



Retaining our Young Men in Scouting

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by

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PREFACE

I have served as a volunteer scouter for over 24 years, mainly as a Scoutmaster and Post/Crew Advisor. I have been fortunate in that I have been a leader at six scouting events in other countries: Brazil, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Austria and Great Britain. During each of these events, I took the time to understand scouting in the host countries, as well as in the countries visiting the events.

Over those 24 years, I have observed scouting environments where scouts were motivated to stay involved in scouting, and I have also seen situations where they did not want to stay involved. From my experience and research, I have found that retention is greatest when young adults can retain peer relationships.

This thesis will discuss senior scouting history, current problems, survey results taken in a 2011 Philmont Training Center course “Building Strong Packs, Troops, Teams and Crews” and proposed training.

Historical Background

Even in the very early years of scouting, Baden-Powell (BP) came to realize that the scouting program should address the challenge of boys under 12 being interested in scouting but not being eligible to join, and boys over 16 leaving the program.

Incorporating the younger boys into the program was reasonably easy in Great Britain. In 1916, BP started a Wolf Cub program. The inspiration for the program came from Kipling's *Jungle Books* which provided an imaginative background for the activities. This not only made an alluring call to the younger boys, but it gave the Wolf Cubs a distinctive character, as compared to the Boy Scout. The Boy Scouts of American (BSA) were under the direction of James E. West from 1911 to 1943. Unlike BP, West opposed the younger boy program calling it a "younger boy problem". Therefore, Cubbing, as it was first called by BSA, was delayed until 1930. The Cubbing program's age range during its first 19 years was 9 through 11.

To address the older-boy problem, BP considered several avenues, but all were unsuccessful because of the onset of the First World War. However, it is important to note that he expressed the following objectives:

1. To keep Boy Scouts in touch with each other and with the Movement when they have to leave their Troops and go out to battle with the world.
2. To preserve the ideals of good citizenship which they have been taught as Scouts.

3. To attract to the Movement young men who have not been Scouts, and to give them the opportunity for doing a service to their country.

In 1912, Sea Scouts was founded in America and Arthur A. Carey of Waltham, Massachusetts was appointed Chairman of the National Council Committee on Sea Scouting. BSA had been aware of the need for an older-boy program and Mr. Carey made the first real effort to satisfy that need when he helped promote Sea Scouts with his pamphlet, *Cruising for Sea Scouts*.

It is important to note that in the early years, Sea Scouts struggled through a difficult period in part due to the First World War and the fact that there was little or no national guidance. Despite these issues, it managed to grow and will be celebrating 100 years in 2012.

For many years, the Sea Scout program was aimed at older boys who had graduated from Boy Scout troops. Sea Scouts even had a special set of rules (probably introduced in the 1920's) that allowed a Sea Scout to complete his Boy Scout rank advancement. The ranks of Star, Life and Eagle were made with a navy-blue or white background for the Sea Scout uniform until the early 1950's.

The most comprehensive information on the early years of Explorer Scouts has been compiled by Michael R. Brownⁱ. Michael has created a website named www.seniorscoutinghistory.org.

Michael provides the following overview: “After several years of experimentation in the west, mainly in Utah, Washington, and Oregon, going as far back as 1922, Explorer Scouts was approved by the National Committee in 1933 and became one part of the Senior Scout program in 1935. It was, in many ways, a kind of 'land-based', high adventure/advanced camping version of Sea Scouts. When it first started, it was unclear the direction of the program. Initially, they didn't have a true advancement program or distinct uniform.”

“In 1935, National established a new program for older boys in the BSA which they called Senior Scouts.

What had been the Sea Scouts Service became the Senior Scouts Service. After researching the needs and interests of older boys since 1927, they concluded they



needed unique opportunities for them to keep them in the Scouting program.

Under the Senior Scouting program, once a boy turned 15, he was automatically considered a Senior Scout, and could participate in any one of several programs. Senior Scouts was not so much as a program, but a collection of programs. Under one umbrella, they brought together several existing programs, along with several new programs. It took awhile for some of these programs to really get going, and some that didn't were dropped.

These programs included:

- Sea Scouts – was established in 1912.

