

JANUARY – GETTING PERMISSION TO HANDLE AWKWARD SITUATIONS

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LEE: Happy New Year, everyone! Welcome to the January 2015 ScoutCast. I'm Lee Shaw, Team Leader of Community Alliance.

PAULA: And I'm Paula Murphey, Managing Editor of *Boys' Life Magazine*, *Scouting* magazine and *Eagles' Call*. So, Lee, how will we be starting the ScoutCast year?

LEE: Sharing the microphone with us is Venturing Advisor Peter Self to explain, in great detail, how to get permission to handle awkward situations. So join us, won't you?

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LEE: Joining us for our first ScoutCast of 2015 is my good friend Peter Self. Over the past 33 years Peter has served in a number of volunteer Scouting positions including Assistant Scoutmaster and Scoutmaster as well as serving as an Advisor of three Venturing Crews, including his current Advisor role in Crew 425 chartered in the Circle 10 Council in Dallas, Texas. Welcome to ScoutCast, Peter.

PETER: Thank you, Lee. It's great to be here.

LEE: Before we get started I wanted to let you know you have a little spinach, uh, in between your teeth there.

PETER: Oh, I do? I was saving that for later.

PAULA: This isn't awkward.

LEE: We're going to get started anyway. Peter, why are we talking about this?
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PETER: If you've been a Scoutmaster or a Scout Leader for very long, you've come up with a lot of awkward situations and discussions that you're not really sure how to handle, and ultimately the one that pays the price is the youth. We've got youth out there that are being excluded or being left out of the program because we're unwilling to have these discussions. One or two things happens. Either we assume that because of these situations they can't participate or they assume they can't participate, and neither one is correct quite honestly. So, if we don't have these discussions periodically, we leave a lot of kids out of the program.

PAULA: So, Peter, what are some examples of an awkward situation that a leader might have to address?

PETER: There are a lot. You can hardly list the number of different situations that can come up. There are things that come under the category of physical conditions or physical situations where the youth has no control. They may have a disability, they have an allergy or food sensitivities. There

may be things that they can control such as physical conditioning. Perhaps those Scouts never learned how to swim and so that would exclude them from certain activities.

There are emotional issues like depression and anxiety that you've got to deal with sometimes. Medical issues, having to do with the administration of medications or prior existing injuries. There are financial issues that come up; families have income challenges or maybe a job loss, and that affects the ability of the youth to participate in various activities. You've got values-based discussions that get awkward sometimes. If you're in a troop that has members of different religions or different faith-based organizations, those come up periodically, and if we don't address them, they can cause risks. We have different family settings, all the way from single parents to step-parents and foster parents and who has custody of the child. We have behavior issues, things like anger management, ADD, and ADHD problems. So there's just a whole range of situations and events that occur that if we don't discuss them, the youth will be left out of the program because of them.

LEE: Peter, you certainly listed some great examples for us, but why do you suppose leaders aren't addressing awkward situations?

PETER: Primarily they're not addressing them because of fear - the fear of offending others, I think. We also live in a different age than we did 30, 40 years ago. We're afraid of a lot of privacy issues. There are things like HIPAA laws in place having to do with medical issues. A lot of folks are afraid of how litigious we've become and afraid of saying the wrong thing and being sued. There's greater public awareness situations, but they're also more stigmatized. Take ADD and ADHD for example. You know, years ago nobody had heard of it and now everybody knows about it, but the stigma that goes with it is much bigger as well. There's a wider range

of parenting styles, and so you're a little bit afraid to say anything or do anything with somebody else's child, not knowing what their values are.

PAULA: So, Peter, other than the little spinach incident that we all just awkwardly witnessed...

PETER: Yes...

PAULA: (laughs) have you ever found yourself in an awkward situation, and how did you handle it?

PETER: Asking a Scouting leader if they've been in an awkward situation is kind of like asking anybody, well, I won't go there...

PAULA: (Laughs) Awkward!

PETER: If you've been a Scout leader very long, you've had several awkward situations, and maybe I can just talk about a couple. I'm a Venturing advisor which means we have a co-ed crew. I had a situation one time where we had a young lady who wasn't quite living up to the standards that we thought were appropriate for modest dress in the crew, and it became an issue with not only members of the crew, but with some of the adults. So this is a situation that we needed to address, and how do you do that, right? I mean, this is not my daughter, and yet somehow I've got to address the issue of her appropriate attire. So, in that particular case, I just went to her mother and said, "You know, we've got a problem here. Your daughter doesn't see it, but other members of the crew do, and can

we talk about it and how we can handle this?” She said, “I really need your help with this because I have tried, as a parent, and can’t seem to make any difference here. So could you please have this discussion with her?” Well, that was awkward for me, having to have a discussion...

PAULA: Mm-hmm.

PETER: ... about modesty with somebody else’s child. And I said, “Well, fortunately I raised a daughter, so I’ve had this discussion before. Let’s talk about your values and where you’re coming from so that when I have this discussion with your daughter, I’m not going out of line with what your family values are.” So, within the bounds of youth protection, no one-on-one discussion here, I was able to have that discussion with this young lady, and we were able to resolve the issue, and there were no problems beyond that.

I had another situation once where we had a young man in the troop whose father lost his job, and it was not known to the rest of the parents or the rest of the people in the troop. And yet, this boy quit coming because he felt like he couldn’t afford to go to summer camp, and he couldn’t afford to do some of the activities, so we had to pursue that. It’s an interesting discussion to have when somebody has lost a job or you have financial challenges, but one that we had to have in order for this boy to feel comfortable with the troop and be able to come back and participate fully. I set aside some time. I went out to lunch with the father, and I said, “You know, I noticed that your son has quit participating. Is there a reason? Is there anything we can do to help him?” And it came out what had happened in the family. Quite frankly, there are lots of opportunities to help in financial situations. There are camperships offered by councils. I think most troops out there are willing to step up to the plate, but it’s

clearly a sensitive situation, so we kept that between the father and I, and we took care of it, so we got the boy engaged again.

