Funding your Scouting Program

By Paul Jackson, Executive Secretary to the Young Men General Presidency

As a young Scout I always enjoyed participating on hikes and other outdoor activities. I remember each time having to mow lawns and do other odd jobs to earn the money to go. While it was not easy, I knew that if I was to go, I had to make it happen.

Over the years as a Scoutmaster (twice), Venture leader (twice) and Varsity coach (twice), I have seen changes in what I refer to as the funding operations of Scouting. It has been a blessing to now have a more uniform way of how activities and the overall program funding functions.

The Church provides wise guidelines in Handbook 2, making it possible for all young boys to have the opportunity to learn, grow and develop key life skills.

I recall having a parent come to me with concern over the cost of the Scouting program. The uniform, outings, camps and other fun activities he knew his son would love to do were just not within his reach. Yet, this parent understood the benefit his son would gain by learning many important lessons that would help him throughout his life. Well, with the help of a good community and solid neighbors, this young boy was able to earn his own money.

There was another boy, whose parents took the approach that, the Church and Scouting “owed” their son the same privileges as others. In this case, the boy had no support or encouragement from parents to find ways to earn what was needed. This is where a great Scout committee came into action. Several adults in the ward took turns working with the parents and their son, in a very meaningful and positive manner.

Just like your own personal household budget has an occasional challenge to make ends meet, so does running a good Scouting program. In a ward or branch where you may have more Cubs than Scouts, or more young women than young men, making a program work as we all want is sometimes just not possible. Adjustments are necessary and such adjustments do not have to lessen the “good” in anything you have planned.

As your deacons quorum presidency, troop youth leadership, Scouting committee and Scout adult leaders, prepare your calendar, you also prepare a budget. This is reviewed with the bishopric. Once approved, you are prepared to visit with parents and boys. Doing this, a young boy and his family will know well in advance of any camp or other special activity how much “he” is responsible for. No family will ever have to help their boy come up with the needed money for camp in 2-3 weeks.

The other important element of a solid Scouting program is that of supporting Friends of Scouting. When families, neighbors and communities see the benefits of Scouting for their boys, getting everyone involved in supporting local council camps and other needs is not a problem. Again, boys, parents, leaders, and Scout committee members are all involved as they reach out to neighbors and the community to make Scouting even stronger.

Important guidelines for financing youth activities include: (Handbook 2 – 8.13.7; 13.2.8; 13.2.9; 13.6.8; Scouting Handbook, 8.15)

- Activities should be simple and have little or no cost. Expenditures must be approved by the stake presidency or bishopric before they are incurred.
Setting and Achieving Goals

by Jean A. Bingham, 1st Counselor, Primary General Presidency

Learning to set goals and achieve them is one of the purposes and strengths of Scouting. From the day a boy is a brand-new Cub Scout to the year when he earns his Eagle award, he will have chosen and accomplished many goals. For each one, he creates a plan and carries it through to completion. Through many experiences of this kind, a boy increases in confidence as well as ability. Each step on that path helps him learn important skills that can lead to a life of successful service to God, his country and his fellow man.

At the recent dedication of the Thomas S. Monson Lodge at the Hinkley Scout Ranch, President Henry B. Eyring shared his experience with learning to set goals as a Cub Scout. He credited his neighbor who was the Cub Scout leader with helping him see a higher vision of himself. “My neighbor built confidence in me that I didn’t think was in me,” said President Eyring. Following through on goals helps boys develop good character traits, increases their feelings of self-worth and teaches them the value of work.

President Thomas S. Monson advocates Scouting because, as his son-in-law, Roger A. Dibb, explained, “He believes in young men and knows they can make a difference in the world.” Latter-day Saint Scout leaders can be “partners with God” in building boys into capable, caring and committed men. Helping boys learn to think, to plan, and to achieve worthwhile objectives while they are young helps them develop habits and skills that prepare them to become leaders in their families, in the Church and in the world. As President Monson stated, “The need for strong, capable leadership is critical today, both in Scouting and in the world generally. To be associated in some small way with developing such leadership is humbling indeed.”

