

## Essential Wood Badge Skills

Wood Badge training consists of 11 essential leadership skills in addition to the essential practical skills. Although there are many different ways to present the skills, the basics are still the same. The White Stag Leadership Development Organization has provided skills training in the USA for many years, and can give you a different perspective to what is presented here. Keep in mind that the basic skills are the same, only the presentation of them is different.

The 11 Essential Leadership Skills are:

Communicating  
Knowing and Using Resources  
Understanding the Characteristics and Needs of the Group and Its Members  
Planning  
Controlling Group Performance  
Effective Teaching  
Representing the Group  
Evaluating  
Sharing Leadership  
Counseling  
Setting the Example

Communicating

Communication involves several factors: receiving, storing, retrieving, giving, and interpreting information. It is important that members of a group communicate freely with each other. Exchange of information often involves a "transaction," a stimulus followed by a response. It's important that these transactions be kept open or complementary. Crossed or blocked transactions result in people talking at one another with no real communication. As a result, information is not exchanged.

Information is received through hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, and smelling. Obviously we receive information by reading what is written or listening to what is said---and we often do a poor job of these. We also receive powerful messages through facial expressions, body language, an individual's general appearance, costume, etc. The more ways we use to gather information, the better the information is received, understood, and put to use.

Most people store the information they receive in their memories. The memory can be supported with notes, sketches, written references, and similar techniques.

Retrieving or recalling information is important. It often is closely related to how the information is stored. People known for outstanding memories have simply developed an effective retrieval system. This can include memorizing using memory joggers, repeating the information as it is received, taking notes, and skillful use of references.

Giving information involves the same five senses used to receive it. In giving information, however, speaking or writing clearly, using visual methods, watching and being sensitive to the group, asking for feedback, and summarizing what has been given results in an effective transfer of information.

Interpreting information is vital. In many cases the information was given and received, but somehow communication did not result. Blocks to communication include motivation (one of the two parties didn't think the information was important), conflict (two messages didn't agree), experience (your own back ground or prejudices cause you not to accept what is said), personal dislike

(you dislike the other person so you filter out what he or she says), distractions (you don't receive because something else is on your mind or something distracts you), and attitude (you think you already know all about the topic).

Most people learn approximately 11 percent of what they know by listening, but 83 percent of what they know by seeing (observing and reading). People recall 20 percent of what they heard but can recall 50 percent of what they both heard and saw. Thus a "multimedia" approach to communicating is vital.

Clear communication is essential. Avoid initials, acronyms, technical jargon, and unfamiliar words in communicating with others. The success of establishing and maintaining a group will depend largely on how well its members communicate with each other and with those outside the group.

### Knowing and Using Resources

To establish a group, you must know what you have to work with. Two types of resources can be used—those available to the group and those available from within the group's own members.

Resources available to a Scouting group can come from literature and books, members of the chartered organization, parents and friends of members, local businesses, community organizations and services, and programs of the local Scouting council and its districts. An inventory of these outside resources is a valuable tool for the Scouting leader. A formal listing might be helpful, but the same results often can be obtained by simply asking the question, "What do I need and where can I get it?" The more people doing this type of thinking, the more resources will appear.

Usually the resources available within the group are greater than any individual member is likely to perceive. The Personal Resource Questionnaire filled out by each group member is a way to begin. Each member of the group lists some facts about his or her background, attitudes, and abilities. The questionnaires are shared and group members quiz each other to expand on what has been noted. This almost always triggers additional resources, which are then listed.

Members are next urged to share what they consider to be "meaningful experiences"—things they have done that would be considered successes. Members of the group look for resources in the successes each has experienced. All discussions must be positive—no negative statements are allowed.

As members see the resources available to the group and from within the group, they gain a better understanding of each other and the potential for what the group can achieve.

### Understanding the Characteristics and Needs of the Group and Its Members

For our purposes, a characteristic is "a trait, quality, or property distinguishing an individual, group, or type." A need is "a want, a requirement, feeling the lack of something that would be useful." The characteristics and needs of youth can vary widely from one person to the next. They often depend on the young person's background in the home, school, church, and other organizations as well as the particular situation at the moment.

