

# Intentional Retention

What Keeps Adult  
Scouters In  
and  
What Puts Them  
Out  
of Scouting



Rev. David Weyrick  
Great Trail Council  
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*Dedicated to Dr. Randy Pausch,  
who fought a battle with cancer  
and passed away as I was writing this booklet.  
He understood the importance of  
data and of Scouting.*

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Boy Scouts of America

# About the Author

A native of Akron, Ohio, David Weyrick is an Eagle Scout who worked on the camp staff at the Manatoc Scout Reservation for fourteen summers. He has been a Scouter for more than thirty years serving as a Unit Leader, Chaplain, Commissioner, and Trainer. David served as Lodge Chief and Section Chief in the Order of the Arrow, on Wood Badge staff, backpacked at Philmont, received the District Award of Merit, holds the Silver Beaver, and is a James E. West Fellow. He serves on the Area Four Committee and the Council Executive Board as Chairman of the Council's Camping Committee.

David is Pastor of the Stow Presbyterian Church and holds a Ph.D. in theological education. He enjoys cooking, whittling, hiking, Star Trek and is an accomplished musician. He and his wife, Beth, have two children and two wire-haired Dachshunds. He has previously authored a five-volume set on the history of Manatoc along with a book on leadership for Scouters.

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And some 339 Scout Leaders who took the time to fill out my survey and eat some steak and eggs at the weekly Leaders' Breakfast during summer camp at Camp Manatoc.

# Introduction

## Scientific Stuff

This booklet proves nothing. Let me explain.

Years ago I earned a Ph.D. That and a small fortune will buy you a cup of coffee at Starbucks. But, supposedly with a Ph.D. in hand, I now have the credentials to say something intelligent based on research. This booklet tries to say an intelligent thing or two about adult retention in Scouting based on some scientific research.

Many folks don't really understand what scientific research means. When they hear about it they think of Albert Einstein or some mad scientist in a lab with boiling test tubes. But, its simple. Scientific research uses what's known as the scientific method. That's just gathering observable, empirical, or measurable evidence in order to make an observation. And from that observation, we hope the researcher is able to say something intelligent.

Research tries to answer a question or solve a problem based on the information (we call it data) that has been gathered. A classic example is

historical research and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The researcher tries to answer such questions as was there more than one gunman and if so, where did they stand? The researcher gathers and studies information that is observable (film footage, photographs) in order to say something intelligent.

Candy companies conduct research when they develop a new product. They test it on kids and measure how many liked it and how many didn't. Get enough kids to say they like a product, based on the observable research, and it just might sell.

The film industry spends millions of dollars a year to get you to enjoy a movie. Films we see in theaters go through numerous test showings to gain peoples' opinions. These opinions (research) help the producers make changes to develop their final product which will make money.

But research doesn't prove anything, it can only infer. We could look at research in more detail and talk about theories and hypothesis but, trust me, research doesn't prove, it infers. That means the research draws a conclusion from the evidence.

An historical researcher can't prove there was more than one gunman in Dallas that fateful day in 1963. The researcher can only infer, draw a conclusion, from all his or her evidence.

That's why this booklet proves nothing. It's some research that infers several reasons why many adult leaders (a.k.a. Scouters) stay in Scouting and why some leave.

The idea for this booklet actually began in 2006 when I was involved in writing another booklet for the Great Trail Council called *ReTENTion: The Ten Defining Moments in a Scout's Life Where Retention is Critical and What You Can Do About It*. Leaders used the ideas in that booklet to help them keep boys in the program. Statistically we have seen improvement across the Council and in other Councils in our Area and Region.

But numbers reveal that Councils can do a better job retaining adult leaders. As I looked at the annual adult retention numbers in my own Council I asked myself, "Why do leaders stay in Scouting and why do they leave?" I had some ideas but nothing observable in order to infer some conclusions. So, I decided to conduct my own research that would be informative and able to shed some light on adult retention for this great organization.

A great deal of research uses sample groups. Candy companies sample boys and girls. Film companies sample teenagers, "soccer moms," as well as senior citizens.

My research would need a sample; a group with a common thread, that could provide information. Obviously, the common thread would have to be Scouters. I just couldn't ask people walking down the street, "Could you tell me why Scouters stay in Scouting?" If they had no Scouting experience, they wouldn't have a clue.

But, where could I get a good sized sample group of Scouters and what would I ask them? I thought about visiting all of the monthly District Roundtables but realized most met on nights I couldn't make because of my church responsibilities. I thought about visiting unit meetings each week but that would involve more time than I could give.

I finally decided my group would be those Scouters who attended summer camp at our Council's Camp Manatoc. As a member of the Council's Executive Board and as a Council Chaplain, I could easily meet with leaders at the weekly leaders' breakfast during the seven weeks of summer camp.

But, what would I ask them and how would I gather the information? A one page survey would be easy and if I designed it correctly could be filled out quickly and provide me with enough empirical information to generate some conclusions.

So, after receiving permission, I circulated the survey which asked:

Number of years as an adult leader  
Gender  
Year of birth  
Previous youth involvement in Scouting  
Eagle Scout  
Three reasons why they stay in Scouting  
Three reason why they believe Scouters leave

Each Thursday morning during the seven weeks of the 2008 summer camping season at Camp Manatoc, the surveys were passed out and almost every leader returned one. That produced a great deal of data for me to generate my conclusions.

