

FEBRUARY – HOW TO MOTIVATE A SCOUT ALONG THE MERIT BADGE TRAIL

Music Full then under

PAULA: Hello, everyone, and welcome to our ScoutCast for February. Back in November, we talked about some of the new merit badges coming out in 2015.

LEE: But whether it's one of the new merit badges or an old favorite, how does one get the scouts excited about earning merit badges?

PAULA: So listeners, get ready for a discussion on How to Motivate a Scout along the Merit Badge Trail.

Music Fades

PAULA: Our guest for this month actually wrote one of his Wood Badge tickets on motivating his Scouts to earn merit badges. Zach Chopp-Adams is Assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 383 in Heartland, Michigan. Zach's been involved as a Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster since he was 18 years old and currently serves as advisor for the New Section C 2 in the Michigan Crossroads Council. You may remember him from a previous ScoutCast on how to handle problem parents. Welcome back to ScoutCast, Zach.

ZACH: Thank you.

PAULA: So, Zach, how do you explain the benefits of a merit badge to a boy? You know, adults get it, but how do you communicate it so the boy gets it?

ZACH: Well, it gives you an opportunity to talk to the boy and tell them that it can teach them something that they have a really good interest in, or it can, introduce them to new hobbies. Certain merit badges can teach them life essentials, for example, with citizenship in the nation, it can teach them the basics of government operations and even less, daily applicable stuff, such as the difference between reptiles and amphibians. Merit Badges like cooking where they can do a little more for themselves and others.

LEE: Can older Scouts get involved and assist a leader with motivating younger Scouts?

ZACH: Absolutely. A nice thing and a very simple thing that older Scouts can do is wear their merit badge sashes to troop meetings, and have an open roundtable discussion. Have them talk about their favorite merit badges, why it's their favorite, and what their interests are, and in some cases they can actually help out if a unit does decide to do a merit badge class and a particular older Scout is very, very interested in one topic, they can typically offer another point of view or another position of expertise that maybe the counselor can't or just doesn't have the experience to.

PAULA: Yeah, it's pretty amazing what older Scouts can do in this way. But what if an older Scout isn't advancing? How do you get him motivated to advance?

ZACH: The first thing that needs to be done is, find out why he's not advancing, and in a lot of cases, it's they don't know how to. It can be something of they don't know how to contact a counselor or they just don't have an interest, and either way, you can offer the help to them. Most, if not all, districts and councils have a list of merit badge counselors in your area or within your troop that can help the Scout with their merit badge. In some cases it's the Scout is nervous meeting a new person, and that's where having a familiar face is going to help out a lot. If it's just due to lack of interest, explain to them why a particular merit badge is important, whether it offers life skills, or offers a new hobby or a unique interest that they may not have an interest of now but may grow on them once they do take the Merit Badge Class or complete the merit badge.

LEE: As you explained that, it made me think of ways in which others could possibly help. Do you know or have examples of where parents can get involved and help their child or get them excited and motivated to earn their merit badges?

ZACH: One great resource is having a parents' night to discuss what the parents' hobbies and skills are and have them sign-up if they would like to as a merit badge counselor. Even in a small unit there is typically a large diversity of skills and hobbies amongst the parents that they are more than willing to share. Get them signed up as a counselor, and then they can discuss that with the Scouts themselves. With more of a one-on-one

between the parent and the Scout they have a more in-tune opportunity to discuss why a particular merit badge is important or why it is helpful for even other merit badges.

There have been cases where in larger Scouting family units, it actually becomes a challenge, kind of a competition between boys' parents where, "Hey, your brother's got this many: do you want to try to go for this one?" And that opens the door up for a discussion between the parent and youth of, well, what do you think about this, are you interested in this, not only creates a closer bond between the parent and the youth, but it also creates an open conversation about the Scouting program and opens up an interest in certain merit badges that originally the Scout may not be interested in at all.

PAULA: One of my nephews is a Boy Scout and I have witnessed my brother and his wife, his parents, using pop culture to kind of promote merit badge acquisition. For instance, my nephew is really interested in the *Hunger Games* and so they really encouraged him to pursue the archery merit badge because of that movie, and I bet you that is the case in a lot of families across the country.

ZACH: Oh, yes.

PAULA: Say you have a Scout who's earning a lot of the outdoor badges like camping or kayaking, how do you get him motivated or interested in branching out to the more cerebral merit badges, like chess or law?

