

BOY SCOUT ADVANCEMENT
THE DASH TO FIRST CLASS
AND THE
LONG HAUL TO EAGLE

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MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of this paper is to discover why boys advance through the lower ranks of scouting with great enthusiasm, but then either do not achieve the rank of Eagle or drop out of scouting altogether.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to "One Hundred Scout", only four out of 100 boys who join Scouting will achieve the rank of Eagle. When you consider how many thousands of boys across the United States join the Boy Scout movement, it vividly demonstrates the problem of retention in Scouting. Somewhere between the 1st Class scout and the ascension to the rank of Eagle we lose boys.

INTRODUCTION

Advancement is the process by which boys progress from rank to rank in the Boy Scout program. To do this, a boy fulfills specific requirements involving active participation, skill achievement, service to others, and leadership experience. These methods are used to achieve the aims of Scouting: to strengthen character, body, mind, and the concept of being a participating citizen. This paper will examine advancement through the ranks of Boy Scouting, as well as, reasons boys drop out of Scouting.

DISCUSSION

Scouting is an adventure! We hear it everywhere. It implies the outdoors, camping, hiking and lots of fun. That's what scouting is all about. Fun. Even the things we learn in scouting, we learn because it's made fun. When a boy first joins scouts he has a new world of people to meet, activities to do, and skills to master. Everything is exciting and he wants to learn it all yesterday. His enthusiasm only mounts as he is congratulated and rewarded for mastering a new skill. Therefore, it's easy to keep a boy coming back - at first.

If a boy joins Cub Scouts he is taught certain skills and does the majority of his activities and advancement with his den. This is done on a schedule and at a pace set by his Den Leader. But once he becomes a Boy Scout, advancement is designed to let a boy pick and choose what he is to accomplish and do it at a speed he chooses for himself. Boys do not compete against each other but instead challenge themselves to set goals and reach them at a pace that's comfortable and suits their individual needs. The rate of advancement totally depends on an individual boy's interest, effort and ability.

The first three ranks of Scouting: Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class can be worked on simultaneously. Almost everything a boy learns or does in the first couple of years as a Boy Scout applies to some aspect of his rank advancement. Therefore, he is continuously able to have an achievement signed off in his book and then be recognized for his accomplishment. On each camping trip he is still learning something new and gradually progresses to the point where he can begin to teach newer scouts some of the skills he has mastered.

To obtain the last three ranks of scouting a boy must work on merit badges, serve in a position of leadership and perform service to others. The trail to Eagle becomes steeper and the challenges more difficult.

The first requirement of rank advancement for older scouts is merit badges. The merit badge program becomes a basic measuring tool by which boys gain self confidence and learn to overcome obstacles to achieve a goal. Merit badges expose boys to new experiences and the skills they learn; both physically and socially, will remain with them a lifetime.

Another requirement of rank advancement for older scouts is to serve in a position of leadership

within the Troop. Older scouts help plan troop meetings and activities; as well as, take on a large part of the responsibility of teaching younger scouts the skills and activities they need to advance.

Another important requirement for rank advancement of older scouts is service to others. Each rank specifies service hours in preparation for the Eagle service project whereby a scout can demonstrate the leadership skills he has learned through scouting.

In reviewing the ranks of scouting through advancement it is easy to conclude that advancement is easier and possibly more exciting in the beginning, but becomes more difficult as the boy advances through the ranks. But is it the difficulty in advancing alone that turns boys away from scouting?

According to John Fenoglio, Program Director and Council Advancement Chairman for Crossroads of America Council in the Boy Scouts of America, only two percent of all boys who join Boy Scouting make the rank of Eagle. The national median last year was 54, the national standard was 61.2 and The Crossroads of America Council was 64.2 for achieving the rank of Eagle. In Crossroads we are doing a better than average job at finishing the trail to Eagle. So then, what are the roadblocks?

