

The skills of leadership



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Ask any group of adults what they mean by 'leadership' and you will get a wide variety of answers, most of them imprecise. We use the word in a rather general way, as with the word character, assuming there is general agreement on its meaning.

Many ideas of leadership stem originally from military situations. Famous soldiers have written on the subject, giving their secrets for success. Qualities such as courage, wisdom, and a sense of justice are clearly important ideals - as necessary for running a Pack meeting as for winning a war! But how do you develop such qualities? Can they be learned as a result of training? Or do we only recruit the born Leader and provide Appointments sub Committees with a list of heavenly virtues, rejecting all who fall short of the archangel ideal? In Scouting we are clearly concerned with such qualities.

Leadership Styles

Different age ranges demand different approaches to Leadership if young people are to be encouraged to develop as individuals. This can be represented in very general terms by the diagram overleaf, changing from a completely directive style to non-directive as adult status is achieved. At birth the child is totally dependent on adults and takes no decision alone. By the time adulthood is reached people are expected to be able to take decisions for themselves. (naturally taking account of other people)

Looking at the accompanying diagram we can see that Scouting begins when a young person is at about the quarter-way mark. The different Scout age ranges demand different leadership styles. The adult gradually moves into the background as the youngster takes more decisions, until a completely non-directive style is appropriate as adult status is achieved.

In the Beaver Scout and Cub Scout Sections the Leaders still retain a large part of the responsibility for running the Pack, though allowing Cub Scouts and particularly the older ones, to take decisions where feasible. In the Scout Section, much of the running of the Troop is in the hands of the Scouts, under the guidance of the Scout Leader, whereas an Explorer Scout Unit should be almost entirely self-programming.

A Leader must, therefore, be able to use the range of styles appropriate to the Section. However, within each age range, no one style suits all situations. The diagram merely indicates a general trend. It shows the proportion of decisions taken by the Leader and the member - if each young person is to gain maximum benefit and develop as an individual.

The Leader's role

Part of the Leader's role in encouraging the development of young people is dependent on example - what the Leader is as a person. The Leader creates the atmosphere or ethos of the Colony, Pack, Troop, Unit, or Group. A great deal of research has been carried out into developing

Leadership skills. The general approach has been to analyse what Leaders do, to make them aware of this, and then to help them to improve performance.

First though, what do we mean by leader? Usually we refer to a specific appointment, such as Cub Scout Leader. We then expect that person to do certain things and behave in a particular way.

However, many situations arise demanding leadership, from the most appropriate person present, who may or may not be called Leader. Thus it is helpful to adopt a broader picture of leadership, applied to whoever is called upon to lead at a particular time.

Consider a typical situation. Five members of an Explorer Scout Unit have decided to go climbing in a month's time. Jim is the one most experienced in mountaineering and is accepted by the others as leader for this activity. How does he set about it?

He probably gets the group together to discuss the weekend. What do they want to do? Which area, which climb, perhaps? Having taken a decision on the task, they must then plan how to achieve it. This will involve the whole group. Jim will ensure they are working together as a team and that each individual is fully involved and wants to make the weekend a success.

Any activity can be considered in this way. The Leader's job is to ensure that these three areas are properly dealt with - the needs of the task, the group, and each individual. It will be helpful to consider each of these in more detail.

The task

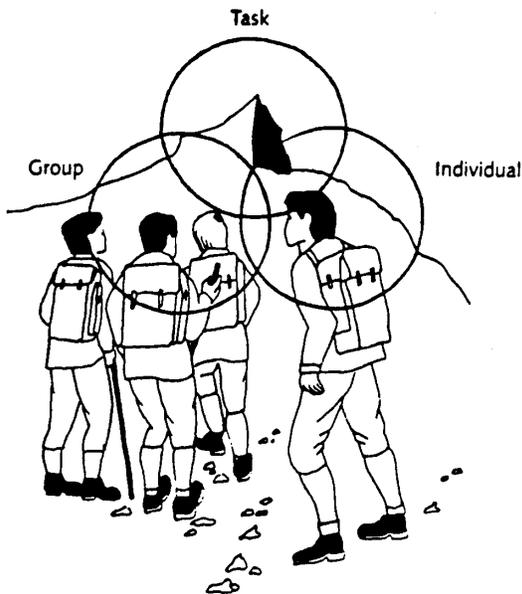
What exactly is the group trying to do? Then, how can it be achieved? What are the alternative methods? Shall we go by minibus or train, or in several cars? What equipment will be required?