Stake and ward budget funds should be used to pay for all activities, programs, and supplies. Members should not pay fees to participate. Nor should they provide materials, supplies, or long-distance transportation at their own expense.

If the ward budget does not have sufficient funds to pay for one annual extended Scout camp or similar activity, leaders may ask participants to pay for part or all of it.

If funds from participants are not sufficient, a stake president or bishop may authorize one group fund-raising activity each year for the following purposes only: a) To help pay the cost of one annual camp or similar activity and b) to help purchase equipment that the unit needs for annual camps.

If a fund-raising activity is held, it should provide a meaningful value or service. The activity should not advertise or solicit beyond the stake or ward boundaries nor sell commercially produced or packaged goods or services door to door. It should be a positive experience that builds unity.

In no case should the expenses or travel for an annual camp or similar activity be excessive. Nor should the lack of personal funds prohibit a member from participating.

Voluntary contributions may be accepted from families of young men and boys of other faiths participating in Scouting activities (see Scouting Handbook 8.17).

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints follow the funding guidelines, outlined in Handbook 2, and invite parents and guardians to be involved, our boys will have experiences that will benefit them throughout their lives.
Over the past several weeks my messages have focused on the support structure put in place to help you in your Scouting and Aaronic Priesthood role. In this message I wish to discuss how to fund your efforts.

Scouting can be very expensive. One disincentive to conducting your Scouting program as designed by the Boy Scouts of America is the significant cost of running a quality program. It requires a sizeable revenue source to fund participation at council-sponsored summer camps, hold monthly outdoor activities, purchase equipment and supplies, or to help boys acquire merit badges and rank advancement. It is much easier and cheaper to neglect Scouting-type activities all together and merely entertain your boys with fun activities closer to home.

According to Church policy, “Funding for Aaronic Priesthood activities, including Scouting activities where they are authorized by the Church, should come from the ward budget” (Handbook 2: Administering the Church, 8.13.7). “Fund-raising activities are not usually approved because expenses for stake and ward activities are paid with budget funds. As an exception, a stake president or bishop may authorize one group fund-raising activity each year. Such an activity may be held to raise funds for the following purposes only: 1) To help pay the cost of one annual camp or similar activity, and 2) To help purchase equipment that the unit needs for annual camps” (Handbook 2, 13.6.8, emphasis added). “If the ward budget does not have sufficient funds to pay for an annual extended Scout camp or similar activity for young men, leaders may ask participants to pay for part or all of it.” (Handbook 2, 8.13.7, emphasis added).

I often hear LDS Scouting leaders complain that the Church policy for funding activities does not provide enough money to fund a quality Scouting program. Far too many adult Scouting leaders, including myself, have spent a significant amount of their personal money supplementing the small budget of their Scouting units. Church leaders frown upon this. Let me tell you why.

The Lord has commanded members of the Church to stay out of debt, to be frugal, and to manage wisely one’s financial stewardship. He wants us to limit our needs and wants and to stay focused on the things that matter most, rather than seeking the material things of the world. When conducting Scouting and priesthood activities the Lord wants us to obey the part of the Scout Law directing us to Thrifty.

What this means is Young Men leaders should not expect their Scouting unit to be like a community unit, where every boy is dressed in full uniform, they have a Scouting trailer full of matching tents and quality camping gear, and they attend exotic summer camps at distant high adventure bases. A Church unit that abides by the policies stated above could never afford such luxuries. Nor should they want to.

The Lord wants His Scouting units to model Zion, where the people are of one heart and one mind, and there is no poor among them (see Moses 7:18). When the Church changed the ward budgeting process in the 1980s, I’m sure leaders in some wards were upset because it reduced their ward budget. But I was ecstatic. At that time I was serving in the branch presidency of a Cambodian branch in Florida. Because of the impoverished nature of our members, our ward budget was extremely small under the old budget policy. Our funds were so limited we couldn’t do much for our members. Yet we met in the same building with an affluent ward. Our members could not help but compare themselves—and our activities—with what was going on in the other ward. Our members felt separated from the other ward by a financial barrier that existed not just because of the economic conditions of the members, but also because of a discriminating Church financial policy. I’m sure this might be one reason why Church leaders changed the policy.