The booklet is mostly divided into two sections: what keeps leaders in (eight conclusions) and what puts them out (six conclusions). It just so happened that's where the numbers fell. There where almost fifty reasons given in the surveys but most were just mentioned once or twice. I paid attention to the ones that received more "mentionings" (if that makes sense). Each conclusion chapter contains some objective findings from the surveys and then some comments.

**"There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something.  
You certainly usually find something, if you look, but it is not  
always quite the something you were after."**

J.R.R. Tolkien,  
author of *The Lord of the Rings*

**"Jumping to conclusions is a dangerous exercise."**

Ancient Proverb

# **The Sample Group**

## **More Than Three Hundred**

I had the honor of asking 339 Scouters to help me offer some insight into retention of adults within the Boy Scouts of America. Of those 339, 20 (5.8%) were female and 319 (94.2%) were male.

About one third of the Scouters (32.4%) had been leaders from one to five years while another third (34.2%) had been leaders for six to ten years. That meant that two-thirds (66.6%) of the Scouters, had been leaders for ten years or less.

About one quarter of them (24.1%) had eleven to twenty years of leadership, 5.4% had twenty-one to thirty years experience, and 3.8% had more than thirty-one years in leadership.

They ranged in age from 18 (born in 1990) to 70 (born in 1938). The average age of the Scouters was about 46.

But if we break that down, we find the average birth year of those who had been leaders from one to five years was 1968. And, as you would expect, as the years of leadership experience

increased, so did the average age of the leaders. Average birth year of those with six to ten years experience was 1961; those with eleven to twenty years was 1957; twenty-one to thirty was 1950; and more than thirty-one years was 1947.

Almost two-thirds of the men (61.1%) were Cub Scouts and about the same (62.6%) were Boy Scouts. Those who were Explorers or Venture Scouts were 12.5%. Interesting that almost one-third of the men are Eagle Scouts.

Even more interesting and something to note is that 75% of the female leaders were Girl Scouts.

These conclusions are based on Boy Scout leaders' opinions.

That's enough for now. Let me present my conclusions

# WHAT KEEPS THEM IN They Want to Help Boys

## Conclusion #1

As I was collecting the data from the surveys, it didn't take long to realize that helping boys was the top reason these leaders stayed in Scouting. Almost two-thirds of them listed this in one way or another.

Perhaps the largest emphasis within this "helping boys" theme was an opportunity to guide them into manhood. The comments reflected that leaders wanted to assist boys in their patriotic, selfless, spiritual journeys into adulthood. Some called this "guiding," others "mentoring," and others "leading."

Some of the more specific comments were:

"I enjoy seeing the smile on a boy's face when he finally figures something out."

"If we don't help our boys into manhood the right way, who will? The culture? His video game?"

“I want to be a part of a young man’s life and help him become a responsible God loving adult who cares about this country.”

“To help the boys learn the real, important things that make a difference.”

“I really enjoy helping boys learn new things and then seeing them grow up to become good men.”

If leaders stay in Scouting to help boys, then how do Districts and Councils lift this up as a priority and use this as a way to both attract and retain Scouters?

Perhaps the best bet is to turn it around. Rather than emphasizing the idea that leaders want to help boys, emphasize the understanding that boys need help; especially on their way to manhood. In today’s technological, fast paced culture, our boys desperately need their fathers and other men to guide them up into an authentic manhood.

Unfortunately, masculinity is sometimes looked down upon and also vilified because of the repression men have historically put on women. At times, it seems to sound politically incorrect to talk about leading a boy into manhood. But, as the one leader wrote, “If we don’t help our boys into manhood the right way, who will?”

Even the female leaders surveyed understood this. Their comments included:

“I love Scouting. I believe in it. I see the great good it does for the boys.”

“Boys need these experiences to become better men.”

“The values the program imparts helps them on their way to manhood.”

“A boy can become a better person.”

Perhaps Gerald Ford, 38<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and an Eagle Scout, said it best, “Boy, do we need Scouting!”

**"One hundred years from now it will not matter what your bank account was, the sort of house you lived in, or the kind of car you drove; but the world may be different because you were important in the life of a boy."**

**Anonymous**

**(On a card I've carried in my wallet since 1981.)**

**"See things from the boys' point of view."**

**Sir Robert Baden-Powell**

**Founder of Scouting**

# They Want to Be With Their Sons

## Conclusion #2

Almost one-third of the leaders surveyed said that they remained in Scouting because they wanted to be with their sons. They became leaders because their sons joined a pack or troop.

If we look at that a bit more we find that 40% of the leaders with one to five years of experience expressed that as did 44% of the leaders with five to ten years. That percentage dropped substantially when compared to the leaders with more experience.

Looking at it even more, we see very little percentage change from the number one reason (Helping Boys) to this number two reason (Being With Their Sons) among those with less leadership experience. We could infer that for up to two-thirds of our leaders, being with their sons was about as important a reason to remain in Scouting as helping all the boys.

