

How to Turn Parents into Helpers, and Helpers into Leaders ...



This piece generated from discussions and presentations on the hardest part of successful, sustainable recruiting ...

This guide is set up in categories of Communication with Adults (about sharing the leading and helping), Activities as the Lure for Adults (schedule stuff they want to do with their families), Recognition of Helpers and Leaders (to show appreciation), Your Local Org Chart and/or Wish List (List the Jobs You Need and Want), Right Size Your Jobs (slice and dice jobs into digestible bits), Right Size Your Program (making sure your program expands or contracts to avoid leader burnout – do what works), and Other Tips (to Develop Leaders).

Communication with Adults (about sharing the leading and helping)

1. **Every Parent Helps.** Have, and promote, an “every parent helps” policy ... or “every parent leads” ... so that families know when they join that this is a family program, not a “drop off” program.
2. **The Parent Committee.** Explain that every parent is part of the Parent (instead of Pack) Committee. Set the expectation that every family needs to attend a majority of the monthly parent committee meetings to ensure that their Scout’s Scouting experience is awesome.
3. **Sign Up Sheets.** Give people the chance to sign up at events ... make lists public.
4. **Sign Up Online.** Some people are more comfortable online ... use your resources. Signup Genius is transparent.
5. **Talent Survey.** Ask what people know and can do, but don’t tie it to “jobs” or “roles” ... tie it to skills, hobbies and interests. Make it a brag sheet ... ‘this is what I like to do’ and “this is what I want to do more when I get time”. We’ll make the time ... with the Scouts and his friends.
6. **Get to Know Parents.** Survey or not, talk and listen, and let parents open up about interests. Ask what they like to do, used to do, fun places they’ve been, sports, hobbies ... favorite books, apps, whatever! Be Facebook friends, and you can find out a lot about people ... maybe what someone likes, maybe who you would *never* ask again!
7. **One on One Ask.** Once you know a person, make a one-on-one pitch for a job ... if you ask a group, or even two people (even spouses), each thinks “*oh, you were really asking her, not me*” or “*someone else will do it*”.
8. **Ask in Person.** For a critical job, it’s easy to say “no” by email, text, phone ... take someone out to lunch or coffee.
9. **Specific Ask / Small Ask.** Make sure your request is specific ... give them a request they can say “yes” to by being really specific about what the job is, so that they can take it and succeed. For big jobs that are hard to fill, get a group of respected stakeholders to help with the “in person” ask ...
10. **Find the Right Ways to Make a “Group” Ask.** At some point you will have to do a “Group Ask”, and the “ask” is different depending on whether you have few leaders or lots of leaders and just need backup. You’ll tailor your ask to your Pack and the existing leaders and mentors you might have.
11. **It Takes Two.** Let people know about the rule – two registered leaders present for each activity – and let them know that means every den will need more than two registered (if someone can’t make it).
12. **Benefits of Helping/Leading.** And don’t be just “about the rule” but be sure parents know *why* it is important to participate ... that Scouting is a family program, a parental support program, teaching life skills, 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*.
13. **Don’t Give People an “Out”.** Yes, it may be your *goal*, but don’t make statements like “we need one registered leader for every 5 Scouts” without *also* saying “and that’s on top of the ‘every parent helps’ policy even if you don’t sign an adult application”, because if you only talk about the 1 in 5 registered leaders ... many will say “*great, I’m one of the four who doesn’t have to help ... let someone else step up*”. Stay on message that *every* parent helps so that nobody has that “easy out”.

