



KEYS TO SUCCESS

FOR GROUP SCOUT LEADERS

HELPING YOU UNDERSTAND
THE ROLE, PLAN AND LEAD
THE GROUP TO SUCCESS



scouts.org.uk

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Although in some parts of the British Isles Scout Counties are known as Areas or Islands and in one case Bailiwick, for ease of reading this booklet simply refers to County or Counties.



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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to help you, the Group Scout Leader (or potential Group Scout Leader) understand and make the most of your role in Scouting. Much of Scouting happens in Groups so your role is vital in making sure the best possible Scouting is available for young people in your area. As Group Scout Leader you are the figurehead for, and provide leadership to, the Group. You are also an important part of making sure that the Group provides a welcoming atmosphere to all.

Supporting you in your role

In essence, you are leading a team of volunteers (the Section Leaders, Assistant Leaders and helpers). To some who are associated with large Groups this probably seems a huge task. Others with smaller Groups may not think the role so essential. However, the role is equally important in both situations although you are likely to need to go about things in different ways. It is the aim of this booklet to provide you with some advice to support you in your role and to help you make the best use of your time.

STARTING POINTS

Create the right atmosphere

As Group Scout Leader you are a key influence on the atmosphere within the Group. Is your Group very ordered with things running in a disciplined fashion or is it more informal? How will you manage the Leaders in the Group? For example, will you have monthly meetings round a table or discuss things informally with Leaders after Section meetings with fewer formal gatherings? Whatever you decide it needs to be the best approach for you and your team.

Where do you want it to go?

As Group Scout Leader you need to have a vision for the Group. What do you want your Group to look like in three years' time? Will it have new Sections? What about your Meeting Place – does it need rebuilding? Talk to your Leaders and find out what they want. You will also need to consider the District – what are the plans in the wider area and how will you put those plans into action? Also look at what's happening in the area. Could something impact on Scouting and if so, what response is needed? For example are there new houses being built close to your Meeting Place, creating a need for another Section?

Your vision may be very simple. Eliminating the waiting list for a particular Section by a certain date or offering all young people the chance to camp every year are both positive and achievable objectives.

Having decided on your vision you need to put a plan into place. The best way to approach this is to break it into small pieces and work towards achieving



'As Group Scout Leader you need to have a vision for the Group. What do you want your Group to look like in three years' time'



each piece. If you are not good at planning in this way discuss your ideas with the Leaders, with other adults and with the young people. Putting together a plan collectively for the Group is likely to have many benefits.

Look for the quick win

As well as the long term vision you should also identify the 'quick wins' - the things that you can do quickly (and easily) to benefit the Group. For example, rebuilding the Meeting Place might be your long term vision, but a quick win could be tidying up the existing building and brightening it up with some new posters. Small things can boost everyone's spirits and make them feel part of something exciting and fresh.

Look ahead

As the Group Scout Leader you can support your Leaders by anticipating upcoming events. Check that plans for camp and other events are underway in good time and plan your time accordingly by looking at the Group and District calendars.

Get the balance right

There is one important point missing, and it is probably the most important one. It can best be described as 'remember to have a life!'

We have all seen adults whose lives have been taken over by Scouting, but remember that your family and your work should come first. Decide on some strategies that will allow you to balance your time. For example, you could put blue sticky dots in your diary for evenings and weekends for you and your family. Do this at the start of the year and stick to it - you will be the better for it.

UNPACKING THE ROLE

Having looked at the initial steps in being a Group Scout Leader, it is now time to look at the role in more detail.

Build an effective team

It is a frequent observation that the most successful Groups are built around a team that enjoys working together. Often, in addition to their Scouting they will enjoy some social activities together too.

Team building tasks are a great way to build confidence among members. Group badges are an ideal project as they are designed so that all members of the Scout Group (including Leaders) can take part, working to achieve the same goal.

When building a team, having the right person in the right role is key. You need to be clear about what the role entails and what skills a person might need to do it well. It is all too easy to put the first adult who volunteers into a leadership role where you might desperately need the help. However, they may prefer to be in charge of fundraising. If people are in roles they are happy with they will stay with the Group longer. It is better to find a Beaver Scout Leader that will stay with the Group for two years than have four who each leave after six months because the role is not right for them.

Once you have found members for your team, your role is to support them in their training. This means that you will need to find out how training in your local area is organised. Most importantly, you will need to know where information about local training is available from and whom you need to contact about it. New Leaders are often keen to get on with their training and certain modules are best attended





‘Team building tasks are a great way to build confidence among members’

early in a Leader’s career for them to be most useful. Existing Leaders are also required to do ongoing learning and you can support them in this through being aware of things that might be available and thinking about what the person or the Group could most benefit from.