This is why the Church wants you to use the ward budget first for your Scouting activities. If Church leaders reach into their own pockets to pay for more extravagant Scouting activities—such as super summer camps, elaborate pioneer treks, or multi-day hiking treks in far off mountain ranges—because the leaders can afford to do so, they may establish traditions that cannot be sustained if less affluent leaders are called in the future. Boys can easily feel entitled when generous leaders provide them with Scouting experiences that far exceed what a ward budget can provide. Additionally, if Young Men leaders pay for activities without turning in receipts, the bishop of the ward cannot get an accurate feel for the expenses of the Young Men program.
May I suggest that, like most things in the gospel, your Scout funding effort should be conducted in fervent prayer. Perhaps because of the temporal nature of raising funds, some leaders may neglect to petition the Lord to guide their funding efforts. I know from experience that a loving Lord will direct you to do the right things, to reach out to the right people, and to find the right resources to support your Scouting program. “Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good” (Alma 37:37).

The second source for funding Scouting activities ought to be the young men themselves. Scouting is designed to teach a boy to be self-reliant. A boy needs to learn how to pay his own way in life. If the Scouting unit has an annual calendar, the unit should know where it will be going to summer camp a year in advance. The parents and boys should know exactly what it will cost. This gives each boy plenty of time to develop a savings plan that will fund his Scouting activities. Adults in a ward could be encouraged to pray about jobs they might provide to the boys to help them earn money for Scouting. With the Lord’s help, I’m sure there are plenty of jobs within a ward to help a boy obtain the funds he needs. Most important, during this year of labor the young man will learn to work hard, to be responsible, and to pay and honest tithe.

The final method for funding your Church Scouting unit is through a fund-raising activity. This activity should be one that provides “a meaningful value or service” and offers “a positive experience that builds unity” (Handbook 2, 13.6.8). Many LDS Scouting units put up flags on national holidays; some hold spaghetti dinners and auctions; others build fences for state or national parks; some units usher at sporting or community events; while others sponsor swap meets to fund their programs. LDS Scouting units may also “participate in Scouting shows, camporees, and other BSA activities involving the sale of tickets by boys or young men, as long as all other budget allowance guidelines are met” (Scouting Handbook for Church Units in the United States, 8.15). Also note that “Commercially produced or packaged goods or services should not be sold” (8.15). Popcorn is considered to be a commercial product and thus the sale of popcorn is not approved as an LDS Scouting unit fundraiser. Individual young men can sign up to sell popcorn under their BSA local council as a means of paying their own way to summer camp.

Finally, may I respectfully suggest you allow your boys to do the fund raising. If you put up flags, let the boys contact people and collect the funds. If you have a spaghetti dinner, let the boys do the work. If you have an auction, let the boys gather the goods and conduct the auction. In my many years of Scouting, I have seen so many fund-raising situations where adults do all the work. The Relief Society sisters bake goods for the auction. The men cook the spaghetti dinner. The Scouting leaders collect the funds for the flags. In such situations those donating funds to the Scouting program have little interaction with actual Scouts.

Take a Moment to Reflect:

- Are your Scouting activities planned to minimize expenses?
- Do you encourage your boys to pay their own way to summer camp?
- Does your one authorized annual fund-raising event generate the greatest possible income to fund your Scouting activities?
- Do your boys wear their Scouting uniforms during fund-raising events?
- Do your boys do the actual fund-raising, rather than the adults?
- Have you asked the Lord to guide your fund-raising effort?

Turn Your Reflection Into Action:

- What will you start doing, stop doing, or do better as a result of your reflection?

“Being thrifty is good for our financial well-being. Wastefulness and indulgence are not of God. They are negative influences and have serious consequences on us by and by. When we are thrifty we are self-reliant, able to be free to assist those in need. Scouting instructs us to be wise with our resources” (Vaughn J. Featherstone, “On My Honor,” New Era, February 2006).
**Safety Moment—Why Do We Encourage You...to be Youth Protection Trained?**

*Contributed by LDS Risk Management Division*

According to the Department of Justice, 60% of all children are victimized (in varying forms) before adulthood. Although child sexual abuse (CSA) receives more press coverage and attention, it is only a small slice of the potential range of abuse that children may face. Abuse can range from maltreatment or neglect to physical or sexual abuse. It is exposure to multiple forms of abuse that contributes to poly-victimization.