I surveyed numerous Star and Life scouts in my District who have not advanced in some time or have recently quit. Most of the Scouts were in high school and between the ages of 15-17 years old. Almost everyone agreed that once they entered high school their lives became too busy with other activities. School activities and sports take up a large portion of their time. Add to that being able to drive a car and then throw in girls and dating and the time they could devote to Scouting became less and less. They found it difficult to keep up with advancement, especially the requirements about holding some type of leadership position. Some were put in a position where they had to make a choice. Scouting lost. Others are trying to keep it all together and make it to the coveted rank of Eagle, but time is running out. I did not speak to one boy who did not want to get his Eagle, only boys who felt they probably wouldn't because they just couldn't find the time. The distinction is notable.

Also notable is the fact that many older Scouts do seem to find the time to attend Troop camping and outdoor events. It appears that although the boys can't make it to troop meetings because of the various reasons already stated, they do somehow manage to find the time to attend troop outdoor functions,

such as camping. When asked why, most boys responded that camping is fun. There are a lot of things to do outdoors compared to troop meetings which they describe as boring.

To further understand why boys were not finishing the Eagle trail I created a survey (Appendix A) which I sent to all Boy Scout District Advancement Chairman in the Crossroads of America Council. The survey was sent to 11 District Advancement Chairman; however, only five returned it. I received a phone call from one. Although I acknowledged that we were not statisticians and I was looking for approximations only, I discovered that the majority of District Advancement Chairman do not keep any type of record that would enable them to give the information I requested. However, I did receive numerous comments and opinions.

One Chairman had 132 boys in his District become Tenderfoot Scouts last year. Although he states he didn't have the "firm numbers" to back it up, he states from personal observation that 80-90% of the boys that joined his District last year made that rank within three to six months of joining. Another Chairman also stated that boys who joined his District last year advanced through Tenderfoot and

Second Class ranks very quickly. First Class took a little longer but basically was achieved within one to one and a half years.

Most comments concerned the problems that the older scouts have in achieving the rank of Eagle. As one Chairman put it "If a boy hasn't advanced through Life and almost have his Eagle rank by age 16, then most boys will: a) not obtain Eagle or b) have a "panic situation" two months before his eighteenth birthday. The main reasons are WWW - Women, Wheels, and Work!". This was a recurring theme among the reasons for not obtaining Eagle. Another District Chairman put it this way: "at 16, drivers license, high school, and dating take their toll".

One District Chairman felt that if an older scout did not have other scouts his same age in his troop then it made things more difficult for him. "Older scouts (16+) lose interest unless there is a group of older scouts to be with".

One other opinion expressed by a Chairman is that it "really depends on the direction of the troop". He states that even in his own troop each case is different. Each boy has his own individual set of reasons.

The consensus of opinion is basically the same among all District Chairman. Younger scouts advance

quickly, older scouts fizzle out around 16 years old.

The last comment I will quote from a District Advancement Chairman summarizes what the trend has become: "more younger scouts are reaching Eagle. Typically, Eagle candidates are 14 years old or they wait until they are 17 1\2 plus".

CONCLUSIONS

Everyone who was spoken with or written to about this subject agrees that advancement in the lower ranks is easier. Younger boys are more enthusiastic as they approach scouting. Everything is new and exciting. The challenges start out small and don't appear to be insurmountable. Rewards are practically immediate. The program is fun.

This does not mean to imply that the program is not fun for the older scouts too; however, the program for the older scouts is only as good as the boys and the adults in charge are willing to make it. Once a scout finishes the lower ranks the challenges become more difficult, the rewards farther apart. He

already has learned most of the scout skills he will need throughout his scouting career. His leadership position puts him in a position of authority and setting a good example all of the time may take away from some of the simple fun. Merit badge work is much slower and work often done separate from the troop meeting place. He has taken on much of the responsibility for running the troop. Scouting has become harder.