- Explorer Scouts – was developed in the West as a parallel program to Sea Scouts, starting around 1922.
- Air Scouts – was established in 1941.
- Rover Scouts – was based on a program created by BP for the oldest of boys and sprang up within the BSA by 1928. It is a service and leadership-based program for boys 17 and older.
- Troop Alumni – a loose way to keep past members 25 and older together to help support the troop. This idea lives on in the loose concept of Scouting Alumni programs with National.
- Senior Scouting in the Troop
- Press Club – officially existed from 1930 to 1956.
- Order of the Arrow – was established in 1915 in the Philadelphia Council as a summer camp honor society.
- Knights of Dunamis – was established in 1925 as a fraternal service organization limited to Eagle Scouts, and later on allowed those who had earned Quartermaster, Ace, Ranger or Silver Award to join. In 1971, it became the National Eagle Scout Association (NESA).
- Senior Degree Honor Society – the earliest and least-known of all the Senior Scouting programs. It was established in 1917 and was no longer mentioned in scout handbooks around 1955.”

World Scoutingⁱⁱ

The following table shows the current age grouping of scouts in the countries with significant scout programs:

	Scouts	Ventures	Rovers
Australia	10½-15	14.5-18	17.5-25
Austria	11-15	15-18	18-21
Bangladesh	11-17		17-25
Canada	11-14	14-17	18-26
India	10-18		18-25
Indonesia	11-15	16-20	21-25
Japan	11-14	14-20	18-24
Kenya	12-15	16-18	18+
New Zealand	11-14	14-19	18-26
Pakistan	12-16		17-25
Philippines	10-12	13-17	16-24
Thailand	11-16	14-18	19-25
UK	10½-14	14-18	18-25
USA	10½-17	14-20	

Between 1920 and 1940, the traditional age groups throughout the world were 11-17 for Boy Scouts, and 18 and up for Rover Scouts. Presently, only two of these countries are similar to BSA and have Scouts up to the age of 17 or 18, and they are denoted in red. The implication is that scouting programs in most countries have recognized that grouping by peer groups adds to the value of the scouting program.

Program Organization

The idea of a Senior Scout program is a very good idea, but several problems exist in the way the BSA program is organized.

- Because the ages for Boy Scouts range from about 10½ through 17, there is no normal progression for older boys to segue to senior scouting programs. If a troop has an effective older-boy program, then there are virtually no problems with boys remaining in the troop, but few troops have developed such a program. As a result, some boys get bored with the program, usually around the ages of 14 or 15, and subsequently quit, while others stay to earn Eagle and then “Eagle Out” (quit after earning Eagle).
- The present older scout programs in BSA are:
 1. Varsity Scouting (14 through 17) (dominantly used by the LDS church)
 2. Venturing (finished 8th grade through 20)
 3. Sea Scouting (finished 8th grade through 20)
 4. Exploring (14 through 20)

Except for Sea Scouting, the advancement programs have never settled into a pattern of their own. Explorers had the option of earning the higher Boy Scout ranks (Star, Life and Eagle). In addition, Explorers

have often had a separate advancement track of their own, patterned after Boy Scout advancement, and culminating with an Explorer rank comparable to Eagle Scout (such as the old Explorer Scout Ranger Award, Silver Award, and G.O.L.D Award, and Air Scout Ace Award). Today, male Venturers can earn the higher Boy Scout ranks (they must earn First Class in a Boy Scout troop or in a Varsity Team), Sea Scouts can earn the Quartermaster award, and Venturers can earn a variety of little-known awards. Only the Quartermaster Award in Sea Scouting has the prestige of the rank of Eagle Scout.

Current Options for Retention of older boys

In 2006, Ken Bower (current Western Region Venturing Advisor) shared with me a document he had written called “Strategies for Retaining Older Boy Scouts.”ⁱⁱⁱ This document can be found on one of my “Venturing Notebook” web pages called “Tips from the Trenches.” The web address is www.sageventure.com/venturing/tips.html.

Ken identified four ways to keep boys active:

1. **Venture Patrol:** A special Patrol, consisting of boys over thirteen which meet other qualifications established by the troop. A few times a year, the Venture Patrol conducts its own special outings which fulfill the desires of the older boys and keeps them active in the troop.