LEE: Peter, seems like you've had quite a few situations where common sense prevailed, and I'm just glad that you were able to handle those situations. Now, for other individuals, are there resources available to help leaders to deal with awkward situations?

PETER: The first resource you mentioned already, and that's common sense. In most cases, as leaders we recognize the need to have a discussion, what needs to be said and what needs to be done, and we just need to trust those feelings that we have and go forward and have those discussions. The *Guide to Safe Scouting's* a great resource. Many times in the *Guide to Safe Scouting* issues are addressed. It's a great resource book - we always go to it for activities - but it also addresses things as far as meeting the needs of all our youth.

Another great resource is your roundtable. That's an opportunity to network with other leaders. You'll find that other leaders have had the same challenges you've had, and you might be able to glean from them some practices that they'd put into place and some things they've said or been able to do to make these situations easier on them.

And I think a really big resource that we have that we all forget about - the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. There are key values in there that would guide these discussions. One being, trustworthy. Do we have a relationship with our parents and with our Scouts that they would trust us to have these discussions and they trust that whatever they say with us will be held in confidence and it'll be handled appropriately? Being helpful and courteous and kind - all of those things play a part as we remember those points of the Scout Law, as we have these awkward discussions

and make them less awkward. If we act in kindness and with courtesy, I think those discussions are better received. Being reverent - when we have discussions about values, respecting and being reverent of others' beliefs and opinions goes a long ways in making these discussions easier.

PAULA: It sounds like you've pretty much hit all the points on this topic, but is there anything else about getting permission to handle awkward situations that we haven't talked about that you think ought to be shared with our listeners?

PETER: I think we've said it a couple of times, but I think initiating these discussions, the thing to remember is to ask permission to do that. Let me give you an example. I learned a lot of years ago that I can pretty much get any discussion going if I ask permission. If I were to come up to Lee and say, "Hey, Lee, how old are you?" He's probably going to tell me, but he's going to tell me with a little bit of trepidation. But if I just rephrase it and say, "Lee, do you mind if I ask how old you are?" That information comes out a lot easier. And so as we address these awkward moments, for example, if I approach a parent and say, "Do you mind if we talk about your child's inability to participate in this activity?" or "Do you mind if we talk about the health form that you turned in? Can we have a discussion about that?" They're much more open to talking about whatever their challenges happen to be. So I think just asking permission and being respectful of where they're at goes a long way.

PAULA: Hey, Peter, I'll save you an awkward moment. Don't ask me how old I am.
(Laughs)

LEE: I'm sure there's a way you can phrase that.

PAULA: (Laughs) I don't think there is.

PETER: Do you mind if I ask, did you watch *Gilligan's Island* in original form?

PAULA: Reruns all the way!

(Everyone laughs)

LEE: Well, this is exactly why we do ScoutCast - to have discussions just like this and hopefully to be able to assist our listeners who may be experiencing similar situations. Peter, I want to thank you for joining us and helping us out with getting permission to handle awkward situations.

PETER: You bet, thank you.

PAULA: We'll be right back with Reminders and Tips after this brief message from CubCast.

(CubCast – The Science of Character Building)

PAULA: I bet ScoutCast listeners would benefit from listening to that podcast as well. Alright, it's now time for Reminders and Tips. Lee, will you get us started?

LEE: Check out the January and February issue of *Scouting* magazine which has an interesting article about Scouts from the Cradle of Liberty Council that gather at a park in the inner city of Philadelphia for a weekend of first aid instruction, knot tying, tent pitching, fire building, cooking, and a whole lot more.

PAULA: This month's *Boys' Life* magazine has a fascinating article about American ghost towns including how they became one. There's also a great story about Scouts from Breckenridge, Colorado, who took a nine-mile trek through the Colorado back country in the snow on cross-country skis.

LEE: Family Friends of Scouting is an annual council-wide presentation conducted in every pack, troop, crew, team, ship, or post between the months of November and March. The Family FOS campaign asks parents, families, and alumni to consider financially supporting the Scouting program.

PAULA: This effort offsets the cost of providing Scouting to your child, so if you haven't already done so, contact your district FOS chair for more details. Your support and participation in the Family FOS program in your unit is critical for its success.

LEE: And, believe it or not, your opinion is also critical for the success of Scouting. In order to provide the best youth program, the testing and evaluation team surveys Scouting members to learn their opinions on a variety of topics related to Scouting programs.

PAULA: Youth members who are 14 years or older, volunteers, Cub Scout parents, and Boy Scout parents are invited to join our Research Panel, and don't worry about getting bombarded with our surveys. There will be no more than three surveys per year. If you'd like your voice to be heard just go to www.scouting.org/about/research/researchpanel

BEGIN MUSIC UNDER

PAULA: So that's it for the January ScoutCast. Thanks again to our guest, Peter Self, for joining us.

LEE: And thank you for listening. Be sure to come back next month as we trek along the merit badge trail and discuss how to motivate Scouts to do the same.

PAULA: Now if there are other topics you'd like to hear about, be sure to let us know. Just send us an e-mail to scoutcast@scouting.org or tweet @bsascoutcast. With that I'm Paula Murphy ---

LEE: And I'm Lee Shaw. We wish you all the best in the New Year.

Music full to finish