

VENTURING MAGAZINE

If I Was the King of Scouting

An outburst of frustration from a lifelong Scouter by Joe Garrett

March 2017

If I was the King of Scouting:

1. I would fix Venturing— In my opinion, Venturing is the Crown Jewel of Scouting in America. It is the last, best opportunity for Scouters and Scouting Families to influence young people as they grow into adulthood. It is our responsibility to teach these young people to respect and enjoy the great outdoors. At the same time, we can teach them leadership, work ethic, and coping skills in a controlled (but somewhat chaotic) sport or avocational interest.

I would reinstate the concept of Special Interest Venturing. Crews would declare a primary interest such as hiking, Scuba, climbing, or even quilting. Crews would still be able to participate in a broad range of activities, and they would be encouraged to host each other in their Crew Specialties. An example is the Shooting Sports Crew that hosted my crew for a weekend, helping my Venturers earn NRA certifications.

I would require every Local Council to provide some form of adventure based Leadership Skills Course every year, much as they are currently required to provide Boy Scouts with a Summer Camp experience. My preference would be to bring back the adventure based Kodiak Treks, which are relatively simple to conduct and can be very cost effective. My Venturing Crew used to host whitewater Kodiak Treks on rivers in the Western United States.

I would make certain that the Professional Staff at Local Councils understood that Venturing is not an optional program, and I would make its success a factor in their annual evaluations. In larger Councils, I would encourage the establishment of Venturing Districts along the lines of the old Exploring Districts. A dedicated Venturing District could sponsor activities and events for Crews in smaller or more remote Districts and provide Council-wide support for all Venturing and Exploring. Larger Councils could be incented to provide program support for smaller Councils that don't have the resources to fully support Venturing.

I would find a way to solve the financial problem presented to Councils by the Venturing Program. It is well known in the Scouting Community that Venturing does not pay for itself. Families of teens are slow to participate in Council Friends of Scouting campaigns. Teens are hesitant to sell products like popcorn in Council fund raisers. One solution would be to set a higher membership fee for Venturers. Another would be to ask for a higher Crew Annual registration fee from the Chartered partner organization. The best option would be to go back to the successful days of Exploring and do some grant writing. Districts could also be encouraged to seek out in-kind gifts of materials useful to the local Council such as copier paper, airline mileage points, donated vehicles and boats, and so on. Confronting this financial challenge is far healthier than ignoring it.

2. I would make all Scouting coeducational—enough already. BSA has been bludgeoned for years for its position on gay leaders, gay youth, and now trans genders. Lets put a stop top this before any more damage is done. Open up Scouting to everyone. We are one of only a handful; of International Scouting Organizations that doesn't allow young girls to participate. The past 20 years have demonstrated that we cannot win these culture wars. Our stubborn position has done nothing but harm us. Besides, why do we think this program is only good for boys?

3. I would make peace with PTA's. Open up Scouting to all, then go back to our oldest and dearest friends, the Parent Teacher Associations, and make peace. A national initiative would be required, as this has been left to fester for decades. This may or may not let us get back into the schools.
4. I would make peace with the other US Scouting Organizations— Trail Life, USA, Baden Powell Scouts, and others are fellow travelers in the Scouting movement. So are the Girl Scouts of the USA, Campfire USA, and Boys and Girls Clubs.
5. Boypower/Manpower was 40 years ago. Get over it. In the 1970's in an effort to rapidly grow Scouting for the Bicentennial, BSA overreached in its recruiting efforts resulting in systematic cheating on membership recruiting. Ever since, aggressive membership recruiting has been frowned upon within BSA. It's been 40 years. I think it's OK to go back in the pool now. A national initiative, with public service announcements, media blitzes, and especially a social media campaign, are long overdue.
6. I would try to find better off-season utilization of our incredible properties. We have hundreds of beautiful Scout Camps, many with private lakes. Why can't we find a way to use them as an outreach to our communities. There are plenty of church congregations looking for off-site retreat facilities. Many school districts conduct overnights for older elementary students. Some of our camps are in locations that are ideal for family camping. What better way to reach out to our communities than to share our biggest assets?

In short, if I was the King of Scouting, I would get us out into our communities. I would have Scouts in every parade, every community event, every sporting event. We would come out of hiding and be a visible part of our communities again. This is how Scouting was in the 50's, the 60's, and the 70's when I was a Cub, a Scout, and an Explorer. We marched, we sold American Flags for Fourth of July, we marched, we were always the Honor Guard for flag presentations. What happened?