The Boy Scouts of America recently hosted a National Youth Protection Symposium in Arlington, Virginia, for all youth-serving organizations. Attendees included representatives from churches, service clubs, youth sports teams, private camps, and any other interested parties who wanted to learn more about how to recognize and prevent this insidious plague from keeping their good faith efforts in working with children from being misused.

According to the ACE studies, individuals with a score of one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) increases their risks of suffering from a number of physical or emotional illnesses, both as children and later on as adults. Attendees learned about the individual and family risk factors that can contribute to the abuse of children and youth. They also learned about the family and community protective factors that help children and youth avoid abuse and develop greater resilience if abused. Several of the protective factors are:

- Nurturing parenting skills
- Stable family relationships
- Household rules and child monitoring
- Parental employment
- Adequate housing
- Access to health care and social services
- Caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors
- Communities that support parents and take responsibility for preventing abuse

Youth serving organizations (YSO’s) were encouraged to adapt and help promote early recognition of poly-victimization, because abusers are already learning to target individuals suffering from poly-victimization as they are easier targets.

Several speakers highlighted the need for youth to have at least one supportive parent or adult that they can look to and trust to create resiliency. The “Story of Chad” is a video interview of a young adult, talking about the effects of his abuse as a child and witnessing the abuse of a sibling and his mother. It also highlights the impact of one positive influence in his life and the difference it has made.

Several sessions also included discussions of encouraging youth to create a “Personal Safety Net” which identifies five trusted adults or sources they can go to. They then asked the question, “Is your YSO a part of their personal safety net?”

One of the most compelling speakers was Michael Bourke – Chief, Behavioral Analysis Unit, for the U.S. Marshals Service. Mr. Bourke helped to quantify the levels of concern we all face.

- There are approximately 16 million pedophiles in the U.S.
- A recent study that showed over 2.2 million IP addresses downloaded 100 or more images of prepubescent child pornography in a single month.
Mr. Bourke then advocated that YSO’s focus on “How to educate people...so they know what to do when faced with or witness abuse...” He stated that prevention, early recognition and intervention are key to minimizing the impacts of the threats children face. He also shared a profile of abusers who typically are...

1) Male
2) College educated
3) Can be married or divorced
4) Typically, with no prior arrests

He also shared some additional chilling statistics. The average offender goes 13.4 yrs. before they are caught and that 84% of victims never report to police.

We want all Scout leaders to be prepared and to know what to do, especially if they can help a Scout avoid abuse or be willing to take the steps necessary to protect a Scout if you think they are currently being abused. That is why taking youth protection training is so important to us and should be important to you. If you have any questions at all, please visit BSA’s Youth Protection website or take the Youth Protection Training today... for yourself and for the Scouts you serve!

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**Scouting Handbook Featured Section**

8.15 Funding Scouting Leaders should follow the budget allowance guidelines in Handbook 2 to fund Scouting (see 8.13.7, 11.8.7, 13.2.8, 13.2.9, 13.5, and 13.6.8). Ward budgets should be used to purchase Scouting awards and materials, as determined by local leaders. Commercially produced or packaged goods or services should not be sold.

Scouting units may participate in Scouting shows, camporees, and other BSA activities that involve the sale of tickets by boys or young men, as long as all other budget allowance guidelines are met.

The Church supports the BSA’s annual Friends of Scouting drive. These funds provide financial support for the BSA local council. Stake presidents and bishops oversee the drive in their units.

*Click here for the current version of the handbook*
LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar held in Conjunction with General Conference

by Nettie H. Francis, LDS-BSA Volunteer

Scouting professionals and volunteers—from 8 different states representing 11 BSA Councils—gathered in Salt Lake City, Utah, during October for the LDS-BSA Relationships Seminar. Held each April and October, the three-day event coincides with the general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The LDS-BSA Relationships office hosts the seminar and invitees include council Key-3s and LDS-BSA Relationships committee members. Participants tour key Church facilities, hear from Church and Scouting leaders, and attend two sessions of the Church’s general conference.