Among the more experienced leaders, being with their sons was not nearly as important as helping boys. As a matter of fact, among the eight conclusion that I am presenting, this one ranked

the lowest for the leaders with eleven or more years experience. That's understandable because the more experienced leaders' son are grown and no longer in the program or are leaders themselves. It also ranked low among the female Scouters at 15%

Districts and Councils need to understand the importance of the father-son connection and promote that from the start of a boy's tenure in Scouting.

For some reason, this idea of father-son seems to be diminishing in our culture. Before I was a Boy Scout, I was in the YMCA Indian Guides. That was a program for fathers and sons which used the slogan, "Pals Forever" and its purpose was to foster the understanding and companionship of dad and son. Each group (troop) was called a "tribe," and my dad and I were in the Otoe Tribe. There was a similar program for fathers and daughters called Indian Princesses.

Back in 2003, the national office of the YMCA, cowered to political correctness by ending these programs after almost eighty years. All references to Native-Americans were eliminated and the new program became the "Adventure Guides." Tribes became "circles" and the purpose of the new organization is "to strengthen the relationship between a parent and a child." Gender specific programming (fathers and

sons) is no longer offered and gender grouping (all boys or all girls) is now one of four options for the circles.

I am sure Adventure Guides are doing some great things and I have no doubt parent/child relationships are strengthened. My point is that if up to two-thirds of the men leaders state that one of the main reasons they remain as a leader is to spend time with their sons, and if we want to retain these leaders, then we need to capitalize on that and promote the father-son bonding that can happen in Scouting.

My wife and I have this amazing collection of family videos we've taken. There have been some classic moments captured like vacations, graduations, birthdays, and holidays. But there is one moment captured on tape that is very meaningful to me. My wife took video of me and my son Joshua when he was literally just hours old. I was sitting in a hospital room in a chair holding him and my wife asked me, "So, tell us about Joshua's Boy Scout days that lie ahead." I looked into the camera and smiled.

My son and I have shared some great Scouting memories and I will forever cherish them. And now, as he is preparing for college and adulthood, I realize that these experiences created an everlasting bond. I have had the opportunity to

work and camp with other men who have had similar experiences with their sons as well.

But what about the boy who has no father or a transparent father or a father who just doesn't care? Easy - the father of one becomes like a father to the others.

For years I was the Advancement Chairman for a troop. I will never forget one Life Scout Board of Review for a young man whose father had tragically died when he was young and had a rocky relationship with his step-father. There were five or six adult leaders conducting the review, all of whom had worked with this boy for years.

When I asked him at the Board of Review, "What has Scouting done for you?" tears came to his eyes. Through his weeping he told us how much he appreciated the men of the troop being like fathers to him. I think all the men were tearing up a bit as well. It was a proud moment for us when he became an Eagle Scout two years later.

# They Want to Have Fun

## Conclusion #3

It's been said that Scouting is where the man in the boy meets the boy in the man. One-quarter of the leaders said one of the important reasons they stay in is because Scouting is fun.

Again, we find an interesting breakdown in the numbers. Fun didn't seem to be as important to those with ten years or less experience but it seemed to be more important for those with more experience. Remember, sons in Scouting was a very big reason for most of the younger leaders to remain. But, as the son grows up or moves on, those adults who continue to remain capitalize on the fun they have.

The data suggests that the older the leader, the more the fun aspect became important. Up to 76% of the leaders with more than twenty-one years experience said fun was one of their main reasons for remaining.

Yet, only 15% of the female leaders mentioned it and, of the eight conclusions I present, it ranked next to last among those with six to ten years experience.

Districts and Councils need to shift adult retention thinking “from the son to the fun” as leaders grow “older” in Scouting tenure.

I come from the opposite, however. I joined Boy Scouts when I was eleven, became an Eagle Scout at seventeen and an adult leader at eighteen. I stayed active as a leader until I was thirty-five. Having no boy in the program at that time, I remained active because it was fun. I worked many summers on the camp staff because it was fun. Sure, it was hard work at times, but it was fun. I took Woodbadge at Philmont and it was fun. I ran District Roundtables, taught training, and served as a District Commissioner because it was fun.

But I dropped out of Scouting for a few years because it was no longer fun. That’s a story of its own and I’ll explain more later in this booklet. I gave it another chance and returned when my son joined Cub Scouts and am having fun again.

Remember, the Founder of Scout, Robert Baden-Powell once said, “Scouting is a game with a purpose.” It is the presence or absence of fun that keeps leaders in or puts them out.

But what is it? Fun for one person may not be fun for another. Swimming is not fun for me. Playing euchre is not fun for me. And, I’ll admit it, I’m a wimp because camping in tents in zero degrees has never been fun for me.

But, whittling a neckerchief slide is fun to me. A rousing campfire with lots of stories and songs is fun. So is hiking and leading a Vespers service.

Fun is relative and we must not only be providing a balance of fun activities for the boys, we must also provide a variety of fun for adults as well. We must provide enough programming and adventure that even the adults can come away saying, “I had a great time.”

Here’s a preview into the next section of the book. One reason adults leave Scouting is because of conflict; the “anti-fun” poison.

**"Work like you don't need money,  
Love like you've never been hurt,  
And dance like no one's watching."**

**Anonymous**

**"If it's not fun, you're not doing it right."**

**One of my Woodbadge Leaders**

**Philmont, 1981**

# They Want to Camp

## Conclusion #4

Nature's calling! A quarter of the leaders said that one of the reasons they remain in Scouting is because of the camping. And it's not just that they want to provide opportunities for the Scouts to camp, it's that the leaders want to camp, too.

