

FEBRUARY – BOY SCOUT RETENTION

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BRYAN: Hey, welcome to ScoutCast for February. I am *Scouting* magazine blogger Bryan Wendell with Lee Shaw, Team Lead of National Alliance.

LEE: This month is all about Boy Scout retention because Webelos are beginning their crossover into your troop, and it's one thing to get boys into your troop –

BRYAN: But you've got to keep 'em coming back. We don't want them to miss out on what Boy Scouting has to offer, right?

Music Fades

BRYAN: So here to join us in this discussion is Charles Goodwin, or "Doc" as his Scouts call him. So, Lee, I think we should we call him "Doc" as well. He's been scoutmaster of Troop 236 in Kettering, Ohio, for more than 30 years and the troop consistently has – get this – more than 100 Scouts. So what's his secret? Today we're going to talk about retention because recruiting without retention is just spinning our wheels. So, welcome to ScoutCast, Doc. Thanks for joining us.

DOC: Thank you so much. My pleasure.

BRYAN: Okay, so why is Boy Scout retention so important?

DOC: We have an opportunity to mold lives. Boy Scouts is the only large-scale organization that I know of specifically is teaching character-building skills or leadership. These guys are going to be our leaders in the future and we've got a chance to help mold them so that they could do the best possible job with it.

LEE: Well, we're going to rely on your expertise, Doc. Where does retention really occur, is it at camp or is that the council office ...?

DOC It's at the unit. The unit is going to direct things to be sure that we do activities that the boys want. The unit has to work with the boys to get to know them, to make them feel important, provide opportunities that they select themselves, to train them as leaders and let them lead! We just did a Lost Patrol Campout this past weekend where we took them out about five miles from a camp that they didn't know and gave them a set of compass bearings and so forth and had them find their way.

BRYAN: That sounds like a troop I'd want to be in - that's awesome! So, Doc, what role do Patrol Leaders have? We talk about boy-led but some people - when they think about retention they think of that being an adult issue or a parent issue, encouraging their Scouts to stay in, but do Patrol Leaders have a role here?

DOC: A good Patrol Leader can make a real difference. Den Chiefs are the best recruitment tool that there is to get boys to come to Scouts in general. But, we let our Patrol Leaders really run their patrols under the supervision of the Senior Patrol Leader. We don't have adults who do anything in the

forefront. We have people who are doing some things in the background. We're helping with training, but they do pretty much everything else.

We do a five-day Leadership and Scouts Skills Camp and we require every Patrol Leader and Senior Patrol Leader to go through that. And then they come back multiple years and serve on the staff for it. And so, we have boys who are well-trained. Our Patrol Leaders have got to be at least 13 and at least First Class. The APLs have got to be at least 12 and at least First Class. Our Senior Patrol Leaders and Assistant Senior Patrol Leaders are all 16, 17-year-olds and they're Life or Eagle.

LEE: That's amazing, and when you look at the kind of training that the Scouts themselves have, it's no wonder why you've been successful with having such a large troop for a long period of time. One of the things I know also can be equally important in a lot of ways is the adults that you have with the troop, and you've mentioned they're in the background and they allow the boys to lead the troop, but what's most important when you take a look at adult training? Is it the Boy Scout Leader Training or is it Wood Badge, what would you say in that case, Doc?

DOC: We would like for all of our adult leaders to go through Wood Badge. But I think the bottom line is much more important than the leaders being trained, and that's certainly important, it's having the boys trained. They need to be trained and learning to lead. We do what we call leading by initiative. That means if they see a problem and they know how to fix it they're authorized to do it. And that's our expectation is that they will just jump in and do it.

When we get a new Senior Patrol Leader, there are three comments. One is anytime a young person is put in charge of something you feel like you

have to do everything. If they do that, they're going to lose their help, so they're going to need to delegate some things, however, they may not delegate the responsibility. Number two is that I'm not going to tell them what to do. They know what to do and my expectation is they do it. I haven't made an agenda for a troop meeting or a PLC meeting in years. The Senior Patrol Leaders do all that. And then the third thing I tell them is that they don't need to come and ask me is it okay if they do whatever. The answer is they have permission upfront. And if I see them about to do something stupid, which I'm sure I won't, I'll get them aside and we'll talk about it. Our Council Executive's little son is in the troop and after about three months he came up to me and he says, "You don't do anything, do you?"

BRYAN: Talk about pressure- having the son of the Scout Executive in your troop. But anyway, Doc, what are some of the things a unit can do to drive retention? Give us a handful of those tips for us.

DOC: Number one is the making Scout real important. I really try to get to know each Scout. I know every boy's birthday and at every meeting the Senior Patrol Leader recognizes each Scout's birthday and at each meeting I go around and try to speak individually with each boy. Making each Scout feel important is essential.

