

Being a Successful Scout Leader



From [Wayne Parker](#),
Your Guide to [Fatherhood](#).

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I still consider myself a novice scoutmaster, even though I have been to three summer camps and more weekend campouts than I can remember in the last four years. Some dads might question my sanity, but I really enjoy serving as a volunteer scoutmaster. I enjoy spending time with my sons (two Eagle Scouts so far, one just starting scouting). And I also have fun with the other boys their ages.

Sure, there are challenges being a scoutmaster. The weekly commitment to troop meetings, the one weekend a month and one week a year at camp, the challenge with helping reluctant or apathetic parents get involved, and the storage space it takes up in my garage are all part of the commitment. But the rewards are tremendous as well as I try in my small way to help build boys into committed, responsible and successful men.

If you find yourself in a position to be a volunteer scoutmaster (sometimes, volunteer by coercion...), then what should you do to be successful in your scouting service?

1. Get Trained. Too many scout leaders start off with a vague idea of their role and mission. BSA offers what is called Fast Start Training, which is usually done monthly in your local scout district. This is a great way to begin. Then, every leader should have Adult Basic Training, which for scoutmasters usually involves three weeknights or a Friday night/Saturday day combination. And then attending the monthly Roundtable training will help you refine your skills and stay informed on Council and District scouting programs. There is no substitute for scout sponsored leader training.

2. Build a Strong Committee. Scoutmasters who try to run the entire program themselves typically burn out fast and are not very successful. Build a solid and committed troop committee. On a committee, you need a chair and vice chair and several specialists in areas such as advancement, equipment, fund raising, camping and the like. With a committee to 5 to 7 members, who commit to fulfill their responsibilities, the scoutmaster's job becomes to work with the boys first and foremost.

3. Plan and Calendar. Successful scoutmasters understand the need to plan and calendar events and activities. A general yearly calendar with dates for troop meetings, campouts, service projects and summer camp is important. Successful troops then plan a rolling four month calendar in more detail, and then make sure each scout's family receives a current 4 month calendar.

4. Instill Scout Spirit. One of the most important roles of a scoutmaster is to infuse his troop with Scout Spirit. He does this in a variety of ways. He should wear the scout uniform and encourage his scouts to do so as well. Scouts should repeat the scout oath, scout law and slogan at each meeting. Scouts should perform service as a troop from time to time to build teamwork and give of themselves.

5. Hold Scoutmaster Conferences. Most successful scoutmasters know that scoutmaster conferences are a key to helping boys advance. Once every month or two, the scoutmaster should meet with the scout to review his progress and his involvement in the troop. And about quarterly, that conference should happen with one or both of the scout's parents or guardians. The conference should help the boy set goals for

advancement, should keep parents motivated to work with their scout, and can help focus the boy's attention.

6. Develop Scouts into Leaders. Successful scoutmasters understand and practice the concept of "shadow leadership." The boys should for the most part run the troop. Many scoutmasters take the position of electing patrol leaders from the patrol members, but reserve the right to appoint the senior patrol leader (SPL) and assistant SPL. These boys form the Patrol Leaders Council (PLC), which really governs the troop. The PLC should take the lead in planning and calendaring, and should be seen as the leaders by the other scouts. The program will be most successful when the PLC takes the lead and the scoutmaster and troop committee become the resources.

Successful scouting is not easy. It takes a strong commitment to the program and to the keys of success. But by following these suggestions, a scoutmaster can be the main catalyst to a successful scout troop-one which helps boys develop into responsible, committed and successful men.