

FEBRUARY – THE SCOUTMASTER’S MINUTE

Music Full then under

LEE: Welcome to our ScoutCast for February. I’m Lee Shaw, team lead of National Alliances.

BRYAN: And I’m *Scouting* magazine blogger, Bryan Wendell. Now, I’m going to make this quick because the clock is ticking. That’s right, our topic this month is the Scoutmaster’s Minute. We’re going to discuss why we have it, the key elements that make a good one –

LEE: And how to make an impression on your Scouts.

Music Fades

LEE: And joining us for this discussion is John Duncan. John has served in a variety of unit, district, and council positions since 2001 in the Northeast Illinois Council. He presently serves as the council commissioner. In addition, John serves as the national chairman of the Boy Scout Experience Task Force. Welcome to ScoutCast, John.

JOHN: Thank you, Lee. Pleasure to be here.

LEE: I can hardly do anything in one minute, but I know with your expertise I want to learn from you today. So, let’s review for listeners the definition of the Scoutmaster’s Minute.

JOHN: Scoutmaster’s Minute is a brief period, usually at the end of a meeting or at the end of an activity in which you bring the whole group back together and one person will usually lead a reflection or deliver a brief inspirational message. So, a committee chairman might give a minute to a unit

committee, or a district executive might deliver such a message to a district commissioner meeting. Outside the context of a troop meeting we often use other names like Mission Moment or Professional's Minute, but make no mistake, by whatever name, it's a Scoutmaster's Minute and it brings us back together to refocus us and give us something to think about.

BRYAN: Yeah, John, my dad was the Scoutmaster. I remember him giving that minute at the end, and I always was inspired and I'm not just saying that because it's my dad. It was just a moment where you really got to reflect, but I'm interested to hear what you think about the purpose of the Scoutmaster's Minute, why we really have it. I mean, most people just assume that it's part of Scouting, but is there a real purpose to it?

JOHN: There is purpose, and probably there's two different questions that you just asked there. One is the origin, where did it come from. How did it become part of our vernacular in the first place? Scoutmaster's Minute, called by that name, as near as I can tell, is at least 91 years old.

BRYAN: Wow.

JOHN: The earliest reference that I can find to something called a Scoutmaster's Minute comes from the January 1925 issue of *Scouting* magazine.

BRYAN: Nice plug there.

JOHN: That was a suggestion submitted to *Scouting* magazine from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Council. He writes, "I like the so-called Scoutmaster's Minute during which the Scoutmaster says a word or tells a story, in his own way gives the boys a bit of inspiration in the way of a reminder of the Oath and Law." So there's some history on where it comes from.

The purpose is we want to refocus the whole group and make people think. Specifically, we want to make them think on the values of Scouting, on our Oath and Law and Slogan and Motto, and we want them to think on what is Scouting and why is what we do in Scouting so important. What's the difference between "a Scout is kind" and "a Scout is courteous," and why are both of those important and why can neither one of them stand alone without the other? Or it may be something much more subtle, a Scoutmaster's Minute that outlines the far-reaching effect of a single good deed, perhaps without even ever mentioning the Scout Slogan but instead leaving that as something for each Scout to realize and reflect on in their own way.

LEE: So, troops are youth-led. How does a Scoutmaster's Minute mesh with that?

JOHN: That's a deep question. Youth leadership is meant to come with a certain amount of coaching and mentoring from a Scoutmaster, built on wisdom that only comes from having lived a little bit of life, from some experience; to recognize something in the current circumstances, what went on at tonight's troop meeting or in our week at camp, and somehow magically know just the right thing to say at just the right time to refocus that group in a way that enables them to find their own way forward without necessarily having to spell it all out for them or jump in and do it for them. That really is based on some experience.

This actually leads to another question that is really important. Is the Scoutmaster the only one who can deliver a Scoutmaster's Minute? The answer is no. The power of a Scoutmaster's Minute is in having just the right person deliver it, the person who can bring together the key elements of a truly great Scoutmaster's Minute. While we certainly wish that every Scoutmaster would develop the skill of delivering a great Scoutmaster's Minute, there's no reason in the world that he might not, on some occasion,

delegate that responsibility to someone else in order to make it more effective, more powerful.

LEE: That's good.

JOHN: Just be sure you warn that person so that they know what's coming. Don't surprise them. Our Scoutmaster's Minute will be delivered tonight by Bryan Wendell. Ready?

BRYAN: Yeah. Oh, wait a second. Yeah, exactly, and you might even have some Scoutmasters who aren't comfortable with public speaking and they might want to pass the baton more often. Now, John, I want to go back to something you said - that magic of the Scoutmaster's Minute. I like that. So, is there a method to the magic? Are there some key elements that every Scoutmaster's Minute has or is it just you either have it or you don't?