“The purpose of the seminar is to give Scouters a vision of why and how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints uses Scouting. We want Church members and those of other faiths alike to understand how Scouting fulfills the purposes of the Aaronic Priesthood and strengthens young men,” explained Mark Francis, LDS-BSA Relationships Director.

The opening event was a Thursday evening training session at the Church Office Building with Brother M. Joseph Brough, first counselor in the Young Men general presidency. The Primary general presidency also attended and greeted the participants. Their warm welcome and Brother Brough’s comments set the tone for the weekend and were a wonderful introduction to the position and structure of the Church. Watching a clip of “The First Vision” was a highlight of the evening.

“Scouting is a tool, one of several which the Church uses to prepare young men to become missionaries, good husbands, and good fathers. Scouting builds relationships with leaders and with other youth. These relationships may be the most important thing that is learned,” taught Brother Brough.

Participants gathered again early Friday morning at the Church Office Building for a session on LDS-BSA Relationships by Mark Francis.

“Collectively, we have the capacity to solve the toughest problems. Collectively, we can come up with solutions to benefit everyone,” he said.

Following the early morning training the group traveled to Provo to the Missionary Training Center. Attendees of non-LDS faiths met with MTC President Dean Burgess and learned more about the specific training young missionaries receive before going out into the world. President Burgess thanked the visitors for what they do in Scouting that specifically prepares young men to serve missions for the Church.

Many attendees commented that their visit to the MTC was the highlight of their weekend. They toured the MTC campus including the impressive cafeteria and gymnasium, viewed the new addition to the MTC, and even visited in a variety of classrooms where they talked directly with missionaries who were learning Hungarian, Spanish, Armenian, and other languages.

Don McChesney, Assistant Chief Scout Executive, was especially impressed when he asked how many of the eight elders in one classroom were Eagle Scouts. "Each one raised his hand. I would have hired them all on the spot."

The group then traveled to the Humanitarian Center in Salt Lake City where they ate lunch with refugees. They toured the facility followed by a tour of Welfare Square. Participants also had time during the weekend to visit the Family History Library, Church History Museum, and additional venues on Temple Square.
Friday and Saturday meals included visits and remarks from Young Men General President Stephen W. Owen, first counselor Douglas D. Holmes, and Primary general presidency second counselor, Bonnie H. Cordon.

“In the Church we have great youth doing their duty to God. The tool of Scouting taught them this. They have a sure foundation and know their Savior Jesus Christ. Scouting is not just a wonderful club, but it is a value-building organization,” taught Sister Cordon.

On Saturday the group attended the morning session of general conference in the Conference Center, the highlight and climax of the weekend. While waiting for the morning session to begin, key church leaders visited with the participants, including Sister Linda K. Burton, Relief Society general president, and Sister Joy D. Jones, Primary general president.

After the session, while eating lunch in the Lion House, Brother Stephen W. Owen spoke.

"I'm grateful I could serve on the National Board and get to know some of you," he said. "I commend all of you for being involved in this great cause and this great work. The skills that a boy learns in Scouting are important, but the attributes are so much greater. President Monson exemplifies all of this. He is the greatest Scouter we know. The Church is not looking for an Eagle Scout or a uniform or a badge. The destination is the missionaries you saw—Melchizedek priesthood holders, fathers, and missionaries. Scouting is a wonderful way to get there."

Don McChesney also shared his thoughts from the weekend.

“This experience was fantastic and emotional. Now I can see why we’ve been partners for over 100 years. We are doing what both of us love to do."

“You really have a wonderful secret here. That’s why I’ve been emotional. I should go back to my boss and report that the relationship is fantastic and we must keep it going. Duty to God is where both of us are, and Duty to God is where we will always be.”
Advice for the New Latter-day Saint Scout Leader

Submitted by John Westhoff

As a young man I had outstanding leaders. Both of the LDS troops I spent my teen years in influenced me profoundly. While the two units were very different, they had one thing in common. We were outside a lot.

