instead of animals scurrying around. The day the SPL runs the perfect PLC meeting or the Troop meeting goes off without a hitch. I remember once when an ASM and I watch the Troop break camp and load the trailer in 30 minutes. It was perfect. We looked at each other and said, well it's time to raise the bar on breaking camp, but we were smiling at the moment.

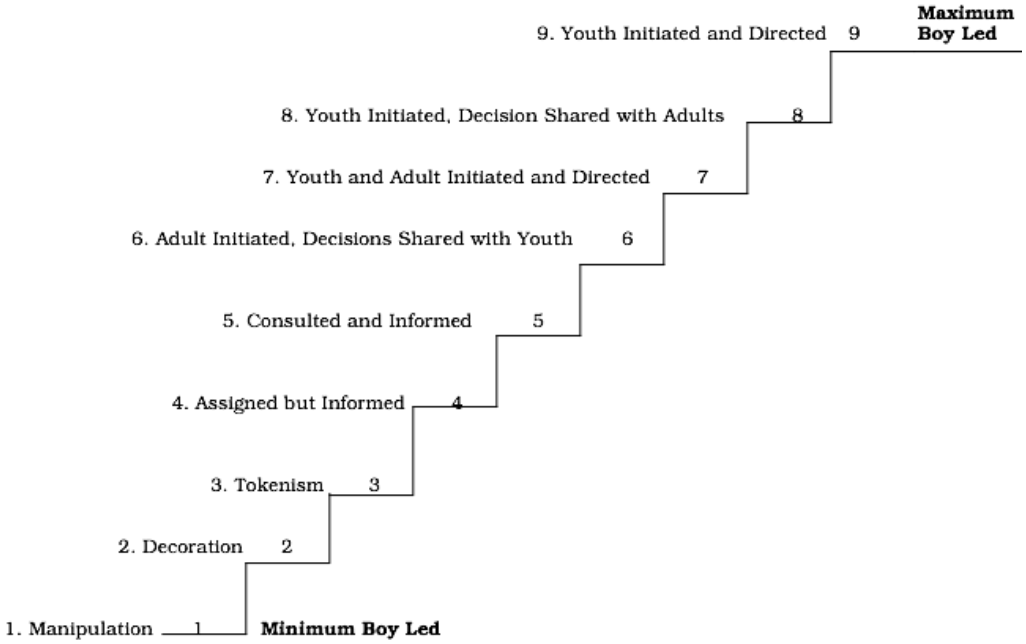
A boy run program requires a lot of work from both the adults and scouts, but the rewards are worth bragging about. For the Troop to be successful, both the adults and scouts have to grow in the program. Real growth is slow and unexpected. One day you are looking at a confused boy wondering how he can manage his Patrol of yelling, rambunctious boys. Then it seems like all of a sudden, a much taller version of the same scout is inviting you to attend his Eagle COH. "How in the world?" you wonder. But while we give all the credit to the will of a boy, let's give a little credit to the adults who had the courage to stand up and *get out of his way*.

11/02/02 BR/cwb

Lessons and Suggestions on Boy-Run troops http://bsaroundtable.org/boyruntroop.html

Parents' and New Leaders Guide to a Boy-Led Troop

Boy-Led Model Handout from Col. Red Dog Maynard



Degrees of Participation

9. Youth Initiated and Directed	→Designed and run by youth and decisions made by youth.
8. Youth Initiated, Shared	→Designed and run by youth Decisions with Adults who share decisions with adults.
7. Youth and Adult	→Designed and run by youth and Initiated and Directed adults in full partnership.
6. Adult Initiated, Shared	→Designed and run by adults Decisions with Youth who share decisions with youth.
5. Consulted and Informed	→Designed and run by adults who consult with youth. Youth make recommendations that are considered by adults.
4. Assigned but Informed	→Youth do not initiate, but understand and have some sense of ownership.
3. Tokenism	→Symbolic representation by few. May not have genuine voice. May be asked to speak for the group they represent.
2. Decoration	→Adults use youth to promote or support a cause without informing youth. Youth are not involved in design or decisions.
1. Manipulation	→Youth involvement used by adults to communicate adults' messages.