14. **Don't Ask Too Early.** With a strong prospect, slow and steady wins the race ... and helps you find the right role for that person. Get to know the person and find the right role.
15. **"No" Does Mean "Never".** The person who says "no" now might be a "yes" later ... don't write them off.
16. **The Lifetime Demo.** Whether yardstick or adding machine tape, show how little time is left to make a difference in a young person's life ... we get them from about age 6, and by age 11 or so they will be too independent ...
17. **Use a Non-Uniform Method.** At recruiting events or parent planning meetings, don't wear uniforms, because the message sent is "*you guys in uniform are the leaders*" and "*us guys in regular clothes don't need to be leaders*" ... show that there is no difference between current leaders and future leaders, that we're all the same. And that once they register, they can put on their Scout shorts two legs at a time by jumping in just like us!
18. **Use a Uniform Method –the Shirt Off Your Back "Fashion Show".** Be sure your wardrobe can do this, and sizes are compatible, but if you get a potential volunteer, offer to help so much that you'll give "the shirt off your back" ... and do it, putting the shirt on the new volunteer to "try it on for size" ... fashion runway applause should result!
19. **Lottery.** Just to make it clear that everyone helps, pull names and assign to jobs or have them taped under chairs ... *P.S., this is not a way to fill jobs, but to make it clear someone's gotta do it.*
20. **Play Support Jobs Roulette.** Have role cards with jobs and job descriptions, enough for everyone in attendance ... you'll have multiples of some. Hand out cards, give everyone 15 minutes to trade until they find a job they like.
21. **Juggling Jobs.** A fun variation of the Roulette with cards ... but show what it's like if the Cubmaster has every role, by tossing balloons or balls (or eggs!) for each Unit Role everyone thinks the Cubmaster will do.
22. **Too Many Hats.** Ha Ha, we always talk about leaders wearing many hats. It's funny – until it's not. Like Jobs Roulette with cards ... get party hats with jobs on the hat and try putting the hats all on one person.
23. **Adult Peer to Peer Cards.** OK, if youth "peer to peer" cards are good for recruiting, why not "Parent to Parent" cards used to invite parents to help lead.
24. **What's More Important than your Kid?** Gather the parents around a table in a room away from the boys. Ask everyone to place their wallet on the table. Then, ask them to move to another room (or outside). When they reach for their wallet, say, "*Oh, no, leave that here!*" When you get a few quizzical looks respond with, "*You didn't pick up your kid(s) when you left the other room; are they less important than your wallet?*"
25. **Recruit Right Away.** Don't let people believe '*oh I'm too new to help*' ... everyone was new once. Even if you don't have a live "mentor" in your Pack, anyone can Google anything about Scout activities and find fun things to do.
26. **Hold People to Obligations.** Have someone circle back to those who haven't helped to remind them of your policy of "Every Parent Leads" or whatever you call it ... they may have a good excuse, or just thought you didn't mean it.

Activities as the Lure for Adults (Schedule Stuff they want to do with their families)

27. **Over-Schedule Fun Activities.** The more you *aim* to do, the more families might aim to make it work ... and if doing things as a Pack of Families is valuable, then you can really make your Pack successful. Put it on the list ... when somebody steps up to go, maybe you'll have a leader, and if nobody steps up to go, no worries.
28. **I Know What Guys Want.** Most dads do something or did something or want to do something, but they think they can't ... discover hobbies, and use them in your program. Do they golf, bowl, tailgate, fish, run, hoop, tennis, ski ... find what they do, and make it part of **your** program. All Scouting is local. If it's fun for kids, fun for families, and safe, it's Cub Scouting.
29. **Know What Moms and Girls Like Too.** Find out what your moms do too, or want to do, or did before kids ... there may be great activities. Even in a "boy only" Pack, activities that include sister siblings may work out for everyone.