There was not much emphasis on rank advancement. We almost never worked on merit badges during our weekly meetings, though I did manage to earn the rank of Eagle Scout as a seventeen-year-old freshman at BYU. My first semester I was still two merit badges short, so with the help of a good friend and his car, I attended weekly meetings with a community troop composed of mostly eleven and twelve-year-olds. They generously held a Court of Honor for me my second semester, and many of my dorm mates came to the ceremony.

For years when I told the story of how I came to earn two merit badges at BYU, I would make a gently disparaging remark about how, while the troops I’d been in were great, they just weren’t into advancement. The implication was that my leaders had somehow not been “doing it right.” I could not have been more wrong—though I didn’t realize it until I became a Scoutmaster myself.

Just because you were a Boy Scout doesn’t mean you know what you need to know to be a Scoutmaster. In fact, if you’re just getting involved in Scouting for the first time as an adult, you’re not ready to be effective. Like too many new leaders, you may be tempted to rely on what you remember from your youth. You don’t know what you don’t know—and you won’t, until you read the Scoutmasters Handbook, now called the Troop Leader Guide.

It has been extremely useful to me as a three-time Scoutmaster to think of my efforts as aligning with the “eight methods of Scouting” described in the Troop Leader Guide. I will not explain all of them here. They’re described in detail in the guide. Rather, I’ll focus on the two methods that are underemphasized in most LDS troops, and the one that is generally overemphasized. This is not to say that all eight methods are not important—each is valuable in its own way and this advice is, of necessity, an oversimplification. That said, I have found there is real power in focusing on two specific aspects of the program to build excitement and group cohesion in your first year of stewardship. If you’re successful, the rest comes easily and you will have the support you need from parents and your leadership to implement whatever other aspects of the program you feel you may have neglected.

Focus on Adventure

Since Adam and Eve entered the wilderness, the Lord has run an “outdoor program.” The Israelites were chastised and refined in the wilderness for forty years. Lehi’s family learned to rely on the Lord after they left the comforts of Jerusalem to live in the Arabian wild. John the Baptist’s primitive desert upbringing prepared him well for his unique and difficult mission. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and many other early church leaders walked the entire distance from Ohio to Missouri and back as part of Zion’s Camp. They hiked up to 40 miles a day enduring “heat, humidity, torrential rains, mud, uncomfortable sleeping conditions, broken equipment [and] food shortages.” (Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith and Zion’s Camp", Ensign, June 2005, 42–4).

Sound familiar? Scouting is an outdoor program. “The outdoors,” is method number three of eight. Brigham Young commented later in life that Zions Camp, though a failure by most standards, was invaluable to his development. What he and many of the other leaders of the Church learned in that “outdoor program” would bless the Church for decades to come.

The conventional wisdom is that boys lose interest in Scouting around age fourteen. I have found that that is not the case once the outdoor program is “big enough.” It is true that many older boys do lose interest in “tailgate” or “car camping” and the other activities that so easily capture the attention of the deacons quorum. Teachers and priests often acquire a “been there, done that” attitude about sleeping in the bishop’s backyard or camping at the familiar local haunts (again) in the rain—but they do not outgrow adventure. Ever. In fact, neither do their leaders. Oddly enough, this insight occurred to me as a young elders quorum president in Maryland. My counselors and I had planned a typical quorum fellowshipping social. The event was well advertised but literally no one came. As I counseled with my counselors over several untouched bowls of chips and dip, we resolved to plan future activities such that we’d enjoy the event and one another’s companionship even if no else showed up.
We planned a quorum day hike on a section of the Appalachian Trail that ran nearby, and unlike our “social,” the turnout was fantastic! We enjoyed a great day of fellowship on the trail, and, we felt much more like brethren as a result. I have followed that formula over and over again with the same results—even with high priests! It turns out that if it sounds like fun to you, it very often sounds like fun to others.