Each member of a group has some important needs. At the basic level is the need for food, water, shelter, and warmth. The next level involves the need for safety and security. Next is the need for friends, association with others,

interpersonal relationships, order, and a feeling of belonging. At the fourth level, needs include recognition, self-respect, independence, and esteem. The final level involves the need for self-fulfillment, confidence, achievement, and growth to the individual's full potential.

Recognizing these needs and how well they are met will often explain the characteristics of the members of the group. If one level of needs has been somewhat met, then other needs emerge as dominant. For instance, a boy from an unstable family in a poverty stricken urban neighborhood beset with street crime may respond quite differently than one from a stable and loving middle income family residing in a safe suburb. A relationship between observed characteristics and the true needs of an individual may be misleading, however. The seemingly self-assured individual might in fact be playing a role in an attempt to feel secure. On the other hand, the quiet and reserved person might be so self-confident that he or she sees no need to attract attention.

### Planning

Effective planning is usually the result of seven specific steps.

1. Consider the task. This involves what has to be done, who does what, when, where, and how.
2. Consider the resources. What time is available? What are the skills of the group? What equipment and supplies are needed and available? What other items should be considered?
3. Consider alternatives. What happens if something goes wrong? What are the emergency procedures? What is the alternate plan? Could the alternate plan be better than the original plan?
4. Reach a decision. Who has the responsibility? Is a poor decision better than no decision? Is no decision a decision? Is a group decision best? A decision usually is needed at every step in the process.
5. Write down the plan. The act of writing down an action plan may cause it to be revised or refined. The final plan might need considerable discussion.
6. Put the plan into action. All too often, great plans are formed but never followed.
7. Evaluate. Evaluation must take place all during this process. As each step is taken, it is evaluated against the previous steps to assure that the original task is still being considered.

In many ways, the steps for planning are similar to those for problem solving. Solving a problem is a type of planning, developing a plan is a type of problem solving. Substitute the word problem for the word task, and the seven steps can be used in either case.

When faced with a specific project to complete or a problem to solve, a process known as "verbal rehearsal" works well and is easily understood by boys. Here the members of the group literally "talk it up" as they decide how to approach the project or problem. As in classic problem-solving, seven steps are involved.

1. What is the problem? A problem is any situation that a group may need or want to do something about. A clear understanding of the problem. is needed before the group can set a goal.
2. What's our goal? A goal redefines the problem into a positive statement that answers the question, "What do we want?" A goal must be important to the group and must be realistic, not based on wishful thinking. A goal should require the group's best effort, and members should feel good after reaching it.
3. Stop and think. Here the group should stop talking and allow each person to examine the problem and goal before continuing to the next step. Often boys--and adults--take the first suggestion that is offered and jump directly into action.

If group members take a few moments to think and form their ideas. they will be able to add some original thought to a plan to be followed.

4. Make a plan. A good planner is always looking for options. The ability to think of a large number of possible pathways to reach a goal is an important skill. "What happens if... ?" examines the consequences of a particular course of action. For each alternative there are pros and cons. Once the alternatives and consequences have been discussed, a decision is made on a start-to-finish plan.

5. Do it. Action must follow the planning. if the group has discussed the plan in enough detail, each member will know how to proceed.

6. Keep at it. Nothing worthy of achieving is gained without endurance. The group must recognize that before a plan is abandoned, sustained effort is needed. Sometimes only a small adjustment in the plan is required to make it work.

7. How did it go? Was the goal attained? Did we give our best effort? What might have been changed? It is important to evaluate the entire problem-solving process so that the result will be a better plan next time.

### Controlling Group Performance

Controlling group performance is an important but often misunderstood function of leadership. To some, control implies that a whip-cracking boss is in charge. Good control is far more subtle.

