

# Learning the Basics

by Glenn Cockwell

**W**e live in a world that makes great demands on our time and energy. As each of us tries to balance our resources between our family, job, and community we find that we must make choices. Scouting values your decision to join us as a leader, which hopefully will result in a meaningful and fun experience. As with every new adventure, the full potential of your time as a leader will only come if you have the skills and knowledge appropriate to your role in Scouting.

Our traditional method of developing these skills has been through courses. These events not only provide ample opportunity to learn and practice Scouting skills, but you also meet other Scouters and share their stories and experiences. Unfortunately these courses quite often require an extended time away from our families and they may not fit into your work schedule. In some cases, you may already have many of the proficiencies offered in a particular course and just need to fill in some gaps.

If a course does not fit with your needs, perhaps the best way to develop the necessary skills for your role is through mentoring. We have many very knowledgeable leaders in our ranks; the challenge is to connect their experience with you. Through mentoring we can create timely, convenient, and appropriate learning opportunities that will give you the confidence and skills to present a fun and challenging program.

## Some misconceptions of mentoring:

**A mentor runs a one-on-one course.**

– Courses generally have a learning outcome defined by the people running the course. During mentoring, the person who is being mentored defines the goal.

**Mentoring requires a large commitment of time on the part of the mentor**

– It is important that the mentor and the new Scouter spend some time together initially to get to know each other and understand the goals. Once you agree on the outcome, you can establish a more efficient method of communicating. This can be through the internet, telephone, fax, or mail, as well as the occasional face-to-face.

**A mentor is a very experienced Scouter that knows everything you need to learn.**

– Because the new Scouter sets the goal of the mentoring session it is only necessary to find someone that can guide you through that particular topic. In fact you might have several mentors as you explore all the learning objectives. In some cases, you might choose someone that is just a bit more knowledgeable than you and give them an opportunity to build their skills as well. There is no better way to expand knowledge of a topic than to teach someone else.

## Setting goals

When you look at the Section Leader's Passport you see a great number of "Learning Objectives". While it is true that eventually you should understand and be able to demonstrate all these skills, they are really the underlying skills of your ultimate goal. What you really want to be is:

A contributing member of your leadership team with the skills to help plan and run a youth program as laid out in the leader and youth handbooks. The program you present the youth must comply with the Mission of Scouts Canada and the methods of conducting this program must be in line with norms described in the leader handbooks. At all times

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you must follow Scouts Canada's regulations concerning conduct and administration for these activities.

Sound formidable? You may find it easier to break the activities into categories:

#### **Understand Scouts Canada and the Scouting community**

The Scouting Movement is a world-wide organization with a Mission, fundamental beliefs, a Law and a Promise, and a desire to contribute to the education of the youth of our community. By spending some time understanding the history, traditions, and practices of Scouting you will be much better prepared to understand the programs.

#### **Conduct an effective meeting**

Although as a leader you participate in the regular meetings of your section, there may be many nuances that escape your attention. Each piece of the meeting has its own subtleties and the leader should understand them.

#### **Plan your program**

Good meetings do not happen by accident. A detailed meeting plan, which is the result of a long-term plan, is the only way to ensure that you and the youth will find Scouting fulfilling. You, the rest of the leadership team, and the youth of your section must work together to plan a program that covers all the elements of our program in an exciting and fun way.

#### **Take your program outdoors**

The "outdoors" element of Scouting is what makes it unique and exciting. Every element of the program in your short and long-term plans should have some form of outdoor activity associated with it. To ensure both the safety and the success of the adventure, you must also have the skills of living, working and playing outdoors. The Camping and Outdoor Activity section of *Bylaw, Policies and Procedures* is the key guide for these activities.

#### **Understand the basics of leadership and administration**

As a member of the leadership team you have responsibilities to the youth, to their parents, to the other members of your team, to Scouts Canada and most importantly to yourself. To participate as an effective team member you must communicate with your team, work with the other sections, and meet the administrative expectations of Scouts Canada and the youth of your charge. Each of these categories of skills is really a collection of the individual "Learning Objectives"; however, if you set your goals in terms of the "category," you and your mentor may find it easier to approach and achieve the "Learning Objectives".

#### **Determine specific tasks**

Define your goal as the completion of a series of tasks. Whether it is "read the history of Scouting" or "conduct an

opening," each task should reflect the skill associated with your goal and have criteria for completion. (e.g. The opening includes the following ——).

# *The "outdoors" element of Scouting is what makes it unique and exciting.*

#### **Set schedules for communicating and a time limit for completion**

With vague schedules it is very easy to get busy doing other things and lose the initial momentum. Keep in touch with your mentor on a regular basis and have a target for completion.

#### **In conclusion**

Scouting is known for the unique contribution that we make to the development of the youth of our community. The adult volunteers that present our program need a special set of skills and un-

derstanding if they are to meet these expectations. Whether you choose to pursue those skills through a course or through mentoring, the key to your satisfaction in this leadership role is that you take full advantage of the help that is available. X

– Glen Cockwell Scouts in the Greater Toronto Council and is a member of the National Program Services Committee.

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