30. **Joint Venture.** If you have Girl Scout Troops and other youth groups in your community, see if there are activities that you can do together. It would be an ever living shame if you thought *“we don’t have enough people do to [this activity]”* and they thought *“we don’t have enough people do to [this activity]”* and it turns out *“[this activity]”* would have worked if you just did it together ... so, why not? All Scouting is Local and use your resources!
31. **Fun Activities Can be the “Gateway” to Advancement.** If you’re doing a fun activity, like a summer or back to school pool event, at some point some new parent will ask: *“Is there a badge for this?”* Your answer: why yes, yes there is. And if you’re prepared, you can have copies of Den Leader Guide Elective Plans for Tiger “Floats and Boats”, Wolf “Spirit of the Water”, Bear “Salmon Run” and Webelos “Aquanaut” ... and enlist that parent to help.
32. **Hand Down Ideas.** If you’ve done something before, hand down the plan and lessons learned ... but beware of: (1) “old” Cub Scout advancement that isn’t tailored to the new program, and (2) handing over poor program.
33. **Use Resources.** Don’t leave your leaders stranded with no help. Be sure a Den Leader gets access to the Den Adventure Guides or *Streamlined* Guides ... print them off, or parts of them, and hand them over ... and use your District resources, because many District leaders would love to support a unit leader who really wants help.
34. **Let A Thousand Flowers Bloom.** If someone has an idea for a new unit activity or program ... go for it. Don’t let *“we’ve never done that before”* be the reason why you don’t really ramp up something someone has a passion for ... If it’s fun for kids, fun for families, and safe, it’s Cub Scouting.
35. **Have a Calendar of Fun Activities but Ask for More Ideas Too!** Yes, the Pack Leader’s Guide to Recruiting says that “Have a Calendar of Fun Activities” is Step One – and you need that to attract families – but don’t fail to ask for ideas for more fun activities. The person with the new idea might be the organizer for that activity.
36. **Trophy Turnabout is Fair Play.** The Parent who is excited about something is more likely to help! The parent asking about Pinewood might start as your car cutter or workshop leader or run the “outlaw” adult derby.
37. **OK, We’ll Just Drop This Activity.** Here’s a game for an organizing meeting (not for when youth are around). Seek signups to organize and help with an event, and if no signups are on the sheet ... crumple and toss the sheet saying *“I guess we don’t care enough to put this event on, so we won’t have a Pinewood Derby this year”* ... this is sort of extreme, but if you’ve made a series of good faith efforts to get volunteers, it can get a message across.
38. **Cancel an Activity – That Will Show Everyone!** Seriously. If you cancel, and people ask why ... let them know *“well, we could have done that and asked for a leader, but sadly, nobody volunteered – could you lead next time?”* It’s good to have an “easy” activity – like a Braves game – that fails due to a lack of an organizer, and it makes people step up so that the next activity does not fall through. This is a benefit of “over-planning” the calendar ...

Recognition of Helpers and Leaders (to show appreciation)

39. **Recognize.** Make a big, huge deal about any parent who steps up and helps ... if done well, not only will other parents notice, but the Scout will push his parent for more recognition.
40. **Commissioning Ceremony.** As part of that, have a formal “commissioning” of your new registered leaders, present them with their patch of leadership, give them a certificate, make a big, huge deal about it.
41. **Recognize, II.** Did we mention that you want to make a big, huge deal about “thank you” for everyone who helps?? Even if you are recognizing with just applause or a free bauble from some conference, make it a big, huge deal!
42. **Honor Roll.** Have a regular “heroes” recognition for those who are getting it done ... in a newsletter, email, Facebook post, poster on the wall at meetings ... use pictures and spread the word.
43. **Parent of the Month / Stars of the Game.** Have a recognition process for parents who help, maybe monthly, maybe also right after each event. (Think NHL Hockey, with “Three Stars of the Game” or MLS Soccer with “Man of the Match” recognition right after a game.)
44. **Social Time.** Make some unit parent events just fun, social time to bond, with no work ... a reward for leaders.

45. **Feedback.** Ask your volunteers how it's going, and if something isn't right, try to fix it before they leave.
46. **Awards.** Beyond just "thank you" recognition, be sure leaders are getting awards for service ... there's lots of official BSA awards, and you can make up your own too!
47. **Recognition Beyond the Pack.** Not "instead" of Pack event recognition, but you can get a lot of mileage if you can recognize helpful parents in public ways on Church, School or Community newsletters, websites, etc.
48. **Thank You Notes.** Never underestimate the power of the handwritten thank you note. You're welcome!
49. **Thank You Coordinator.** Hey, take that parent who loves Scouting, but doesn't want to be a Den Leader, and task her with the job of saying "thank you" to everyone who helps ... share this list and all the ideas.

Your Local Org Chart and/or Wish List (List the Jobs You Need and Want)