2. **The “partnered” Venturing Crew:** The troop “spins off” a new Unit, which is chartered as a Venturing Crew.
3. **The “neighborhood” Venturing Crew:** The troop finds a local crew which has a program attractive to the older boys, and encourages many of them to join the crew in addition to being active in the troop.
4. **The “special interest” Venturing Crew:** In the broader geographical area, there are likely to be several crews with specific interest programs. Climbing, music, soccer, historical reenactment, sailing, drama, and shooting are some examples. It is common for Scouts to join one *or more* special interest crews. They may have to travel some distance to participate, but older Scouts are generally capable of making those arrangements.

Although I do believe these are great ideas, too many scout leaders fear the last three ideas because they do not want the older boys leaving their troop. Losing those boys would mean they would “lose their boys’ leaders.” If an older boy enjoys leading, then he would probably excel in the troop and continue to stay. But this does not work well for all older boys. Many want to be with their peers and, for the most part, Boy Scout troops lack a good peer environment for high-school-aged boys.

Rover Proposal^{iv}

Another relevant study aimed at retaining young adults in scouting, is a Rover proposal submitted by a BSA-sponsored committee. The proposal was shared with me by Ken King, a member of the committee.

This proposal recognizes that efforts to establish and sustain Venturing crews among college students are challenged by the obstacle of having the youth membership "age out" sometime during their sophomore or junior year in college. However, retaining these young adults could provide a talent pool to develop leadership for units, districts, and local councils.

This program would provide young adults with excellent knowledge and the potential for a long-term investment in Scouting. Their later service as unit leaders when their own children become eligible for participation in the Scout movement would be enhanced by their specialized experience and training. Additionally, an organization, such as a church, that already sponsors a pack, troop, and crew could utilize Roving as an alumni group to remain connected with its former Scouts. Rover crews would further improve retention in the program and would strengthen the ties between young adults and their former troop/crew.

The Rover proposal goes on to list the benefits to the Boy Scouts of America:

- Offering a mechanism for young adults to remain connected to Scouting.
- Providing an avenue to involve non-Scouts in the movement.

- Creating a bridge between youth and adult membership in the BSA, so that we do not lose them from the time they leave high school until their potential return as parents with new Scouts, fifteen to twenty years later.
- Recognizing the potential to increase membership in the movement by several hundred thousand.
- Defining a new Scouting cohort that would reflect natural groupings/socialization patterns of young people.
- Providing an opportunity for young adults to deliver service to their campus, to their community, and to Scouting.

The benefits are all positive and I feel there would be only a gain in the scouting program by reintroducing Rover Scouting.

Philmont Survey

In 2011, I took a course called “Building Strong Packs, Troops, Teams and Crews” at the Philmont Training Center. Before the course, I put together a survey to help me understand the participants’ role in scouting and I asked the question, “Assume you are responsible for retaining the youth in your unit. What action do you think would help the most?” The responses are summarized below:

Primary Scouting Role	Response to question
District/Council	Working with the boys to get their ideas about what they want most
District/Council	I worked with the Troop & Crew to develop specific older youth high adventure outings.
Venturing	Active super trip programs Bonding weekend trips
All of scouting	Develop a coaching/mentoring relationship to help retain older boys
Boy Scouts	Have monthly outings that changed regularly with high adventure activities 2-3 times a year.
Boy Scout & Venturing	Make sure the youth are designing the program, step aside and let the youth lead, make sure it is safe and FUN!

From these responses, I draw these conclusions with respect to actions that would help retain older youth:

1. Make sure the boys are involved in the selection of activities.
2. High adventure activities are important to include in a good outings program.
3. Bonding (most likely with peers) is important as well as trusting relationships between adults and young adults.

Employing Retention Ideas from the Business Community

The growth of scouting can only improve if we develop our current generation of scouts into adults who, because of their enjoyment in scouting, want to promote the program. With so many opportunities to do things other than scouting, many young adults are leaving the program because “they want to have fun and varied experiences.”

Paul Montelongo^v has authored a number of books about success in the workplace. He has listed 10 reasons why an employee will stay with a company, and these reasons can be extended to scouting:

1. ***Clearly defined expectations and outcomes.***

Scouts know the value of earning Eagle, but few understand the value of earning awards in the senior scout programs. Earning Eagle has a well-established process and universities and employers recognize its value. This can also be said for Quartermaster which has been a program since 1912, but the knowledgeable community is smaller. Other than Quartermaster, the awards in senior scouting have changed many times and currently do not have a rigorous process for achievement. I believe this lack of a rigorous process for achievement is a detriment to our young adults. Scouting should ensure that all the highest awards are reviewed in a standard manner as are Eagle and Quartermaster. When others recognize the value, our young adults will win.