If we look at the break-down of years of experience and the importance of camping we find that it ran highest, almost one-third, of those with eleven to twenty years of experience. Only two females leaders noted it and we see camping drop to 11% of those with twenty or more years experience. I can see why. Figuring that these leaders were born in 1950 and earlier, the ground gets harder and harder the older you get!

When I refer to camping, I'm also talking about the total aspect of camping and high adventure. That includes backpacking, canoeing, repelling, white water, and other outdoor programs. The leaders enjoy these activities as much as the boys.

Here were some of the leaders' comments:

"I just enjoy being in the outdoors."

"It's about camping, camping, and more camping."

"There's something about camping that keeps calling me back."

There's an old saying among leaders, "Three-fourths of Scouting is outing." Sad thing is, you don't hear it much any more because the word "outing" has some cultural overtones. But it's true. The majority of our programming should be outdoor oriented in all four seasons.

There is a book that I think every Scouter should read called *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv. The author's premise is that today's kids are disconnected from the natural world. He sighted a 2002 study (research) that reported eight-year-olds could identify Pokemon characters more easily than they could name an otter, beetle, or oak tree.

Louv demands a return to an awareness of and appreciation for the natural world. He explains that as children's connections to nature diminish and the social, psychological, and spiritual implications become apparent, nature (camping) can offer therapy for such conditions as depression, obesity, and attention deficit disorder.

He also lifts up the vital importance of parents and others (like Scouters) helping kids (like our Scouts) experience the natural world more deeply and find the joy of being connected to it in the process.

Districts and Councils should be jumping on this information and sharing it with leaders by saying, “Not only as a Scout leader do you get to go camping and enjoy all kinds of outdoor adventures, but you also influence the next generation in the great classroom nature provides.”

**"To These Things You Must Return"**

Gate at Camp Manatoc

Quote from *The Spell of Marnoc*

by Rev. David Atwater

**"Why so sad, son?"**

**"Summer camp is over and we have to go home."**

**"Want to know something?"**

**"Sure."**

**"I'm sad, too."**

Conversation with my son  
driving home from a week at summer camp

# They Value the Values

## Conclusion #5

More than 16% of the leaders mentioned this as a reason they remain in Scouting. As one leader said, “The values of Scouting are what America needs right now.”

Interestingly, as the years of experience increased so did the percentage of those who recognized the values of Scouting. But, the number to pay attention to, in my opinion, is among the female leaders where 75% of them mentioned values as a reason they remain. It was their number one reason!

The National Council of the Boy Scouts of America states that “Scouting is a values-based program with its own code of conduct. The Scout Oath and Law help instill the values of good conduct, respect for others, and honesty. Scouts learn skills that will last a lifetime, including basic outdoor skills, first aid, citizenship skills, leadership skills, and how to get along with others.”

If we were to sum up the values that Scouting teaches in one word, I think the best word

would be integrity. Or, if you're looking for two words it's character-building. This is vital to our development and I'm in good company when saying that.

Norman Cousins, journalist, author, professor, and world peace advocate, once explained that the words "hard" and "soft" are generally used by medical students to describe the contrasting nature of courses. Courses like biochemistry, physics, pharmacology, anatomy, and pathology are labeled "hard" but subjects like medical ethics, philosophy, history, and patient-physician relationships tend to be labeled "soft" or "easy."

But, Cousins explained, a decade or two after graduation there tends to be an inversion. That which was supposed to be hard turns out to be soft, and vice versa. His point was that the knowledge base of medicine is constantly changing, as is our technology, but the soft subjects, especially those that have to do with intangibles, turn out in the end to be of enduring value.

As I was conducting this research, *USA Today* published an interview with the Chief Scout Executive Robert Mazzuca (July 28, 2008). Mazzuca was asked, "When people of business discuss leadership, they use words such as vision, passion, charisma. Why do the Scouts use these 12

words: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent?”

He said, “Charisma and other personality traits may determine how far up the ladder you go, but the 12 points of the Scout Law define your character. If you don't have integrity, you're not a good leader no matter how charismatic. We run the risk of becoming irrelevant if we don't adapt to things that attract kids today, but we run the risk of losing our way if we abandon the principles, which is the Scout Law.”

Education in our nation is now grasping the importance of what is known as value-based education. Values education places the search for meaning and purpose at the heart of the educational process. It acknowledges that the recognition, worth, and integrity of all involved in one's life and those foster positive relationships and quality in education.

What goes around comes around. It's true. America is returning to the values that Scouting never left.

**"Scouting is about building self-esteem through setting goals and meeting them, working individually and with others. Scouting's 'Big Idea', from the beginning, can be described in one compound word: character-building."**

**Rick Perry, Governor of Texas**

**author of *On My Honor***

***Why the American Values of the Boy Scouts of America Are Worth Fighting For***

**"It's not about you."**

**Pastor Rick Warren**

**author of *The Purpose Driven Life***

# **It's About the Program**

## **Conclusion #6**

Scouting has been in this country for one hundred years. Although the uniform may have changed and requirements have evolved to meet the needs of boys over the decades, the program remains the same.