50. **Unit Job Chart or "Help Wanted" – List Ways to Help.** Yes, you've got to list the big leader jobs (Cubmaster, Den Leaders at each rank/den), but show space for Assistants, and help with support roles like Advancement, Paperwork, Weekend Activities, Fundraising (popcorn/camp cards), Banquet/Court of Honor, etc.
51. **Unit Job Chart – Show Open Roles.** List only people *really doing the job*, not just "holding the title", so people see the needs of the Unit ... always show space for assistants, so that the list always shows a way to join a team.
52. **Unit Job Chart – Show "Available Volunteers".** After you've asked enough, also show who has "not signed up and is not exempt" so that people see "I've got to find a role". You might exempt spouses of key leaders like Cubmaster and Den Leader, and special circumstances (e.g., health, deployment).
53. **Be Prepared Pledge Card.** Take some small jobs and put them out there for signup on a "pledge card" ... as one way to gather interest ... just put the jobs that might gather people in, or that you need the most right now..
54. **Collect Assistants until you have a Leader.** For big jobs that are hard to fill, accept anyone who says "no, but I'll be the 'assistant', just not the one in charge" ... because having a group of helpers who will commit to "assist" makes it easier for one of those assistants to say yes to being in charge. If you have enough "helpers", a potential leader won't be as afraid to step up as when the potential leader thinks "*oh no, I'll be all alone*".
55. **Pack Tip on Recruiting Assistants.** For some events (Banquet, Derby, Popcorn) having "den coordinators" can create an event committee and allow one of them to step up and say "OK, I'll run it with your help".
56. **Make it a Team Job: It Takes Two (Me and You).** When someone says, "I can't do that", see if you can make it a "team" ... sell a husband and wife on being a team of leaders ... or a pair of friends.
57. **Term Limits / Exit Strategy.** Make it clear the job is for this year, and someone steps up next year ... be willing to take the person who says, "I'll take it on next year", and make the commitment public.
58. **Doing Too Much? Resign Early (and Just Assist).** Yes, quit, but announce you'll be the assistant to the next person ... this doesn't mean that "you're gone", it means you're there to give "on the job" training and support. Maybe require all fifth-grade parents who are Pack Leaders (and who will cross over) to just be "assistants" to parents of younger Scouts who will be there longer.
59. **Visualize the Future.** If you have a leadership transition coming, show everyone what the future holds ... have the leaders on stage, and show who is gone next year ... let people see that they need to step up and take their place.

Right Size Your Jobs (slice and dice jobs into digestible bits)

60. **Slice and Dice.** Break down jobs into bite size pieces that people can take on. So a person can sincerely believe "I can't be a den leader" but if asked: "can you lead a game?" or "can you lead a hike?" ... they can say "yes". (See: Bobcat Adventure Plans, and Tiger/Wolf/Bear/Webelos *Streamlined* Adventure Plans.)

61. **Plan to Assign.** When you have an event, have specific jobs you assign to individuals ... that may mean you need to have sheets or cards telling the volunteers what to do, but once they lead and succeed, you've hooked 'em!
62. **Split Up Den Meeting Jobs.** Let the planner plan, the game leader game, the crafty one craft, the phone person take photos and video, the badge recognition helicopter mom put on recognition ceremonies ... get to know what people can do and assign away.
63. **Assign at Fun Events Too.** Yes, even if you can do it better and faster, make it your goal to assign bits of the fun event to others to lead, whether leading a game, or fun ways to do a hike, or simple instruction on a skill ... have some sort of easy "cheat sheet" that shows what you want the Parent to do ... let them lead and succeed!
64. **Split up Administrative Jobs.** Let someone call and poll the den, have someone collect paperwork, have someone track advancement, someone else coordinate fundraising ... don't make the Den Leader Do It All!!!
65. **Efficiencies of Scale.** Share Unit Committee Membership, and see if similar jobs can be covered in both a Troop and a Pack ... Troop and Pack Leaders can be "multiple" registered in the other unit, and many administrative jobs could be done over both, like applications, popcorn, camp cards, recharter, YPT, etc.
66. **Rotate Jobs / Unlimited Co-Leaders.** No single leader? Then get everyone together and assign events so everyone takes a turn. So if you have 8 parents of a "rank level" in Cub Scouts, have all 8 rotate who leads which Adventure.
67. **Protect Your Volunteers.** Avoid mission creep ... a den leader who volunteered for a den of 8 can't be asked to lead a den of 12 or 15 or 20 – that's just not fair, and you'll end up with no Den Leader and no Scouts.
68. **With Expectations Come Limits.** So, if 8 Tigers become 16 Wolves, without 2 DLs, 8 kids lose out ... you have to make it clear that if families want the full program, they have to step up – but they can do it, and we can help.
69. **Use Mentors.** The person who did it last time can often give advice ... and help make it better. Psst: this is another reason to keep Troop Leaders connected to your Pack, to lean on them: they've BTDT (Been There Done That).
70. **Use New Member Coordinators.** Some parents might not be able to be Den Leader or Cubmaster, but they might help you find the next one. Use "New Member Coordinators", or a team of them, to "welcome" people to your Pack events. Be sure they know how your Pack works, and how parents can be involved.