2. **Encourage continuing development.**

Retaining a boy in a troop until he is 18 certainly serves to provide a good role model and leader for the younger boys, but I suggest it does not help to fully develop a young man. Learning to lead your peers has great value.



Sunshine as a whitewater guide

As a course director for Kodiak for 5 years, I had one young man, nick- named “Sunshine”, who joined my Crew in 2006 because he wanted to participate in whitewater rafting, a Kodiak activity

offered in my Crew. He had been in a troop, but dropped out because of the lack of fun. Over the years, Sunshine became one of the outstanding leaders for Kodiak and for whitewater guide training. I am sure Sunshine would not have developed as a leader without



Sunshine as a Kodiak instructor

Kodiak and the Venturing program. In 2010 and 2011, Sunshine took primary leadership roles in our week of rafting. I am proud of what he accomplished.

3. ***Extend recognition and praise.***

Venturing does a very good job with recognition. There are a number of different avenues that Venturers can follow to get recognized. Probably the best manner of presentation of the award is with the Venturing Star below:



4. ***Genuinely care about your employees.***

This goes back to caring about the growth of our young adults with age-appropriate programs. If a leader is focused solely on retaining a boy in his troop, this does not show caring for the boy as he grows into a young

man. There are great troops which provide growth, but in general, a boy needs to join a senior scout unit or continue with the OA in order to grow. As adults, we need to foster this development and transition.

5. ***Salary and benefits are not the number one reason people stay at a company.***

I suggest this implies that being a Senior Patrol Leader or a Junior Assistant Scoutmaster does not generally keep a boy in the troop. A boy needs peer relationships to stay in scouting. (Don't we all need peer relationships to stay in anything?)

6. ***Offer regular, quality feedback.***

Again, Venturing and Scouting does a good job in this area. There is no question that providing quality feedback is needed by all. As a scout unit leader for over 20 years, I fully believe in this type of feedback.

7. ***Nurture friendships at the office.***

As I have said previously, peer friendship is most important to teenagers. This can best be accomplished by being in a unit that has youth the same age. This goes back to promoting senior scout programs for our boys, because they are more likely to stay in scouting.

8. ***Provide the right tools.***

More recently, with respect to training, scouting has taken the direction of one overall program. All scouts 13 and older are encouraged to take National Youth Leader Training (NYLT) followed with National Youth

Advanced Leader Experience (NAYLE). The program itself is good, but it does not promote older youth to look forward to something new. In the past, NYLT was a troop leadership training program and Kodiak was a Venturing leadership program. Since Kodiak was conducted on a high-adventure activity, it was a carrot for older youth to want to be involved. Since the dissolution of Divisions (Cub, Scout & Venturing), there is little training motivating our older youth. Many took NYLT in their troop, and NAYLE is not, in general, a hook for Venturers because it is essentially a Boy Scout training course.

Kodiak was replaced by Kodiak Challenge early in 2011. I was the webmaster for the Kodiak web site which listed the courses for Kodiak training. In 2011, the number of courses listed significantly dropped which likely means that the new Kodiak Challenge is not the same exciting program that Kodiak was for older youth.

9. ***Include them in the decision-making.***

One of the backbones of senior scouts is decision-making. Although making decisions is encouraged at the troop level, the boys are still developing their skills in this area. Venturing allows young adults to practice exploring and implementing alternatives, right or wrong. In fact, making mistakes is how many of us learn. Leading their peers enhances their decision-making abilities.

10. ***Allow them to make a difference.***

Venturing is very good because it is open to any constructive ideas the

young adults have. Many Crews do get involved in training, environmental, or community support of some type. Whatever the type of involvement, they often do make a difference.

Summary

Since the early years of scouting, retaining older youth has been an identified problem which continues today. Within the BSA and throughout the world, Sea Scouting probably has the best infrastructure for our young adults. Great Britain celebrated 100 years of Sea Scouts in 2009 and BSA will celebrate 100 years in 2012, both significant achievements.