Boy Scouting provides a program that offers effective character, citizenship, and personal fitness training for youth. It develops American citizens who are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit; have a high degree of self-reliance as evidenced in such qualities as initiative, courage, and resourcefulness and have personal values based on a belief in God. We have the desire and skills to help others and understand the principles of the American social, economic, and governmental systems. We take pride in our American heritage and understand our nation's role in the world as well as have a respect for the basic rights of all people. Ultimately, our program concentrates on preparing boys to participate in and give leadership to American society.

No wonder the leaders with over thirty years experience mentioned the program as the number two reason they remained in Scouting.

I'm one of those with more than thirty years experience as a leader and, for me, its about the program. It's the main thing and the main thing is to do the main thing.

As I am working on this booklet the 2008 Summer Olympics are being held in China. Since 1912, the Americans have dominated the 4 x 100 Meters Relay in track and field. But in 2008, our runners (both the men and women) didn't even make it past the preliminaries for one simple reason; both teams dropped the baton. They forgot the basic mission. The runners were more interested in their own individual times rather than getting the baton to the finish line.

It's easy to get sidetracked and drop the baton. It's easy to forget about the importance of the program. Drop the baton and the entire team is disqualified. Drop the baton of good program in your unit and everyone suffers, especially the boys.

# They Want the Fellowship

## Conclusion #7

The leaders with ten or less years experience ranked this as seventh. But, the leaders with eleven to twenty years ranked it second. Again, it's that shift of importance once the son is no longer a Scout. Remember I mentioned a shift from "the son to the fun" as a way to retain leaders after their sons leave. It's also a shift from "the kid to the kith."

Kith is an older word that refers to familiar friends. Leaders whose sons are no longer Scouts enjoy having fun and enjoy being with the other leaders who have become their close friends. They have created memories and a real bond of fellowship which make it worth staying in the program for. Leaders commented:

"I can't imagine where I would be without the support of the other leaders who are my closest friends."

"We have more fun together than the boys!"

"Not only are these guys my fellow leaders but they are my good friends."

I was on vacation with my family last summer in the Adirondacks in upper New York State. We drove close to the top of one of the highest peaks known as Whiteface and decided to walk a one mile path to the summit. The view was breath taking and an amazing 360 degree panorama of the beauty of that area.

While on the summit, I noticed a man with a jacket with the name of his Order of the Arrow Lodge. I went over, introduced myself, and we talked Scouting while my wife and daughter just rolled their eyes. They've experienced this before, many times; dad talks Scouting even with total strangers.

The bond of Scouting is strong. This bond leads to some fantastic fellowship that so many leaders enjoy.

# The Eagles Want to Give Back

## Conclusion #8

Although this one came in eighth, never underestimate its importance. If we were to look at the total number of surveys and then take out all the Eagle Scouts, (about a third of them) “giving back” wasn’t hardly a blip on the radar. But, it ranked number one among the Eagle Scouts with 75% of them saying that they stay in because they want to give back. Two Eagle Scout leaders summed it up well:

“My Scoutmaster gave so much of his time and taught me to give as well.”

“I have to give back to what Scouting has given me.”

Bottom line - most Eagle Scouts understand the importance of service. I can vouch for that. Scouting taught me the importance of service to God, country, and others. I stay in because many people gave of their time and energy to help me. They saw the “diamond in the rough” and didn’t give up on me even when I wanted to give up on myself. Thus, I became an Eagle Scout at

seventeen years and eleven months. But I made it because others valued me and gave of themselves to help me.

Even this booklet is another way I can give back.

**"He who serves his fellows is, of all his fellows, greatest"**

Motto of the Order of the Arrow

**"Earning the Eagle Scout rank is the only thing you can list on your resume at 50 that you did when you where 14."**

Dr. Randy Pausch,  
*The Last Lecture*

# WHAT PUTS THEM OUT

## Their Sons Quit

### Conclusion #1

The next six conclusions deal with why Scout leaders leave the program. The conclusions are based on the opinions of those who are still in and not those who are out. Also, these data were across the board in regard to years of experience.

Almost 60% of the leaders recognized that when a son leaves a unit where his parent is a leader, for whatever reason, there is a good chance the adult will leave as well. As one leader stated, “If you’ve been taking your kid to Scouts for the last seven or eight years, who wants to drive to a meeting alone?” Good point.

So that puts the emphasis on doing what we can to keep the boy in the program. I think it’s safe to say that if you keep the boy and you keep the adult as well.

I mentioned the 2006 booklet from my Council (Great Trail in Akron, Ohio): *ReTENtion: The Ten Defining Moments in a Scout’s Life Where*

*Retention is Critical and What You Can Do About It.* In it, we presented ten areas or moments in a boy's progress from Cubs through Boy Scouts where retention is critical. If you've not read the booklet, let me present them here in a nutshell sort of way.

## **1. THE FIRST THREE MONTHS IN TIGER CUBS**

Here's a National Scouting statistic: within the first three months of joining Tiger Cubs, we will lose 50% of the boys.

Here are two reasons. For starters, there is no second chance at a first impression. If a Cub Pack is disorganized and poorly run, both the boys and their parents will run far away from the Pack!