A group needs control to keep its members moving in the same direction for best results. If a plan is to be properly carried out, someone must direct the effort. Controlling is a function that the group consciously or unconsciously assigns to the leader in order to get the job done. Skillful control is welcomed by the group. The expression "Come on, you guys, let's get our act together" is a plea for someone to take charge and bring the group under control.

Control of group performance involves six basic operations.

1. Observing. The leader should be in a position to see the group, communicate with its members, and be available, but not appear to dominate. Coed work is praised. Suggestions, rather than orders, are given for improvements.

2. Instructing. The leader must often give instructions as the work proceeds and the situation changes. The leader must communicate well, apply the skill of effective teaching, and allow members to use their own initiative. As long as the work is progressing well, the leader should not intrude.

3. Helping. When a group has decided that it wants to perform a task, the leader must help the members be successful. The leader does a good job personally, takes a positive approach, and gives a helping hand when needed. Care is taken to see that an offer to help is not implied criticism.

4. Inspecting. The leader must know what to expect to see. The leader should know the plan and the skills involved. A checklist is valuable. If the work is not correct, the worker is led to the proper performance of the task. Again, a positive approach with helpful suggestions for improvement is vital.

5. Reacting. How the leader reacts to the efforts of the group is important. Praise the person if the work is good, but the praise must be sincere. If the work is not correct, praise the parts that were done well and accept responsibility for work not done well. A reaction such as "Gosh, I guess I didn't explain it very well" doesn't hurt the leader but makes the person feel good about corrections that are suggested. React to the total job--do not focus

on obvious weak points.

6. Setting the example. The most effective way of controlling group performance is the personal example of the leader. How the leader observes, instructs, helps, inspects, and reacts is vital.

### Effective Teaching

Effective teaching is a process by which the learning of an individual or a group is managed or facilitated. Five elements are involved, but these are not necessarily steps in a sequence.

1. Learning objectives. Before attempting to teach, it is important to know what is to be taught. Asking "What should the participants be able to do by the end of the session?" determines the learning objectives. Learning objectives are stated in performance terms. To "know," "understand," "appreciate," or "value" are slippery words that have no part in good learning objectives. Learning objectives should clearly state what the individual will be able to do as a result of the learning experience.

In a structured teaching situation, it is wise to write down the learning objectives as guidelines to the instructor. The objectives usually will determine the content of the instruction. In casual situations or "opportunity teaching," the objectives might not be written but should be clearly in the mind of the instructor.

2. Discovery. A discovery is any sort of happening that has three results.

Knowledge is confirmed. People discover what they do know. Until then they might not have been sure. The need to know is established. People discover that they do not know something they must know if they are to be successful in what they want to do. Motivation is instilled. Participants discover the desire to learn more.

Sometimes a discovery just happens. An alert leader can turn this happening into a learning experience. This is referred to as "opportunity teaching." In more structured teaching, an instructor often will set up a discovery as the introduction to a learning activity. A discovery can be simply a leading question, or more complicated as in dramatic role-playing.

3. Teaching-learning. Once the discovery has shown what the person already knows. the instructor has choices to make.

The person knows and can do what is desired. The learning objectives have been met. Subtract what the person knows from what is desired and work on what the person needs to know. Give the full instruction session. The participant will learn what he or she needs to know and will review what is already known.

Teaching involves a variety of communication techniques. We learn principally from hearing (lecture, discussion, conversation, dramatization), seeing (reading, displays, visual aids, demonstrations), and doing (trial and error, experimenting, copying the acts of others). As each task, skill, or idea is broken down into simple steps, the learner can confirm what he or she now knows, needs to know, and wants to know. Thus, learning is actually a series of discoveries. Each step should lead to some success--it is important to keep the person encouraged that progress is being made.

4. Application. Each individual should have an immediate chance to apply what has been learned. Application must be deferred in some situations, but immediate

application is more desirable.

In attempting to apply what has been learned, another discovery likely will occur, which leads to new learning objectives, more teaching and learning, and further application.