Right Size Your Program (making sure your program expands or contracts to avoid leader burnout – do what works)

71. **Less is More.** Every Pack is different. If yours has weekly den meetings, monthly pack party, plus a pack activity, and a leader meeting and social, with all leader roles filled and with assistants and successors – congratulations. If you're like many, you're always struggling to get enough good leaders. So, if you as a leader can do great meetings monthly, or a couple times a month, better to do that than burn out if you try to do too much. If/when you get enough help to meet more often, then do it.
72. **If It Hurts ... Stop Doing It.** Make your schedule work for your leaders to keep them happy. Easy example: if it's anxiety and struggle to "get the kids to rank" by a February Blue & Gold Banquet (usually the "high point" of the year and the biggest attendance), why not do your Banquet and Awards later in the Spring? If you're worried about being "late" for Scouting's birthday on February 8, don't worry, Scouting is kind, and friendly, and helpful. Scouting understands. Your Aunt Millie? She won't understand, so don't be late for her birthday!
73. **The Perfect Program is the Enemy of the Good Program.** Don't have "den meetings" if you don't have enough leaders to lead them (1 able leader and 1 Assistant for every den, max of about 8-10), because too big and too unplanned turns into chaos and failure and sadness. Until you get there, just do weekend fun family stuff (with mini activities you can give to parents to lead) ... if and when parents ask, "what about advancement" or "when do we get badges", then you know they want more of the Den Adventures and they may be willing to volunteer!

74. **Meetings are not as Important as Adventure.** Unless meetings are really well planned, Scouts will have more fun doing weekend activities, and you will likely have more parents attending ... and it is possible, even easy, to knock out Cub Scout Adventures just on weekends.
75. **Keep the “Outing” in “Scouting”.** Don’t let “Cub Scouting” become “Cub *Schooling*” by just scheduling indoor meetings. The Handbook Program is built to be outdoors, even if just a hike around the block or in the schoolyard.
76. **Make the Program Fun for Families.** Be sure parents and families are engaged. So don’t do a “Pack Meeting”, make it a “Pack *Party*”. Don’t have “Den Meetings”, have “Den *Adventures*” ... that’s what they are called in the Handbooks and Leader Guides. “Meetings” sounds like Roberts Rules of Order – bad. Party sounds awesome. Adventure is what we want.
77. **If it’s Not Fun ... Don’t Do It.** OK, for many Packs, official “in the room” Pack Meetings are hard to produce and may not be fun. If they are super fun, great! If not, make your Pack events “hands on” “go fun places” “do fun things” events. If you have enough other fun activities, nobody will miss pack “meetings”.

Other Tips (to Develop Leaders)

78. **Let People Do It Their Way – Even if they First Fail.** Yes, you can do it better, but you have to let people do it not as well as you ... be there to support them and let them grow into the best leader they can be ... nobody’s perfect, and “Do Your Best” is our goal.
79. **If They Fail – Don’t Flog Them!** Even if you did it better, much much better, the best ever ... keep it to yourself and don’t slam your successor. Find what they did great – praise that. If they need help, they can trust you and ask.
80. **Don’t Throw Your Wolf Leader to the Wolves.** Go with her to training ... & train the whole team. There’s lots of general info in training that won’t apply to your Pack ... *if you share it as a team event, you’ll have better results, because your team can collaborate about “how we do it” or “how we will do it”.*
81. **Praise in Public, Criticize in Private.** Don’t grouse about non-involved parents ... we want to praise the behavior we want to see; not recognize by criticism the behavior we don’t like. (But do ask them in private to help.)
82. **Identify Barriers to Joining.** Step back and observe ... is there some “barrier” to volunteering, either active or passive, which sends a signal of “help not wanted” even if the words stated are “help wanted”?
83. **Get the Right Job for the Right Person.** A person might be a terrific den leader, leading great program for 8 to 10 Scouts, but ... maybe not skilled at leading 8 to 10 den leaders. A leader has to know his limits.
84. **The Godfather.** OK, don’t be all heavy like the Godfather (who helped people out and said “*Someday, and that day may never come, I will call upon you to do a service for me*”), but if you do a solid favor for someone, you might be able to get a favor in return.

A Parable about Leadership Recruitment

A Scout Unit has four parents named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody.

There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody’s job.

Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it.

It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.