Second, the program can be boring and irrelevant. We have contacted departing parents and boys to ask why they left. "Simple," they say, "It was boring, irrelevant, and disorganized."

## **2. THE FIRST TWO MONTHS AS A WOLF CUB**

If we can lose 50% of the boys within the first three months of joining Tiger Cubs, we can lose half again once they get into Wolves if the program is boring, irrelevant, and disorganized. That means there is great potential to lose 75% of the boys in less than 15 months.

## **3. THE FIRST CAMPING EXPERIENCE**

Boys who have enjoyable camping experiences will stay in. For many boys, the first camp out will be their first time away from home. Even if mom or dad is there, it will still be a new experience filled with some wonder and some fear.

It must be fun and it must make so much of an impression on a boy that he will want to go on many more camping experiences.

## **4. THE MOVE TO WEBELOS**

More than two-thirds of the Webelos Scouts who begin the Webelos program in the 4th grade will not be a part of the program by the beginning of the 5th grade.

That means that if one hundred boys join Tigers, perhaps ten will actually move on into Boy Scouts. So, getting a boy into Webelos is one thing, keeping him in the program is another.

## **5. WEBELOS TROOP VISITATION**

To receive the Arrow of Light, a Webelo must (with his Den) visit at least one Boy Scout Troop meeting, and one Boy Scout outdoor activity. This visit is one of his gateways to Boy Scouting.

## **6. WEBELO TO SCOUT CROSSOVER AND OTHER RITES OF PASSAGE**

Rites of passage are critical for an adolescent boy. They have a need for transition from one life stage to another. This has been ritualized and acknowledged by civilizations for thousands of years.

When a boy is not provided with rites of passage to make each of his transitions through adolescence, he will create rites of passage on his own. He might start smoking and figure he is now grown up. He may seek out a gang and do things to be part of the group.

There are several rites of passage within Scouting that are vital to a boy: Webelos Crossovers, camp ceremonies, Order of the Arrow, Blue and Golds, and Court of Honors. These must be well done and lift up the accomplishments of the boy.

## **7. THE FIRST TROOP MEETINGS**

Boys are, by nature “pack animals.” Older boys do not naturally gravitate to younger boys. They socialize with their peers. That’s just the way it is.

Troop meetings can become very cliquish where the various “packs” hang out together and tend to ignore the others. Brand new Boy Scouts can feel alienated and remain shy. They can quickly “slip through the cracks” and become frustrated from being the “low man on the totem pole.” These feelings can cause a boy to lose interest and never come back.

## **8. FIRST TROOP CAMPOUT AND FIRST SUMMER CAMP**

Camping is vital to Scouting. We know that 51% of Boy Scouts drop out from Troops with five or fewer campouts a year. But, only 15% drop from Troops that camp every month.

Boy Scout camping is different from Cub Scout camping. It takes a while for the newer Boy Scouts and their parents to figure this out. A boy run, Boy Scout camping experience may not be the prettiest sight to see, but it is fulfilling the goal of developing leaders and helping boys become men of integrity.

If the first camping experiences are negative, boys will quickly leave.

## **9. THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS**

Now it becomes tougher to keep a boy in the program. His social world is changing and so is he. He is being heavily influenced by his peers and almost overnight he is becoming interested in girls.

## **10. THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS**

With high school comes activities like band, sports, theater, clubs, student council, dances, you name it. A boy (now a young man) needs to be involved in those extra-circular activities.

Leaders cannot fault their older Scouts for being involved in those activities. They need to be thankful that their young men are engaged in these because they are, hopefully, demonstrating leadership. That's our goal!

If our Scouts are not leaders and young men of integrity, then we have missed the mark. This is a time where a boy is testing what he has learned and hopefully using his skills to better his team or band or club.

# **They Don't Have Time**

## **Conclusion #2**

One third of the leaders recognized this as a big factor why leaders leave. And in today's culture that's a fact of life.

I can remember a science class when I was in college in the middle 70's. The professor was talking about technology and was excited about the fact that with all the new technology that was coming we would have a twenty-five hour work week. That meant we would have all sorts of time to enjoy leisure activities.

The exact opposite has happened. All that technology has made our work week longer and given us less time than we had before. But yet, a minute is still a sixty seconds and an hour is still sixty minutes.

Technology isn't the problem, the management of our time and priorities is. I think Scout Districts and Councils need to offer time management sessions in training courses. They need to make meetings as effective as possible. They need to not waste leaders' time.

What's done is done. Those that have left are no doubt gone. But those leaders who are still in Scouting and are perhaps on the verge of quitting because of time need to be encouraged to do what they can to manage the time they have.

One of my heroes is Randy Pausch who passed away as I was working on this booklet. I never met him but was intrigued by his *The Last Lecture*, given after he found out he was dying of pancreatic cancer.

Since time was critical to him and his family, he gave a lecture on time management. A Life Scout as a boy, he offered several ideas on how we can save time. Here are ten of his ideas:

1. Time must be managed like money. Bad time management will give you stress.
2. People can waste up to two hours a day because they have messy desks, can't find things, miss appointments, are unprepared for meetings, and are not able to concentrate.
3. Managing your time well will make you successful in all areas of your life.
4. Create "To Do" lists and break things down into small steps. Do the ugliest or toughest thing first.
5. Keep your work space clear.
6. Focus on one thing at a time
7. Touch each piece of paper once

8. Touch each piece of email once and empty you inbox everyday.
9. Learn to say “No.”
10. Keep phone calls short and to the point.