When Venturing began in 1998, there was tremendous interest and growth due to the many new opportunities for available awards and, within a few years, the introduction of Powder Horn and Kodiak. Powder Horn provided information from high-adventure consultants for the new Ranger Award for Venturing leaders. Kodiak provided leadership training for the young adults during a high-adventure activity. Both trainings showed good growth within the first 10 years of Venturing.

Of course, the excitement of the new Venturing program has slowed down. This is compounded by the fact that since Divisions (Cub Scout, Boy Scout & Venturing) were eliminated at the end of 2008, there is no dedicated group of professionals promoting Venturing, as was done by the Venturing Division. Additionally, at the Council level, the new quality unit program “Journey to

Excellence” has no goals set for any senior scout program; i.e. there is no growth benefit for professional scouters when working with Venturing or Sea Scouts.

A positive step that BSA is considering for our older youth is the reintroduction of the Rover program. It is in a testing phase at this time and if it passes muster, it may be the next new program. Hopefully, we will hear more in a year or two.

Compared to scouting programs in the rest of the world, we are one of the few countries with a Boy Scout program that continues through the age of 17. This has advantages and disadvantages, but the most significant problem, in my opinion, is the lack of understanding by our adult leaders, as a whole, about the senior scouting programs. They don't tend to encourage their Boy Scouts to continue in the senior scouting programs. My suggestion is to create a required training class that educates our scouting leaders on the benefits to our younger adults that can be gained by continuing into any senior scouting program. Working to build quality citizens will be a winner for all.

What can the Unit Commissioner do?

The most common situation that a Unit Commissioner will run into is when a Troop wants to create an associated Crew. When this happens, it is common for the Troop leaders to want their older boys to continue attending Troop meetings. Some boys will continue to attend and some won't, but one of the most helpful things for all is getting the boys dual-registered. Under dual registration, boys can "double dip" (and girls, too, if they are registered in Girl Scouts) which translates to getting credit in both Scouts and Venturing for similar requirements with only a little more work. Even with dual registration, boys will more likely continue working toward Eagle in the Troop, even though they can earn it in either program.

If a Troop and the associated Crew choose to hold meetings during the same evening (which I discourage), it is best to have the Crew meet an additional half hour past the Troop meeting. At the beginning of the Troop meeting, everyone who is a member of the Troop (which will include some Venturers) can attend parts such as an opening and could serve on SPL staff. When Patrol meetings begin, Venturers can then break off into their meeting and female Venturers and male Venturers not registered with the Troop could show up to attend the Crew meeting. Of course in cases like this, Venturers cannot serve as Patrol Leaders.

With respect to activities, the youth from the Crew and Troop, rather than the adults, should choose which activities are joint. Adults should only suggest and not feel badly if their suggestions are not chosen. Generally, a few special activities and family outings are the ones that are commonly selected to be joint activities within a year.

One way to help Troop leaders understand the value of using the Venturing program is to ask them to think about how they would want their children to be exposed to different types of experiences and the value that those experiences will bring. Promoting the idea of Venturing to the Scouts in their Troop is much the same. In Venturing, they will have the opportunity to learn more leadership skills, will likely have more adventurous experiences and probably stay in scouting longer because they are doing things with their peers. In Venturing, young adults are leaders for their peers which will increase leadership skills versus being a leader for much younger boys. And, when I was a Scoutmaster, we did activities all over California and other close-by states. In Venturing, we went all over the world!

Another point that leaders lose track of is how much they looked forward to boys transitioning from Webelos to Boy Scouts. Since BSA is one of the very few countries that continues to register boys as Scouts until they are 18, leaders do not think of the similar transition that should occur by having Scouts become Venturers. Also, Scout leaders mistakenly think more about

the Troop than they do about the Scout. Yes, a Troop can use older leaders, but a Scout's growth will be greater by doing things with his peers.

For those Troop leaders that like the idea of Venturing, I suggest they get a Venturing Ranger Guidebook. By reviewing the requirements, the leader will understand that there is a teaching element. This teaching component is an ideal way to get help from the Venturer at a Troop meeting or activity. Of course, it is wise to make sure that enough time is given to the Venturer to prepare, but asking is the simple trick; it all goes back to good communication.

For the Unit Commissioner, it is prudent to understanding as much about the Venturing program as possible. Wiser still, is using scouters like me to discuss the values for our young adults as I was an Advisor for 18 years and previously a Scoutmaster.

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