JOHN: No, there are some key elements. First and foremost is the environment; to come to a point where everything else stops. So often in troop meetings today, there are 95 things going at once. There are fees being paid at the back and forms being filled out over there, and the Scoutmaster conference going on over here and a Board of Review going on in the back room and you need to have some time where everything stops and the whole group comes back together again. At its core, the Scoutmaster's Minute is about tying a message to the mission - a story, a parable, an anecdote that in some causes the listeners to think about Scouting, think about what we're doing in a new way. So beyond the message there's a few things that are most important to taking any good Scoutmaster's Minute and making it truly excellent, four that I'm going to call out.

BRYAN: Okay.

JOHN: The first one is relevance. Is this topic important to the people who are listening? The second one is sincerity. Do you truly believe what you're saying or is this some trite cliché that you read out of the book and you're reading it back? The third one is credibility. Do you exemplify what you are saying? If you aren't visibly doing your best on your honor, then you come across as a hypocrite and that is the worst possible thing that could happen with a Scoutmaster's Minute. And the fourth one is passion. How important is this topic to you as the speaker? And those four things create a unique ability for you to connect with your listeners.

BRYAN: That's great.

LEE: That is great. You said this is at the end of the meeting. Is that required or can you mix it up a little bit?

JOHN: You can mix it up. The key here is to consider the purpose. When people are in a set routine, there is a tendency to do what they've always done, think what they've always thought, and the opportunity for impact is less than it might otherwise be. By mixing it up sometimes, you may find benefit in disrupting that routine, catching people just a little bit off-guard and when their mind is more open to thinking about something in a new way. If you're on a ten-mile hike and the boys are chattering away about school and video games and so forth and perhaps missing the beauty of the world around them as they're hiking along, then maybe the next two-minute break on your hike might be a great time for a Scoutmaster's Minute on why the outdoors is such an important part of our program and give them something to think about.

If you've got Scouts that were involved in a heated argument during the course of a troop meeting, then fairly immediately as opposed to at the end of the troop meeting might be a great time for a Scoutmaster's Minute on

the importance of reconciliation and the difference between being loyal as Scouts and always agreeing on every issue. So, most anytime with a period of reflection might be a good time to break in with a Scoutmaster's Minute. You don't have to wait for where it shows up on a troop meeting agenda.

BRYAN: That's a great point. It's really all in the timing. Now, earlier you talked about those four key elements. You said it needs to be relevant, sincere, credible and passionate. So do you have a personal favorite Scoutmaster's Minute, John, that really ticked all four of those points, whether it was one you gave or one that you heard?

JOHN: Oh, I absolutely have a personal favorite. It stands out above all the others for me. For the moment imagine that we're gathered around the glowing embers of a dying campfire at the end of the day, and the Scoutmaster's Minute goes like this:

You'll hear adults talk a lot about getting ready for your future. We talk about lofty, sometimes trite-sounding things like our mission, to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law. We get so focused on the great things that you will someday be capable of as adults, that we miss what you might be able to do right now. And so I want to tell you, young men, one of my favorite stories, a true story from Scouting's past.

In the 1940s, there was a young boy who was about 16 years old, and he got a job on staff at a Boy Scout camp. And like so many camp staffers, this young man absolutely fell in love with that Scout camp, so much so that he wrote down a poem about his Scout camp. He showed this poem to some of his other camp staffers and one of them said, "Wow, this is really great, but what it really needs is a tune to go with it." And so he set about setting this

poem to music, and when he had done so he shared it with his friends again.

As way leads to way, the young man went on and lived his life. He went to college, got married, got a job and he had two children. It was a great many years later that he got an invitation in the mail to join an alumni organization of former camp staffers and when he got there, he was surprised to learn that they had a tradition there of singing a song at every closing campfire. And of course he recognized it. It was the song that he had written so many years before. And what was surprising was that the author listed for that song was Unknown.

Facts were verified and the mystery of the unknown author very quickly solved at that point,; a man by the name of John Westfall. And when he passed away in May of 2009, Scouting lost a great friend. In all likelihood you've never heard of him before, and you won't long remember his name after we're done here, but the point today really isn't for you to learn his name or about his life. The point is that it was a young boy, not an old man, who created a legacy for Scouting that, to this day, some seven decades later, still tugs at the heartstrings of everyone who longs to return to that place so beautiful that some simply call it God's Country.

And so I encourage you to pause and reflect. Never lose sight of the future, but take a moment now and think on the present, what you are capable of today. How will your time as a Scout be remembered by the generations of Scouts that follow you? People may never know your name or exactly what you did, but in some way how might they benefit from something that you do? What will be your legacy? And as I give you some time to ponder, I offer you this simple yet beautiful piece of music written by a boy to his Scout camp.