You don't find time for important things like family and Scouting, you make it.

**"Don't count every hour in the day,  
make every hour in the day count."**

*Anonymous*

**"The only reason for time is so that  
everything doesn't happen at once."**

Albert Einstein quotes (18979-1955)

Physicist, Nobel Prize winner

# They Experienced Conflict

## Conclusion #3

At least 25% of the leaders recognized conflict as a reason their fellow Scouters left the movement. This one breaks my heart because I have written and spoken on this extensively and don't know if its made any difference. I do know that conflict is the anti-fun poison!

In my book about leadership, *As Iron Sharpens Iron*, I wrote that people enjoy conflict about as much as they enjoy hemorrhoids. Conflict is real and a pain! Every leader has to deal with it from time to time. You can't be a leader without running into conflict.

What is it? Webster says it's a "struggle, battle, an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals; opposition between two simultaneous but incompatible feelings; battle, fight, engagement; a hostile meeting of opposing military forces in the course of a war; a state of opposition between persons or ideas or interests; an incompatibility of dates or events; dispute,

difference of opinion; a disagreement or argument about something important.”

Which of these could apply to scouting?

How about all of them! Many units can't deal with conflict and we lose good leaders who either cause it or have given up on trying to deal with it.

Can units change and improve their attitudes? Can they learn to grapple with controversy more skillfully and productively?

Yes! But will they?

Here are some items that can help:

1. Don't be afraid of conflict. Deal with it.
2. State your concerns with honesty. In my Christian circles we call that “speaking the truth in love.”
3. Don't assume you know all the facts and you are totally right.
4. Take steps to initiate face to face conversation.
5. Don't use angry language.
6. Work on possible solutions by placing many options on the table.
7. Don't pass the buck. Own what you say.

# They Burned Out

## Conclusion #4

Scouting, churches, and other non-profit volunteer organizations can have something in common; they can shoot their wounded. As wonderful and helpful as an organization can be, hard working volunteers get stretched way too thin and end up leaving because they are tired.

We ask them to do just one more thing or we tell them they are the only one who can do this or that job. And as soon as they do something well, we pile more on and stretch them like a rubber band. But eventually, the rubber band breaks.

By definition, burnout is a the term for long-term exhaustion and diminished interest, usually in the work or volunteer context. Burnout can be the result of too much stress, but it isn't the same as too much stress. Stress is what happens when there is too much; too many pressures or too much conflict that demands much of you physically and emotionally. But, you handle it and get through it. If you're stressed out you can still see a light at the end of the tunnel.

In contrast burnout is ultimately about not enough. Being burned out means feeling empty, not enough motivation, and not enough caring about yourself or those around you. Too much stress can tip the scale into burnout. And good people usually stop doing what they love doing when they are burned out.

If unit leaders would recognize when their comrades are on their way to burning out, we can save some of our walking wounded. Burnout doesn't happen overnight and it's difficult to stop once someone is in the middle of it. So it's vital to recognize the signs of burnout among Scouters.

Here are some things to watch for:

- Detachment
- Isolation
- Irritability
- Snide remarks
- Frustration
- Failure
- Despair
- Cynicism
- Apathy
- Forgetfulness
- Non-communication
- Avoidance
- Lack of commitment
- Lack of participation

The Mayo Clinic has studied this and has inferred that we may be more prone to burnout if:

1. We identify so strongly with work that we lack a reasonable balance between work and our personal life.
2. We try to be everything to everyone.
3. We work in the helping professions, such as health care, counseling, teaching or law enforcement (read Scouting).

Sounds like a lot of Scouters I know, including me! The Clinic also suggests asking questions to see if you are experiencing signs and symptoms of burnout.

Ask these of your Scouting participation.

1. Do you find yourself being more cynical, critical and sarcastic?
2. Have you lost the ability to experience joy?
3. Do you drag yourself into work or your volunteering and have trouble getting started once you arrive?
4. Have you become more irritable and less patient with co-workers, customers, clients, or kids?
5. Do you feel that you face many insurmountable barriers?
6. Do you feel that you lack the energy to be consistently productive?

7. Do you no longer feel satisfaction from your achievements?
8. Do you have a hard time laughing at yourself?
9. Are you tired of your co-workers asking if you're OK?
10. Are you self-medicating using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel?
11. Have your sleep habits or appetite changed?
12. Are you troubled by headaches, neck pain, or lower back pain?

I mentioned earlier in this booklet that I dropped out of Scouting for a few years. I lost the fun. But it wasn't until I came back that I realized I dropped out because I was burned out.

I had lost the balance between my Scouting work and my family and still remember when I reached my breaking point. I was summer Camp Director at our Camp Butler living in the director's cabin with my wife and our two small kids. My wife would drive to work in Akron everyday and take the kids to a sitter. They returned by supper.