Once you have built an effective team, it is important to ensure that an exciting Balanced Programme is taking place within your Group. This does not mean that everyone is out climbing every week but that a lively and varied programme is happening in all Sections. Encourage your Leaders to plan ahead and create a programme outline for future meetings. This allows you to support them in what they are doing and let others step in and carry on if they are unable to make a meeting.

Remember that the Group Executive Committee is also part of your team. The Committee will make sure that you have the facilities and resources needed to deliver good Scouting in your Group – so be sure to establish a real partnership with its members.

Do the right things first

As Group Scout Leader it is likely there will be more things to do than can practically be done. It is therefore necessary to prioritise. For example, on your list of things to do might be ‘opening up the Meeting Place every Tuesday night for Cubs’ and ‘cutting the grass every Saturday’. However, getting keys cut for the new Cub Scout Leader on Saturday should be a higher priority for you as it will save you a lot of time in the long run (and make it a lot easier for the Cub Scout Leader). Of course, that is a simple and obvious example and often things are not that straightforward. However, prioritising your tasks is something that is worth spending a little time doing to make sure you are as effective as

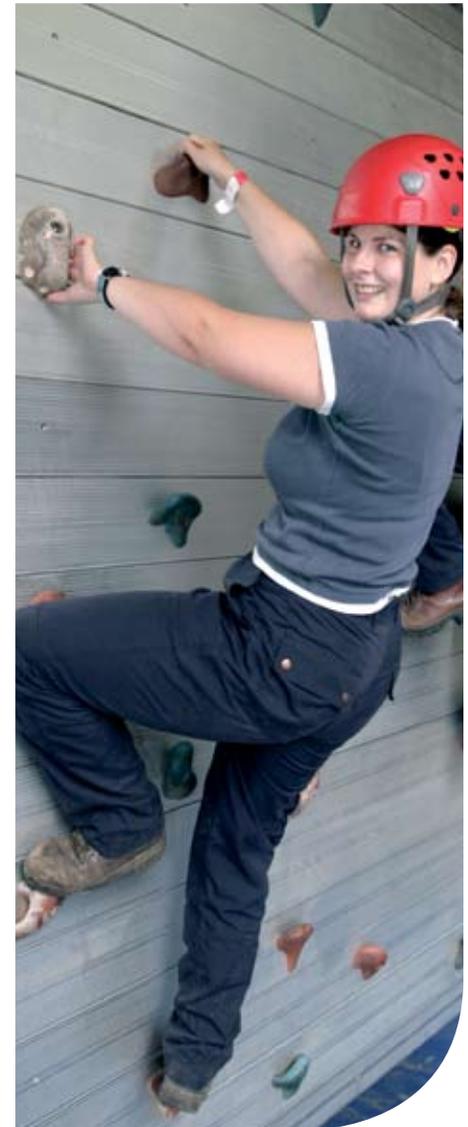
you can be in your role. When you think about the tasks to be done there are likely to be a number that you will consider 'difficult'. These tasks are the ones that give us the most worry. A good way of managing them is to try and do one difficult thing at a time rather than avoid them altogether. Finishing just one difficult task feels a whole lot better than doing several of the simpler ones.

Key parts of the role

The role description for the Group Scout Leader gives guidance on the priority and additional tasks of the role. This is available from the Scout Information Centre but the priority tasks listed are:

- Ensuring the Group has a team of 'fit and proper' adults working effectively together and with others to meet the area's Scouting needs
- Ensuring that all adults are adequately supported including induction, review and development
- Ensuring that a challenging and exciting Balanced Programme is carried out throughout the Scout Group and that all adults are supported in carrying out their tasks
- Resolving problems that may occur within the Scout Group
- Acting as a charity trustee of the Scout Group.

Many of the additional tasks listed in the role description can be delegated to others. Those which cannot only become a priority at certain times.



‘Remember to thank people for what they have done for the Group - all contributions are valuable and every little helps’



Use other people

In the role description of a Group Scout Leader, those parts of your role that can be delegated are clearly indicated. You should therefore consider who else might be able to do them for the Group.

The art of delegation is not about forgetting the task once you have asked someone to do it but about ensuring that it gets done in good order. All Leaders have tasks that they can delegate and one good way of involving people in your Group is by getting them to do something. Try listing all the tasks (no one too small) that need to be done for the Group to run smoothly. Approach parents in an informal way to sign up for any task (you could run a social event of some sort, perhaps pinning the lists to the wall against which people can sign their names). When people can see the boundaries to the task they are more likely to sign up for it. For example, two tasks might be: ‘wash down hall floors once a month’ and ‘clean the Meeting Place windows twice a year’. This looks far more attractive than ‘we need a Meeting Place caretaker’. These days, people spend more time working than ever before and it is important to them that they do not take on too much.