Now, we do what's called a Big Brother program. We take each new Scout and assign a Big Brother to him, and that Scout has to be at least First Class and their job is to get to know the boys that they have, and I expect them to know at least as much about them as I do. That Scout's job is to be their friend, their mentor, and help guide them up to First Class. And when we do a Court of Honor we call on, Tommy Jones and his parents and his Big Brother to come up.

The next thing is leadership trainings. We try to put several boys through the National Youth Leadership Training Camp each year; train the Scouts and let them lead, let them run the show. The Patrol Leaders, Assistant Senior Patrol Leaders are allowed to lead also under the direction of the Senior Patrol Leader. We don't have an adult assigned to any patrol. We have an older boy assigned as an advisor to each patrol.

We lose some like everybody else, some boys just don't like bugs and they don't like camping and they may get so busy with other things, but program is it. Boys don't join Scouts to say, "I want to be a leader." They join to have a good time and so, we're doing things but with fun it's what's going to keep them in it.

LEE: You could not have a more appropriate name than Doc because it sounds to me as if you have your PhD in retention when it comes to Scouting. I really love the fact that you allow the Scouts to be mentors and you assimilate them into patrols that they can really grow and so I just want to give you kudos for that. You've been an awesome resource for our audience and want to ask you if you know of any other resources that are available to help with retention, whether that's the Handbook or *Boys' Life* or...

DOC: The Handbook or *Boys' Life* or Fieldbook, books on Scout skills, - the adults need to get back and study and learn these things that we can pass them onto the boys.

BRYAN: Now, Doc, I have to mention about *Boys' Life*. We hear that, and I'm not just saying this because I'm on the *Boys' Life* team, but Scouts who get *Boys' Life* are going to stay in longer and advance farther.

DOC: You're right - it's good information in there.

LEE: Doc, I thank you for agreeing with Bryan because without that he was going to keep going.

BRYAN: Yeah. So, Doc, here's a hypothetical here. If a Scout were to come up to you and say, "Hey, Doc, Scouting just isn't really working for me right now. I'm thinking of dropping out," What would you, Doc, what would you tell them? And give us a little bit of insight into if you've ever had that kind of conversation.

DOC: Oh, indeed I've had that conversation. It's important to find out what do they not like. I had one about a year ago, a really nice kid. He was struggling with schoolwork and he decided that he needed to put his focus on schoolwork. I never put Scouts above schoolwork. But, we need to see are there things that we can fix. Are they things that they don't like that we can fix, and if so we try to do that.

BRYAN: And it goes back to what you were saying earlier about knowing each Scout and making the program fun, if you're doing those two things, hopefully you're having that conversation a lot less frequently. So, lastly, is there anything else about retention that you wanted to share that we didn't get a chance to ask you about?

DOC: One other thing: It needs to be an older boy program. We do a rotation of Philmont, Sea Base, Northern Tier and Jamborees both national and world. And we've done Appalachian Trail trips. We try to do something

that keeps the interest of the older boys. Every campout other than these is for every single Scout, but then, we need that little bit extra for the older boys.

BRYAN: That makes sense and that's when they're more at risk of other extracurricular activities coming in the way, they get their driver's license, they learn about girls, that kind of thing...

DOC: As I say, the fumes, gas fumes and perfume get them.

BRYAN: Exactly. Okay. Well, we know all about the importance of recruiting. We hear about that a lot but I really appreciate that we were able to devote an episode to retention because we have to keep them engaged if we want the troop to grow. So, Doc, this has been really great. We want to thank you for coming on ScoutCast for this excellent discussion.

DOC: Okay, my pleasure.

LEE: Stay tuned for our new segment, Safety Moment, then we'll be right back with Reminders and Tips.

(Safety Moment - [Weather](#))

LEE: 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 a good 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.

BRYAN: And since our motto is Be Prepared, you might have heard of that, 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. Tune into the January 2017 ScoutCast for more details.

LEE: Have you've found yourself asking, "What is hands-off leadership?" Well, it's what being an adult leader in Boy Scouting is all about. You step back and allow the Scouts to make mistakes and discoveries – all while keeping them safe.

BRYAN: Absolutely, and you can learn more about this fundamental part of Boy Scouting in the January-February 2017 issue of *Scouting* magazine. You might remember the March ScoutCast on *The Guided Discovery Process*, right? Well, that episode and this article puts the master in Scoutmaster.

LEE: And *Boys' Life* magazine takes a close look at what the Northern Tier Winter Program has to offer.

BRYAN: Have you signed up to go to Jamboree yet? Well, what are you waiting for? When you finish here, go to – and get ready to write this down –

summitbsa.org/events/jamboree/overview for all the details about the Jamboree.

BEGIN MUSIC UNDER

BRYAN: Oh – what a coincidence – the February ScoutCast has now come to an end. Special thanks to our guest, Charlie Goodwin.

LEE: And thank you for joining us. Don't forget to come back next month for a fascinating discussion on generational diversity. 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 easy. You just send us an email to scoutcast@scouting.org or tweet @bsascoutcast. We look forward to hearing from you.

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