5. Evaluation. Essentially, evaluation is a review of what happened to see if the learning objectives were met. In a teaching situation, we are always checking to see. "Did it work? Do I understand? What do I do next?" In effect, the evaluation itself often becomes another discovery.

Recycling. If evaluation shows that the person has not learned what was to be taught, there is a need to recycle-teach it again. The approach may be changed, the steps simplified, or the explanation more detailed, or the learning objectives might need to be changed.

Research has shown that learning is most effective when it is self-directed. The more deeply a person can be involved in his or her own learning, the more that individual will learn and the longer he or she will retain what has been learned. Teach from the point of view of the student--not the teacher. Be sure that personal objectives are met before dealing with organizational objectives. Move from what is known to what is unknown. from what is simple to what is more complex.

It is important to note that the five elements of effective teaching are not necessarily a series of steps, each to be completed before the next is attempted. Rather, these elements are a mix of factors that can be used to plan a learning experience or evaluate its worth. The five elements are not a lockstep process through which one marches in a training experience. Training must flow and stay flexible to meet the needs of participants.

#### Representing the Group

With a knowledge of resources, skill in communicating, and an understanding of the characteristics and needs of the group and its members, the leader is prepared to represent the group.

Some steps are involved in representation. Before representing the group, it is important to get all of the facts available, decide on the nature of the situation, determine the group's reaction, and make mental or written notes. When representing the group to a third party, it is vital to give the facts give the group's reaction, feelings, and position respect opinions of other groups dealing with the third party consider personality problems and again make mental or written notes.

Then the third party's decision, attitude, or actions must be represented back to the group. Here it is important to again present the facts, explain the decision, and thoroughly represent the third party's attitude and opinion.

As a leader represents the group to the "outside world," the group begins to develop its own attitude, identity, and direction. The role of the patrol leader in sharing the interests and:desires of the patrol to the patrol leaders' council--and carrying out the decisions of the patrol leaders' council with the patrol members--is a classic example of representing a group in Scouting.

#### Evaluating

When a program or project has been completed, it is important to find out how well the objectives-were met and if improvements can be made for the future.

An evaluation should reflect two dimensions of the project--its effect on the total group and its effect on each individual member.

Six simple questions can be used to evaluate almost any project or program. The first three questions relate to the group's success in carrying out the project, while the second three questions relate to individual group members.

1. Did the job get done?
2. Was it done right?
3. Was it done on time?
4. Did everybody take part?
5. Did they enjoy themselves?
6. Do they want more?

An evaluation as soon as an event or activity ends is a handy measure of the immediate reaction. Sometimes, however, a more valid evaluation can be made two to three weeks following the event or activity. In retrospect, the later evaluation may be more valid. It also is less subject to the enthusiasm of the event and a natural desire to please (or condemn) the leadership.

Evaluation is a continual process as a project is under way. Here the six questions are changed somewhat.

1. Are we getting the job done?
2. Are we doing it right?
3. Are we on schedule?
4. Is everybody involved?
5. Are they working well and satisfied with what they're doing?
6. Do they want to continue?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, or if there is any doubt, the leader needs to take some action.

Much has been written on the styles of leadership and how they are applied in given situations. Five styles of leadership generally are recognized.

#### Sharing Leadership

1. Telling(or ordering). The leader alone identifies the problem, makes the decisions, and directs the activities. The style appears autocratic and may or may not involve the opinions of the group members.
2. Persuading (or selling). In this style of leadership, the decision still is made by the leader. Having made the decision, the leader must sell it to the group to get cooperation.
3. Consulting. Group members participate and provide input. The leader may suggest a tentative decision or plan and get the group's reaction. Having consulted the group, the-leader still makes the final decision, usually based on

group consensus. If consensus can not be reached, the group is encouraged to note and follow the desires of the majority.

4. Delegating. The leader identifies the problem, sets certain guidelines, boundaries, or rules, and then turns the problem over to the group or one of its members. The leader accepts the decision of the group if it falls within the boundaries and guidelines established. While authority may be delegated, the responsibility must remain with the leader.