Value people

Remember to thank people for what they have done for the Group. It is important to remember that all contributions are valuable and that every little helps. A person may volunteer to do something for the Group once a year, which is an important contribution that should be welcomed. For some good ideas on ways to say ‘thank you’ see the ‘Saying Thank You’ web page at www.scouts.org.uk/thankyou.

Make meetings effective

Part of your role will include attending some meetings and you will also probably need to organise the occasional meeting. The key to useful meetings is to have a clear agenda. People need to understand why they are attending a meeting and what they are likely to get out of it. When you are running a meeting make sure that everyone who attends has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Make sure you have someone to record the decisions. Minutes of meetings are an important reminder to people of who needs to do what and should be circulated promptly.

When you are invited to meetings try and read the agenda ahead of time and ensure that you are the most appropriate person to attend on behalf of the Group. If you are not able to attend an important meeting, speak with the person chairing the meeting, apologise and send someone in your place.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Be realistic

As Group Scout Leader, it is important to be realistic about what you set out to achieve. By setting yourself smaller and more focused objectives, you are more likely to achieve them and maintain motivation. Remember that it is not realistic for you to do everything on your own, so don't be afraid to ask for help and delegate where possible.

Keep the ball rolling

A key aspect of the role of Group Scout Leader is taking responsibility for your projects. Once you have decided what you are going to do, make sure you follow your plans through to completion. While it is perfectly acceptable to delegate tasks, it is your responsibility to choose the right people to delegate to.

Encourage those you choose to actively take part in the project – there is no point delegating responsibilities and then keeping a tight control over what everyone is doing. People are happier if they can see progress being made from their own initiatives and contributions. The longer they feel useful, the longer they will probably keep helping. However, it is important that you keep an interest in your projects and take ultimate responsibility for their completion.

One way of doing this is by setting milestones. When delegating tasks, discuss the milestones for each part of the project. Each milestone should have a realistic target date for completion. This will give the people something to aim for and a plan of action to stay focused on their tasks.



‘Don't be afraid to ask for help and delegate where possible’

When things go wrong

Accept that sometimes things will not go as you wish. In Scouting as in life, things do go wrong. Be prepared to re-think your objectives or re-plan your milestones to accommodate any mishaps. Remember to let your team know of any problems and of any changes to your plan.

Listen and be receptive

Part of being an effective leader is listening to the people around you. It is important to remember that you are not simply there to instruct and to delegate, but also to allow people to talk freely and openly to you about any issues (good and bad) that they might have. By listening carefully to people and not immediately telling them what to do, you will make them feel valued and supported.

Remember that the people in your Group will have lots of useful knowledge and experience that you, as Group Scout Leader, might not. By listening to your Section Leaders you may discover new information that could help you to be more effective in your role. Try to understand that everyone is different – some people will talk openly in meetings while others will prefer an informal chat on a one-to-one basis. You should create opportunities for people to talk to you in their preferred way, by arriving early for meetings for example. Remember to let people know you are doing this though – if no one knows, no one will turn up!

Finally, try not to avoid talking to people because you think they might bear bad news. As Group Scout Leader you should encourage people to voice their complaints. Often, problems are easier solved the sooner they are out in the open. If ignored, however, problems tend to grow and become more serious.





Growing the team

An important part of your role is making sure that you have an effective team. This means that as the needs of your Group change, you may need to re-shuffle your team to make sure you have the right people in the right roles. You may also need to bring in new people with different skills to do certain tasks.

You may decide on a re-shuffle to meet the needs of one or more of your team members. It is important to keep people interested and motivated, and sometimes a change of role is enough to do this. Talk to your team. Ask them how they are feeling. If someone is not happy ask if they would like a new challenge in a new role. You could do this formally or informally through regular reviews, making sure you find out what people want from Scouting. Remember that you may not be able to change someone's role immediately, but understanding his or her wishes will help you plan for the future.

You can also look to the future by succession planning. Consider who would be good in a certain role before it becomes available. That way, if your Beaver Scout Leader decides to leave or to change their role, you will already have an idea of who could take their place. Succession planning is all about making life easier for you in the future!

And finally

There is no correct way to carry out the role of Group Scout Leader. Everyone is different, and different methods will work for different people. If you use this booklet as a guide, however, and pick out the bits you think will work for you, we hope that you will be equipped with some advice to help you be effective and successful in the role. Good luck.

FURTHER INFORMATION

You can contact the Adult Support Team at Gilwell Park by phone on 0845 300 1818, email: adult.support@scout.org.uk or letter to the Adult Support Team, The Scout Association, Gilwell Park, Chingford, London, E4 7QW

www.scouts.org.uk/focus

SUPPORT FOR YOU

Thank you for taking on the challenge of Group Scout Leader; it is an essential part of Scouting.

This is not meant to be a definitive guide on how to be a good Group Scout Leader. Each Group and person is different. However, we hope that some of the ideas will help you be more effective in your role and help you enjoy your time more

