

Parent Committee Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: 3/3/12

Present: Erik Autor, Chris Cozadd, Jim Custer, Julie Custer, Melissa Dana, Jeff Englander, Andy Gilmour, Jeff Hilton, Dieter Leach, Gina Leach, Kathleen Norman, Colleen Parker, Tony Ulses, Wally Zampella

Discussion Regarding Role of Scoutmaster

- Melissa – the floor is open to you.
- Erik – let's identify what issues we want to cover.
- Tony – we agreed that this is an ideas meeting only today, no decisions will be made.
- Jim – regarding some comments in recent e-mails, I want to emphasize that we follow the charter of the BSA, no problem there.
- Wally – we new parents this year had no idea about troop philosophy – never heard about it or read about it.
- Jim – some of us naively believed the reason everyone joined this troop was because of this philosophy. This idea of a “troop philosophy” is not unique. Each troop puts its emphasis on different things (spelunking, religion, canoeing, etc.).
- Chris - I was surprised when some new families said they didn't know about this.
- Jim – we need to get to that now, to define clearly.
- Erik – make sure everyone is involved in decision-making, communication, buy-in.
- Jim – who is everyone?
- Erik – make an effort to include all, then best you can do is decision-making with those people together. Seek buy-in and consensus. I knew the troop was Scout-led and adult-mentored, but that's all.
- Tony – we need feedback on where we failed.
- Wally – have good structure in place, but need to educate everyone.
- Dieter – simply need a “new parent education.” Make it mandatory, here's the Handbook, here's how to be involved, we expect this of your Scout and of you.
- Tony – buy-in is key. This body can change the troop philosophy too. It is an open dialogue.
- Kathleen – not everyone may have seen it, but there is a 75-page Handbook that has not been widely distributed. A month ago Chris, Colleen and I started to review and update this. It is a work in progress.
- Jeff – we as ASMs use this, changes have been made that haven't been put in. We should have a system of bringing proposals to the PCM, and add a paragraph here or an addendum at the back, for example.
- Erik – can't give someone a 75-page book. But you can say here are the critical points you need to buy into.

- Jim – most important thing in Handbook is what each position does.
- Melissa – let's get back to the troop philosophy and what the SM should be doing. Suggestion that we agree, for example, that SM should be responsible for a half-hour of leadership training at each PLC.
- Tony – PLC history – we started with weekly meetings, and PLC on another night. Then decided to take one meeting a month to do PLC. Big loss of time (25%) for troop, but worth it. PLC became the core of leadership training. Then the SPL could go back to Scouts to explain everything.
- Jim – PLC planned in advance to address whatever were weak points with boys.
- Tony – that PLC is where boys learn to lead, they are given particular tasks. This is not typical. Generally in other troops, the PLC is boys sitting around and debating and not coming away with anything, end up doing it at troop meetings.
- Jim – last week I visited four troops in Manassas. What is their long-, medium- and short-term training? I have not come across any troop that does it in our way.
- Tony – BSA leadership training exists, but it is a 10-hour block. We can't really do this. So we do it at the PLC. Monique brought this into a 1 ½ hour program, and boys get a lot out of this.
- Chris – was Monique's program a one-off, or ongoing?
- Jim – Monique's recommendation would be to do this PLC training every time we have elections (every 6 months). She wants to take all boys who have been patrol leaders, and have them train the incoming PLC. These five boys, with support of adult leaders, would help the new PLC, acting as facilitators.
- Melissa – great. What do we want the SM to do or not to do?
- Jim – is SM responsible to train adults?
- Melissa – Monique does this.
- Wally – should this go over to the parents?
- Erik – if Monique can handle this, great. But if it's too much, we can spin it off. Additional levels of parent and adult leader training would be good. Can Monique handle this?
- Melissa – I'll talk to Monique.
- Dieter – how about a new adult mentor? Too much for Monique.
- Erik – we can ask each adult with role on Parent Committee to keep a notebook, for example myself as Advancement Coordinator. Then we can develop written guidelines, ideas on how to do it. Must address how we prepare the incoming SM. Tony may be best to ask, based on his experience. What do you want to impart to next SM?
- Tony – most of success of troop goes back to PLC. I can't overemphasize this. SM has opportunity to really sit down and help the meeting stay on track, but must stage this kind of intervention carefully. We must teach leadership. I will write this down, my ideas on this.
- Melissa – does SM work with the SPL to have agenda, to keep it on track?