I can remember the evening well. I had promised my three-year-old daughter that she and daddy were going to take a canoe ride. We talked about it at breakfast and she was excited. Just as

we were heading to the lake, a Scoutmaster approached me with a problem. It needed my attention and I went with the leader and my daughter was in tears. I returned to the cabin after dark because it took much longer than expected. In retrospect, it was a troop problem and not a camp problem.

But my problem was that I broke my daughter's heart and then I was the one who broke down in tears. I was out of balance and at that time the camp was no place for a young family and a guy who was trying to be all things to all people.

I had become stretched way too thin in Scouting: District Commissioner, Camp Director, Unit Leaders, and Trainer. They took a toll and I became critical and sarcastic. The fun was gone. I had to drag myself to meetings and had become irritable and impatient. The energy was zapped.

So, I left. I didn't drop out, I just left. At the end of summer camp, I stopped Scouting and had no desire to ever come back. Living testimony of burn out!

But, I did come back. So, maybe those good Scouters who left will as well

**"Burnout is nature's way of telling you, you've been going through the motions your soul has departed; you're a zombie, a member of the walking dead, a sleepwalker."**

Sam Keen,  
American author, professor, philosopher, and  
contributing editor of *Psychology Today*

**"Hey, let's be careful out there."**

Sergeant Phil Esterhaus,  
*Hill Street Blues*

# **Their Job Changed**

## **Conclusion #5**

About 11% of the leaders recognized this to be an issue why we lose Scouters. There isn't a whole lot we can do about it. If somebody's hours change or he takes on a new job, there's not much you can say.

But, what you can say is important! You can reassure that leader that anytime he or she can help, then by all means, help.

It's like the older Scout who is in high school and busy with school activities. He is reassured that the troop runs twelve months a year and whenever he can attend he is welcomed.

The majority of employment changes are in two areas: shift change or new job. I think you just roll with it and remind the leader that there are plenty of campouts and others activities where help is needed.

**"The best way to appreciate your job is  
to imagine yourself without one."**

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900),  
Irish Poet, Novelist, Dramatist and Critic

**"Choose a job you love and you will never have to work  
a day in your life."**

Confucius (551-479BC)  
China's most famous teacher and philosopher

# They Got Fed Up With “Politics” or Lack of Support

## Conclusion #6

About 10% of the leaders recognized this as an important reason why we lose Scouters. Many included comments when mentioning this:

“They got fed up with a lack of interest and lack of support from the District.”

“You can only put up with the shenanigans of the Council for so long and then you vote with your feet.”

“The District wasn’t there when we needed help.”

“Too many Council games and politics.”

As someone who has worked at the District, Council, and Area levels, I’ve heard comments like these before. And some are well deserved. I remember when I was a District Commissioner years ago and the Commissioner staff let a troop down. We didn’t offer the support we should have and it caused a good leader to leave.

As one who has attended and taught many training sessions from the unit level to the national level, I can tell you that unit satisfaction is top priority. I can tell you that tough issues are discussed and District personnel, mostly Commissioners, are trained to be able to handle unit problems. Most Commissioners I know hate hearing that a unit didn't feel supported. It's the same at the Council level.

But I guess it's like life itself, some days you get it right and some days you don't. The goal is to get it right more than you get it wrong!

Bottom line - we keep preaching and teaching about unit service. I know I will.

**"Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit."**

Conrad Hilton (1887-1979)  
American Hotelier

# Summary

There were 339 Scouters surveyed. About one third of the Scouters (32.4%) had been leaders from one to five years while another third (34.2%) had been leaders for six to ten years. That meant that two-thirds (66.6%) of the Scouters, had been leaders for ten years or less.

About one quarter of them had eleven to twenty years of leadership, 5.4% had twenty-one to thirty years experience, and 3.8% had more than thirty-one years in leadership.

They ranged in age from 18 (born in 1990) to 70 (born in 1938). The average age of the Scouters was about 46.

Almost two-thirds of the men (61.1%) were Cub Scouts and about the same (62.6%) were Boy Scouts. Those who were Explorers or Venture Scouts were 12.5%. Almost one-third of the men are Eagle Scouts.

## Why They Stay

1. They want to help boys
2. They want to be with their sons.
3. They want to have fun.
4. They like to camp.

5. They accept the values.
6. They like the program.
7. They enjoy the fellowship.
8. They want to give back (the Eagle Scouts).

### Why They Stay and Tenure in Scouting

#### *1-5 Years Experience*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Help boys
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Sons
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Fun
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Program
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Values
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Fellowship

#### *6-10 Years Experience*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Help boys
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Sons
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Values
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Fun
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Program
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Fellowship

*11-20 Years Experience*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Help boys
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Fellowship
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Fun
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Sons
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Values
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Program

*21-30 Years Experience*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Help boys
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Values
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Fun
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Program
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Fellowship
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Sons

*31+ Years Experience*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Help boys
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Program
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Sons
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Values
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Fellowship
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Fun

### *Female Leaders*

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Values
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Sons
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Help boys
- 4<sup>th</sup> - Program
- 5<sup>th</sup> - Camping
- 6<sup>th</sup> - Fun
- 7<sup>th</sup> - Fellowship

### Why They Leave

1. Their sons quit.
2. They don't have time.
3. They experienced conflict.
4. They burned out.
5. Their job changed.
6. They got fed up with "politics"  
and lack of support.