*Silver on the sage, starlit skies above;
Aspen covered hills, country that I love.
Philmont here's to thee, Scouting paradise
Out in God's country, tonight.*

BRYAN: That's awesome. Lee, I've got chills.

LEE: I've (got to) tell you, I'm standing here picturing myself around a campfire, smelling smoke, looking at the flames. You are quite a storyteller, John.

BRYAN: He set a high bar, didn't he? (Laughs)

LEE: Yeah, you absolutely did. I don't know how we're going to go on, (laughs) but I'm sure we'll figure something out. What was your inspiration for that, John?

JOHN: The inspiration for that particular Scoutmaster's Minute and is the single best source that I know of and it's real life. The true stories from your own experiences, the things that have made a difference to you. There's a lot of published resources out there and troop program resources. As a starting point, there are pages and pages of prepared Scoutmaster's Minutes that will give you good topics to think about. In addition, there are three separate books that are available through [ScoutStuff](#) that are filled with nothing but Scoutmaster's Minutes and these are great resources for anyone who's struggling with a topic - how do I get started, I'm not a storyteller, I don't know what to talk about - and it's a great place to get started, at least with finding some topics to speak about. But if you draw on real life, if you draw on the things that have made a difference to you in some way, those are the stories that you can uniquely tell like no one else can tell. You can bring together those key elements – that relevance, that sincerity, that credibility

and, most of all, that passion – that allows you to connect with whoever it is that's listening, be they Scouts or Venturers or other leaders, in a way that only you can connect with them.

BRYAN: Now, that one really ticked all the boxes for sure. Now, I couldn't help but notice that your Scoutmaster's Minute which, like I said, gave me goose bumps, was a little bit longer than a minute, so is that just a misnomer?

JOHN: Like so many things in Scouting, the essence of this is the purpose - not the time - and focus on the purpose. In planning for a troop meeting, make sure you plan on a suitable amount of time. For me, a Scoutmaster's Minute is five minutes, but as long as you know what that is and you can plan around it, all is well.

BRYAN: When someone says, "Hey, I'll be back in a minute," they don't literally mean a minute anyway.

LEE: Yeah, John, is there anything else about the Scoutmaster's Minute that we haven't talked about that you think our listeners need to know?

JOHN: A great Scoutmaster's Minute is great, in large part, because that Scoutmaster, that leader, makes it their own. What is effective for you may not be as effective for me. In that sense, there is no one single definition of the best way to give a Scoutmaster's Minute, so whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever the context is for you to deliver a Scoutmaster's Minute, step forward with the self-confidence to try out new things, develop your own technique, do it in your own way.

LEE: Well, John, that's great. And I've got to tell you, finding a message that is relevant, sincere, credible and passionate, that can be difficult, especially if you have to accomplish it in 60 seconds or even five minutes. So, John, we

want to say thanks for coming on ScoutCast and helping us with this. You made the most out of your Scoutmaster's Minute.

JOHN: Thank you so much.

BRYAN: Stay tuned. We're going to check in next door with CubCast, then we'll be back in a minute with Reminders and Tips.

(CubCast – Shooting Sports)

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

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 percent trained leaders. Ask your committee for help.

BRYAN: Okay, you've heard of Journey to Excellence, right, JTE? It's the BSA's tool for making your troop or crew the best it can be. Now, for a guide to getting started with JTE scoring, including some thoughts on what's in it for you, turn to the January-February 2016 issue of *Scouting* magazine. You should have it already. There's also a great discussion on JTE in the November 2013 CubCast, so look for that. Using both of these resources will make you all gold, all the time.

LEE: All right! And in *Boys' Life* magazine, a Venturing crew goes scuba diving where few would dare to go – in Minnesota, under the icy waters of a frozen lake.

BRYAN: Don't miss the winter issue of *Eagles' Call* magazine either because it has a spotlight on Eagle Scout Creek Stewart, the survival expert who recently hosted the Weather Channel show *Fat Guys in the Woods*. I love that show.

BEGIN MUSIC UNDER

BRYAN: The music cue means the February ScoutCast has now come to an end. Thanks to our guest, John Duncan.

LEE: And thank you for joining us. Don't forget to come back next month for an extension of this discussion with The Guided Discovery Process. Until then, I'm Lee Shaw.

BRYAN: And I'm Bryan Wendell. Don't forget to send us your thoughts and ideas for future ScoutCast episodes. It's pretty easy. Just email scoutcast@scouting.org or tweet [@bsascoutcast](https://twitter.com/bsascoutcast). We look forward to hearing from you.

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