- Tony – SM can have the SPL lead the meeting, delegate responsibility to the ASPLs. SM can help subtly, for example can have a calendar on hand, and if they start to flounder, say “oh, look what I have here if it will help you out.”
- Jim – SM accountable for that. But any or all of the PLC can be delegated. Delegate responsibility but not accountability! We need to have the SPL’s back. What if the SPL is constantly unprepared? Take SPL aside and explain. If he can’t overcome, relieve SPL and put someone new in. But in reality this is very hard to do. The boys who run for this position must understand the responsibility involved.
- Jim – It doesn’t matter what the SM wants. It is the SM who must say “What do you want to do? What theme this month? What campout?” etc. The SM works for the boys, to enable them to succeed.
- Jeff – it is critical for the troop to have a highly successful PLC. It must be energized, so they feel empowered.
- Melissa – what do we say to the SM to energize and empower the PLC?
- Jim – it does come down to personality. If SM is open and listening to input and constructive criticism, it will be successful.
- Erik – back to the point if the SPL is not fulfilling his responsibilities – we need guidelines on what to do if SM or SPL are not meeting their responsibilities.
- Jim – from corporate experience, there are methods out there, when you get to the last straw, guidelines on how to remove someone.
- Chris – the Handbook talks about Patrol Advisors, who monitor the patrol and make sure all is on track, that it is not dying on the vine. Mid-term they would check in with the SM to give feedback.
- Wally – we haven’t really done that.
- Tony – this is a good idea.
- Chris – have SM oversee how this is done.
- Jeff – also applies to ASMs. Everyone is accountable. Training is key. Gave example of his son as Scribe. Also need ASM responsible for each group. The First Class and Star ranked group has been missing this over the past year. Must fix this.
- Jim – during patrol corner, someone needs to monitor – are they working?
- Melissa – also, how exactly do you intervene? There is a difference between mentoring and directing.
- Erik – it appears to me things are getting off track. What are you trying to do here?
- Melissa – this is important in our troop philosophy. Sometimes when we think things are really getting off track, the boys think things are getting done.
- Tony – different ways to teach. Let them go out and fail. Enable their success.
- Erik – allow to fail for a while, then teach. Shared story of job when he was younger. He was doing it wrong, but his boss just watched and let him do it that way for a while. Then he showed him the right way. He

- realized he'd been killing himself for nothing, but if he hadn't been allowed to fail first, he wouldn't have realized.
- Tony – there he enabled your success.
- Jim – I've talked to some families about joining, but they say "we don't do tents and we don't do bugs." But that's not the essence of boy scouting. That is simply the environment that teaches leadership. Mentoring teaches not just skill sets but problem-solving. It all comes back to mentoring.
- Melissa – and it's not necessarily intuitive as a parent, because we are used to directing our children.
- Tony – we have standard BSA training. What are we doing on top of that? If the Parent Committee decides that is what we want to do, then it needs to start thinking about succession. The SM is then accountable for the training.
- Kathleen – other organizations sometimes have a successor/training position, such as a PTA President-Elect, where one commits to be president the following year. Could we have a ScoutMaster-Elect position? Does BSA have this?
- Erik – Done at the organizational level. Do it for the Parent Committee Chair position, have a six-month shadowing period.
- Melissa – how about hearing from those who haven't spoken?
- Gina – important to know our mission, pass it around, to make sure we are all on the same page.
- Colleen – I agree with the philosophy. In Odyssey of the Mind, I couldn't coach because I like to direct. But in OM the kids must work only on their own, and it is crazy sometimes. Then you see them go to a competition, and they win! They did it all on their own. The coach is the facilitator, keeps them from going off-tangent.
- Melissa – I agree. OM is a great example for us. You can learn so much as an adult if you just sit back and let the kids be in charge.
- Jim – some of the language in our Troop Handbook was cut and pasted from an e-mail that Melissa sent out in her role as an OM coach.
- Gina – OM is successful because there is an end goal. Can we think of the Scouts in this way to help them? If the boys had a sheet at the PLC, asking what is your goal?
- Colleen – parameters within each problem.
- Melissa – OM taught the skill of brainstorming. Let's teach the kids brainstorming. Can we make it part of the PLC training?
- Tony – I like the recognition of goals. Let's get that into the training.
- Julie – every Scout should have a goal he is working on, work with the ASM on it.
- Jim – heard this from parents, there are Scouts that are stuck at a rank for years.
- Chris – use TroopMaster to identify stagnation.