5. Joining. The leader steps down as leader and joins the group. The leader agrees in advance to abide by the group's decisions. It is important to remember that joining the group is still leadership. Before deciding to use this style, the leader must carefully consider the resources of the group and, if necessary, change to a more direct leadership style.

No single leadership style is "best." Each depends on the situation, experience of the group members, and tasks to be done. As leadership styles move from telling to joining, the leader's authority appears to diminish and the group's participation increases. Selecting the appropriate style of leadership is an act of leadership based on the nature of the situation and the ability and experience of the group members. Leadership is a dynamic process, varying from situation to situation with changes in leaders, followers, goals, and circumstances.

#### Counseling

Counseling in one form or another goes on constantly as the leader works with the members of the group. Counseling can be used to encourage or reassure an individual, to develop a more effective member of the group, or to help solve a specific problem. Counseling is helpful when a person needs encouragement, should have more information bearing on his or her task, needs help in interpreting facts, or is uncertain about what to do, or the leader feels the need to correct a situation.

The counselor first must find out that there is, in fact, a needier counseling. The counselor must recognize that no two counseling situations are alike that each person is different, and each problem is different. There are no pat solutions.

There are six keys to good counseling.

1. Listen carefully. Give undivided attention to what the person is saying.
2. Ask yourself, "Do I understand what this person is trying to say?"
3. Summarize frequently to assure understanding, keep on the track, and check what is being told.
4. Additional information might be all that is needed. The person might not have all of the facts, or might not know all of the resources available. The counselor must be sure to give information, not advice.
5. The person must be encouraged to think of different ways of handling the problem. The individual has the problem, has thought about it in greater detail than the counselor, and might have arrived at a solution. He or she might only be seeking confirmation of that solution.
6. Above all, the counselor must not give advice. The objective of counseling is to lead the individual to his or her own solution.

A general rule in effective counseling is to keep the individual talking. Many counseling sessions fail when the counselor attempts to arrive at a solution before the individual has finished telling the complete problem. Use "trigger words" to keep the person talking. Phrases like "What did you do then?" or "How did that make you feel?" can bring out more details. Words of sympathy or understanding such as "Wow," "Oh my," or "That's a shame" are helpful. Only when the individual begins to repeat himself or herself will additional information be of value.

Some counseling sessions uncover problems that are serious and might require professional help. The Scouter involved in counseling must consider his or her efforts as "first aid" to a young person with obvious and serious problems. Be careful not to counsel above your abilities. Our objective is to help youngsters the best we can--not to become amateur psychologists. The leader should be prepared to refer a troubled young person to a competent professional in this field if it appears necessary.

#### Setting the Example

The most persuasive leadership skill is the personal example of the leader. A good leader sets a positive example in these ways:

1. Following instructions. Following instructions, obeying the law, and carrying out tasks in the recommended manner points out that rules and procedures are important.
2. Trying hard. The leader must work as hard as--if not harder than--any member of the group. Leadership by direction is not as effective as leadership by example.
3. Showing initiative. A good leader must do what has to be done without waiting to be told or forced to act. An effective leader respects the good suggestions of the group members and encourages each person to show initiative.
4. Acting with maturity. An effective leader shows good judgment. The group members see that the leader's personal behavior is directed toward accomplishing the task.
5. Knowing the job. Generally, a leader should have a mastery of the skills to be used. If not, the leader must apply the resources of the group toward achieving the task.
6. Keeping a positive attitude. A positive attitude is vital as an example to group members. The leader's personal frustration or discouragement should never be apparent. Failure should be considered a potential learning experience. Enthusiasm is contagious.

Role models are an important method in Boy Scouting. This applies not only to adults, but also to youth leaders. Boys often will copy the actions and behaviors of leaders they like and admire. Boys will literally walk, talk, and act as the example set by the adult and youth leaders of the troop.

From GTRSI (<http://members.home.net/knickson/gtr.html>)