It has already been established that the boys don't have the time to devote to scouting after age 16 due to driving, dating and working; however, do have the time for outdoor activities and camping. Therefore, can we conclude that older boys MAKE time for the activities that they perceive as fun? If we conclude that boys make time for activities they perceive as fun, then the answer to retention of older boys in scouting is to make the program more fun for them. If it were that simple, then retention of older boys would not be a problem. Many Scoutmasters spend endless hours trying to figure out how to make the program more interesting for the older scouts. Granted, "women, wheels and work" are still going to "take their toll", but if the program were made more interesting and applicable to an older

them to remain in their own troops.

If there aren't enough older boys in the troop available, a scout may decide to join an Exploring Post. This not only would keep an older scout involved in Scouting but would enable him to learn more about a field and possible career choice that would last a lifetime.

A troop may decide to develop a program specifically for older scouts that would enable them to fulfill their rank requirements while taking into consideration their outside responsibilities. They would be a difficult but worthwhile task.

However it is accomplished, the mission is to keep older boys active in scouting in a way that provides an interesting, fun and challenging program which enables them to obtain the rank of Eagle.

RESOURCES

Interviews with Star and Life Scouts

Interviews with Scoutmasters

John C. Fenoglio

The Boy Scout Handbook

Creative Courts of Honor

Advancement Guidelines - Council and District

Survey to District Advancement Chairman

Boy Scout Requirement Book

Junior Leader Handbook

Appendix A

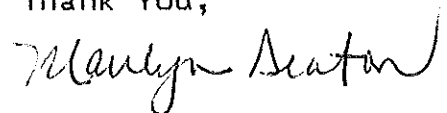
Marilyn Deaton
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Indpls., Indiana 46237

September 4, 1993

Dear District Advancement Chairman,

I am an Assistant District Commissioner with the Pathfinder District in the Crossroads of America Council of the Boy Scouts of America. I am also the Advancement Chairman in Troop 120 and serve on the District Advancement Committee with Eagle Boards. I am presently working on my Doctorate Degree in the Commissioner College. I am doing a project concerning Boy Scout advancement and would appreciate it if you would complete the attached survey in regard to your District advancement. My project focuses on the speed with which boys achieve lower ranks, and then why it takes them so long to achieve the Eagle rank, if at all. If you have any information, or insight, which is not covered in the questionnaire, please include it in the comment section.

Thank You,



Marilyn Deaton

BOY SCOUT ADVANCEMENT
SURVEY

I realize that we are volunteers and not statisticians, therefore, I am asking for approximations only. I hope this will make answering this survey a little easier.

DISTRICT: _____

1. How many boys joined Boy Scouts in your district last year? _____

2. How many of these boys made Tenderfoot rank? _____

What was the average length of time to achieve this rank? _____

Comments:

3. How many boys made Second Class? _____

What was the average length of time to achieve this rank? _____

Comments:

4. How many boys made First Class? _____

What was the average length of time to achieve this rank? _____

Comments:

5. How many boys made Star? _____

What was the average length of time to achieve this rank? _____

What is the average age of Star scouts in your district? _____

How many boys have been Star Scouts for longer than 1 year? _____

2 years _____ 3 years _____ longer _____

Comments:

6. How many boys made Life? _____

What was the average length of time to achieve this rank? _____

What is the average age of Life scouts in your district? _____

How many boys have been Life Scouts for longer than 1 year? _____

2 years? _____ 3 years? _____ longer? _____

Why do you think this is?

In your opinion, based on the boys and records of your District, is the main reason for the delay in achieving the Eagle rank due to lack of merit badges or lack of work on the Eagle project?

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Also, in your opinion, how much do outside influences, (such as work, girls, cars etc.), have to do with it?

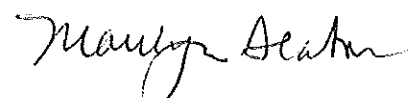
7. How many boys made Eagle ? _____

Please list the ages of the boys who have earned the rank of Eagle in your District in the past year.

Comments:

I would like to thank you for all of your help in completing this survey. I appreciate the time that it took and I thank you again.

Sincerely,



Marilyn Deaton