- Erik – leadership opportunity. If Scouts are plateaued and not advancing, put them with younger Scouts and make it a leadership opportunity as they advance as well.
- Melissa – Trail to First Class should be taught by Scouts that are Star and above.
Dieter – and this is part of the requirement for older Scouts already.
- Chris – patrols as mini-families. Can the Patrol Leader identify and direct this?
Jim – yes, that is his job. We’ve been very clear about the fact that we hold you responsible for giving back. Up until First Class, this is about you. But then after that it’s not all about you.
- Tony – where those skills are enabled, it comes back to the PLC. Each Patrol Leader must be at the PLC.
- Dieter – pulling kids along through rank advancement is so much more effective when it is done by a peer, it means much more to a boy, they listen much better to a peer than to an adult.
- Gina – for me as a Girl Scout, some of my most rewarding memories are working with younger girls and helping them.
- Melissa – Andy, what do you think?
Andy – one of the challenges for this group is how to transition from people who have been in adult leadership positions to new people. It was a hard transition this past year. I like the idea of having a Standard Operating Procedure, and of mentoring and training. It comes back to personality and interpretation of what’s there. You can’t dictate. You can only encourage and support. Let’s wrap up ideas, lessons learned on a successful transition, and become a troop that continues to improve.
- Dieter – is this not the “EDGE” method (explain-demonstrate-guide-enable)?
Tony – important to be self-critical, and to have an open and collaborative working environment.
- Kathleen – is there a liaison from the ASMs to the Parent Committee? As we discuss all these useful and inspiring ideas, exactly how will this be brought to the ASM meeting and put into effect?
- Jeff – no there is not such a position. But we will discuss all these things.
Jim – we have identified many opportunities to improve. Why would we wait?
- Wally – you, the Parent Committee, need to implement and execute. And need to put a rose on a new SM.
- Jim – objective is to have two training tracks. Get from ideas to execution.
Tony – the Parent Committee defines the policy. The details are the duty of the ASMs. I foresee we write up draft modifications of Handbook. Put them out for review, and then vote on them. Have a Parent Committee meeting quickly to do this.
- Erik – let’s proceed deliberately. We need to do this as a next step – here are the decisions we’ve identified that need to be made. Then set up a framework for making these decisions.
- Wally – PLC training plan?
Dieter – new parent orientation.

Wally – is Jim the interim SM?
Melissa – Jim has offered to serve as interim SM as we can't find someone in the next week before the leadership changeover. Harry Shovlin, our Charter Organization Representative, asked Jim to serve in temporary capacity.

Kathleen / Erik – make sure this is done properly or there will be misinterpretation.
Erik – Parent Committee must hold a vote. We need to know if there are any objections to this. We must build consensus and have buy-in. There cannot be the appearance that decisions are going to be made by fait accompli.

Melissa – we said we would not be taking any decisions today, so we can hold a vote at the next PCM.

Jim – Jeff, you have been quiet, what do you think?
Jeff – the troop started extremely strong. In the last two months, I wish we could have done the process differently. Trust has been lost. We need time to rebuild trust. As adults we must be an example to the boys for how to handle conflict.

Melissa – yes, it's a matter of trust. For the people who chose not to be at this meeting, that was their decision. It is important that everyone has an understanding, and that we have majority buy-in.

Erik – we must try to achieve consensus where we can. Buy-in and inclusion.
Tony – these emotions are difficult.
Chris – forcing a sense of urgency fans the flames. I like the work "deliberately." The boys are happy, so there is no crisis. We must make it abundantly clear that we are listening to everyone.

Tony – if you want to slow down, that is fine.
Jeff – next scheduled PCM is on the second Tuesday of the month, March 13.
Andy – I suggest a "focused" as the best term rather than an "intense."
Chris – at that meeting, let's try to move quickly through the cookie cutter issues.

Jeff – for ASMs, we ask for full support of the PC on all things discussed today.

Tony – ultimately, if parents are engaging with kids, is it helping or hindering the program?
Jeff – having parents on campouts can go either way – sometimes helpful, sometimes not.

Chris – the Handbook says parents are welcome on all campouts, so I just assumed it was encouraged.

Wally – at average troop meeting, there are sometimes so many parents present talking at the back of the room. Sometimes I worry that this is having a negative impact on the meetings.
Melissa – can move it into the back room, but it is so smoky.
Tony – at next PCM, let's discuss the role of the Scoutmasters at the PLC. Then have closure and a vote.

Melissa – who will write this up?
Tony – let's synthesize the ideas and pass out via e-mail.

Jim – can I request we don't "Reply All" on all of these discussions?
Tony – our objective will be to hold a vote at the next PCM, but if we can't do it that quickly, we can table it until the next meeting.

Tony will take stab at writing up role of Scoutmaster at the PLC, at request of PC. Kathleen will announce via list serve that Jim has kindly offered to serve as SM for an interim period, and a vote on this will be taken at the next regularly scheduled PCM. Also attach notes from today's meeting.