I was called as Scoutmaster for the second time shortly after moving to Washington state. We’d lived there before but I had been too busy with work to climb any of the majestic local peaks. I talked to the boys during a patrol leaders council about how I’d dreamed of climbing Mt. Rainier, the highest mountain in the state. As with the elders quorum, I am not afraid to steer my scouts toward the intersection of their interests and my own. I’m a better and more enthusiastic leader if we’re working on projects that I enjoy anyway—like climbing mountains.

The teachers and priests were all in, though we decided that Mt. Rainier was too dangerous for us as novices. We set our sights on Mt. Adams, the second highest peak in Washington—a two-day climb, the second day of which is entirely on snow fields and requires the use of technical equipment like ice axes and crampons, but without the dangerous crevasses that make Mt. Rainier so perilous. We laid out a plan to climb progressively higher peaks over the next year, building the stamina and skills we would need to tackle our ultimate goal: the 12,281ft summit of Mt. Adams. I had very little mountaineering experience back then, so I began to read books and attended classes offered by local outdoor outfitters. I took a three-day certification class on avalanche awareness and safety. I found a group of men interested in climbing Mt. Rainier, then trained and successfully summited that mountain, an accomplishment which remains the single most difficult physical thing I’ve ever done.

When the time came to climb Mt. Adams, the boys were ready, and I was ready to advise them. I had no difficulty whatsoever finding other men to come along—everyone in the ward was energized by the project. One of the boys, a high school varsity athlete, had to miss a competition to make the climb. “I told Coach at the beginning of the season, sorry but there is no way I am missing this,” he told me. Another boy on that climb, an almost eighteen-year-old who had not previously been enthusiastic about Scouting, confided in me that he wished he’d “been in a troop like this” when he was younger. He was sure that he would have earned Eagle. I told him not to worry, that we were now training him to be a Scoutmaster someday. He began wearing a uniform to meetings and rarely missed an activity or overnight outing until he left for his mission.

My scouts have camped almost every month of the year, but we very rarely plan campouts. In fact, I avoid even using the word “campout.” The term stifles creative planning and short-circuits attendance. For older boys, camping is best thought of as a means to an end, not an activity unto itself—it is something one does to get to the trailhead, or the mountain, or the shore—where the real adventure begins. Many boys will skip out on “another campout,” but few are inclined to miss a once-in-a-lifetime “Desert Trek,” a “St. Helen’s Climb,” “surf trip, “Tanzawa Traverse,” “Two Towers” urban hike, snowshoeing overnight or “Wilderness Coast” backpacking trip complete with beach camping and tide charts—especially when they’ve been planning and preparing for weeks or months. Well-planned outdoor adventures are exciting for everyone. You just don’t outgrow them. Ever.

Build a Team with the Uniform

It’s likely that many of your boys and their parents are not excited about Scouting. If your ward is typical, a few are even apathetic or hostile toward the program. Scouting as a brand does not “sell” to this crowd, so you’re wise to build a unique local brand that will get their attention. “Boy Scouts” may be perceived as boring, but “four-nine-four” need not be. Garden variety members of the BSA sit around tying the same old knots, but the members of “T31” are always having some kind of adventure you wish you hadn’t missed.

As your brand becomes synonymous with “awesome sauce,” your boys and their leaders begin to feel like they’re a part of something special. You can concentrate and enhance this esprit de corps by carefully uniforming your team. Yes, I’m talking about “the uniform”—the other neglected method of scouting you should focus on in your first year as Scoutmaster.
The value of a scout uniform was intuitive in the early twentieth century. Pictures of troops from that era show rows of boys lined up with precision, dressed head to toe in scouting regalia that their mothers likely made by hand. No doubt those boys highly esteemed and consciously emulated brave soldiers in far-away conflicts. Today the uniform seems to many like an expensive and unnecessary anachronism. But the value of the uniform isn’t in paramilitary uniformity and discipline—it’s in being a part of a team. When you consider the uniform in today’s program, think athletes, not soldiers. A quorum or troop is like a sports team in many ways. If you’ve ever been on a team with spirit, you know the value and pride of wearing the jersey that shows you belong. And when your team wins, you are even more keen to don the token of a champion. If your team lacks morale, they don’t want to be seen wearing the uniform off the field.