What will the weather be like? What are the rules in Safety on Mountains? And so on.

The weekend must be carefully planned. Once there, further decision will be necessary. Perhaps the weather has changed or one of the party is feeling off colour, so that plans must be modified. Afterwards - was it successful? Could it have been improved? Is there any action that needs to be taken as a result? How many Scout activities fall short of their potential through inadequate planning? How often are the same mistakes repeated through failure to carry out an evaluation and apply the lessons learned?

The group

They have come together through their common interest in this case mountaineering. If they are to play a full part in ensuring the success of the activity they must feel it is their expedition or activity. This is, perhaps, one of the most important tasks of the Leader. This is done, for example, by ensuring they do the planning - the Leader just makes sure it is done. An encouraging word here and there, a casual question, is often all that is required. In other words, the Leadership is shared with them and the decisions are not made only by the Leader.



In planning this weekend, Jim must know what the capabilities of each member are, i.e. the total resources of the group. He must make sure that full use is made of these. During the weekend itself, he will see that everyone plays his intended part, he will co-ordinate the group as required. At the planning stages there may be some aspects which need to be discussed with the rest of the Unit. Jim will need to be able to represent the group's views and intentions, so that decisions can be taken based on the facts. In these various ways the Leader makes sure that the group works together as a team.

The individual

How about each individual in the Group? Each must know exactly what is going on, and preferably why. The Leader must then communicate this to each person without misunderstanding. The individual has feelings and requires encouragement - Jim must treat each as a person, not taking anyone for granted, but being aware of feelings, characteristics and needs. The individual may lack certain skills (for example in camping) - so Jim must help that

person to develop them either himself or by using someone else. Perhaps there are problems which only the Leader can help to solve. He will do this by talking and getting the individual to think them through (that is by counselling). Each individual will be affected by the Leader's personality. The Leader's example must, therefore, be the right one. How Jim responds, perhaps if there is a minor accident during the weekend, will often determine the reactions of the other members of the group. If he panics, they will do so, too. Taken together then, in these various ways, the Leader makes sure that each individual is playing a full part, and is able to do so, with encouragement.

Apply these ideas to an activity

All we have done so far is indicate how the Leader's response to the needs of the task, the group, and each individual determines the successful outcome of the activity. Try applying these ideas to any activity for which you have been responsible recently:

- Was the task clear, planned properly and evaluated afterwards?
- Was the group concerned fully involved and motivated? Did they work together as a team?
- Was each individual fully in the picture as to what he or she was meant to do? Was there encouragement to play a full part?

These three aspects of the Leader's role are obviously closely linked. They have only been highlighted in this way to help us identify more clearly what the Leader actually does, or should be doing. We can then see where we fall short and how we can improve. Particular skills (counselling for example) can be developed if required.

In addition, this approach can be used in training young people, for example, in incident journeys, not just to judge how well the Leader does but to help improve as a result. It is, perhaps, of most use to the Scout or Explorer Scout Leader as a mental checklist when working with the Troop or Unit, encouraging the member Leaders in any activity. It is also very relevant to Colony, Pack, and Troop meetings, in fact in any activity where you, as Leader are working with others, from the simplest event to the most complex expedition. Apply the following checklist to any recent activity and test its relevance for yourself.

Leadership checklist

Ask yourself the following questions for any recent activity for which you were responsible:

In achieving the task:

- Did I plan for it carefully with the group?
- Did I continuously evaluate how it was going, and again at the end did I take appropriate action?

In integrating and motivating the group:

- Did I share the Leadership with them (that is, were they fully involved in taking the decision)?
- Did I discover and use fully the resources of the group?
- Did I co-ordinate them so that they worked together effectively as a team?
- Did I ensure the group's interests were properly represented when discussing the activity with others outside the group?

In encouraging and supporting each individual:

- Did I communicate effectively with each one, both facts (for example, what to do) and values (for example, enthusiasm)?
- Was I fully sensitive to each member as a person, their characteristics and needs?
- Did I help each one to acquire any skills required, that is help each to learn?
- Did I encourage individuals to take decisions and overcome any personal difficulties themselves (that is counsel them)?
- Did I set the right example for them to follow?

If our Aim is important to us in Scouting, then providing effective Leadership to attain that Aim (task) is also important. This means developing the skills necessary to work with the members of the group which makes up our Leadership team, and with each individual. After all, Scouting is about people and helping them to grow. How we encourage this growth depends on our ability to work with people using the leadership skills suggested.