ZACH: In cases like that, a lot of the material for some of those cerebral badges are already covered in school, especially in history and government classes, science classes. So you can explain that they've already kind of made that headway into the merit badge, so they know what they're learning; it's just taking a couple of extra steps to make them realize, oh, I've already done this. It's not going to take that much more to complete this merit badge.

PAULA: Yeah, that's a really great point like citizenship in the nation. They would have learned a lot of that stuff in civics class government class, stuff like that.

ZACH: Right.

LEE: Zach, are there resources available for leaders or boys to get motivated to earning a merit badge other than what you already discussed?

ZACH: There's a couple things. One of them is set the boys down, set the leaders down, and explain there's more than 130 merit badges. There's something for everyone. They can offer a unit merit badge course where they work on it over a period of weeks. In some cases bringing a specialist, ask your local police department to do fingerprinting merit badge. If you know an engineer, have them come in and do architecture or drafting. Bring someone in that's not the standard, oh, Mr. So-and-So's going to talk for another hour.

PAULA: So, Zach, is there anything else about motivating a Scout along the merit badge trail that we haven't talked about that should be shared with our listeners?

ZACH: Just like the rest of the Scouting program, this is another area that needs to be made interesting for them where they're going to have fun, but the biggest thing that really needs to be shared with the boys is they don't have to go just to summer camp for merit badges, that these can be done all year around.

PAULA: That's a really good point.

LEE: That's a great point. Zach, I do have a question for you. Are there opportunities for older scouts to possibly come back, maybe those who have earned their Eagle and have realized that all of a sudden I'm applying for college and what I've learned in Scouting I can really apply on some of the things that they're asking me about as it relates to the things that I've been active in? Do you have or have you heard of individuals being able to do that and come back and speak to the younger Scouts?

ZACH: I've heard of quite a few boys who have earned their Eagle who are in college who have kind of had a revelation moment especially with Communications and Citizenship in the Community merit badges where they're in college and realize that what they've learned is a huge help and a huge benefit, and in a lot of cases, they come back and share their experience with the boys in the troop who may not see some of the Eagle required merit badges as fun, but if someone comes in and explains why this is helpful with an actual real life experience, it's a great motivator.

PAULA: Yeah, practical application's always useful. Well, Zach, I'm sure this discussion is going to be really beneficial to our listeners who need help with motivating a Scout along the merit badge trail. So thank you so much for coming on the show.

ZACH: Thank you.

LEE: Stay tuned! After we check in next door with CubCast, we'll be right back with Reminders and Tips.

(Cubcast – Gathering the Kids)

LEE: It's time now for Reminders and Tips. Paula, take it away.

PAULA: Let's start with succession plans. Having a succession plan means being prepared to replace volunteers in key roles, and now is a good time to put one in place. The Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster may have committed to their responsibilities, but he or she may or may not be able to keep that commitment.

LEE: Since our motto is Be Prepared, a successor needs to be identified for the role should something unexpected happen. With a succession plan in place, your troop won't be scrambling around trying to fill a vacated role,

and your troop or crew can maintain its tradition of 100% trained leaders. Ask your committee for help.

PAULA: The Paul R. Christen National High Adventure Base is now open for business. Be sure to check out this month's *Boy's Life* as we follow an Order of the Arrow lodge as they experience a lot of what The Summit has to offer.

LEE: And *Scouting* magazine has an interesting look of what it takes to make a truly Scout-led troop. I know you'll want to check that one out.

PAULA: So, do you ever find yourself in a group with other Scouters discussing how Scouting can be an even better program? Don't keep those thoughts to yourself. Sign up to join our research panel. We'll send you three surveys a year, and you can feel free to let us know what's on your mind. Just go to www.scouting.org/about/research/researchpanel

LEE: And all the comments will be read and taken seriously, Scout's honor.

BEGIN MUSIC UNDER

LEE: The music cue means the February ScoutCast has now come to an end. Special thanks to our guest Zach Chopp-Adams.

PAULA: And thank you for joining us. Don't forget to come back next month for what I'm sure will be a pretty cool discussion on incorporation STEM into your troop activities. Until then, I'm Paula Murphy.

LEE: And I'm Lee Shaw. Don't forget to send us your thoughts and ideas for future ScoutCasts. It's easy; just send us an e-mail to scoutcast@scouting.org or tweet @bsascout. We look forward to hearing from you.

MUSIC FULL TO FINISH