I hear frequently that scout uniforms are expensive and uncool. I won’t argue. This may be true in your unit right now, but it doesn’t have to stay that way. “Expensive” is a statement of relative value. If scouting isn’t valued, then any amount of money spent on it will seem like too much. When the uniform is perceived as uncool, it’s because a boy is not interested, and the program is likely undervalued or misunderstood by his parents. Once the “team starts winning,” things change dramatically—the “team jersey” becomes a source of pride.

When my oldest son was a deacon, I was driving him to a scout meeting when he asked, “do I have to wear my uniform?” I had not yet been a Scoutmaster, and while I didn’t at that time fully understand the role of the uniform, I had an intuitive feeling that I needed to support it. “Do you like your Scoutmaster?” I asked. “Yeah, he’s awesome” my son replied. “He spends a lot of time with you guys, taking you camping and everything, right? That’s time he could be at home with his own family, or doing what he wants to do.” “Yeah,” he acknowledged. “Well, when you show up to a scout meeting without your uniform, you’re sending him a message—you’re saying ‘this isn’t important to me, I don’t value what you’re doing for us.’ Is that the message you want to send?” “No,” he said quietly. Thankfully, he never made that complaint again. I realized that day that there were things I as a parent could do for him to help build respect for and pride in his scout uniform. I made it a point to make sure he looked good in it. I began make sure that he always had the right patches sewn on—I paid a tailor to do it so it looked sharp. I washed it when it was dirty and ironed it when it was wrinkled, got him a new one when he outgrew it. I bought him official scout pants, and a belt. When I saw his scout shirt discarded on the ground, I pointed out that the uniform has our nation’s flag on the sleeve and that it deserved to be hung up, not thrown on the floor. Over time, my son got the message that I valued the uniform, and more importantly that I valued his participation and achievements in scouting; his attitude toward the program improved dramatically.

As a practical matter, I don’t recommend making a big deal about the uniform at first. By all means, look the part yourself from day one. Set a good example by wearing a full scout uniform (yes, with actual scout pants) to every meeting—but focus at first on building a program that the boys are invested in and let pride in the uniform follow. I strongly recommend that you customize the uniform where possible to reflect your local “brand.”

My first move in this regard has been to produce a team jersey, a.k.a. a “class-B” t-shirt that the boys love. How will you know the shirt is good enough? Seventeen-year-old boys will wear it in public, even when girls are around. Members of your ward not involved in scouting and members of other (even non-LDS) troops will ask you if there is any way they can “get one of those cool shirts.”
Ditto for great custom neckerchiefs, beautifully unique patrol patches and flags etc. When executed properly, they’re worth every penny. They all help build and “bottle” team spirit and foster quorum unity.

Don’t worry too much about having the boys design these items—it is more important that you get their buy-in. After running more than one unsuccessful “let’s design a great shirt” campaign, I've learned to solicit ideas, then come up with a few outstanding designs to show the boys for feedback before finalizing the product. If you’re not the creative type, get some help from someone who is—many companies have excellent artists who will work with you to get the design just right. I have had great success with the new technology that allows for full-color printing on synthetic materials without compromising breathability. They cost twice what a traditional t-shirt does, but they look amazing and are more than twice as comfortable on the trail. The boys notice, and it makes an immediate and palpable difference in the cohesion of your troop. When our shirts have finally arrived, there has always been a sense of excitement, a kind of amazement that someone cared enough to actually see the project through—that we’re serious about this team.

Deemphasize Advancement (at first)

It is a surprise to many people when I tell them that scouting is not at all about merit badges and rank advancement. It’s about young men becoming good and decent grown men. “Advancement” is only one of eight methods used to achieve this aim. President Benson was a Scoutmaster for eleven years; he understood this well, though his invitation for every boy to become an Eagle Scout has been widely misunderstood. Scout rank is a means to an end, not an end in itself. An overemphasis on advancements leads to the status quo we see too commonly—a loss of interest in Scouting at around fourteen, sometimes progressing to a refusal to participate by sixteen. Frustrated parents resort to withholding privileges like driving to motivate their boys to begrudgingly finish the trail to Eagle. By such methods we can produce Eagle scouts whose feelings about their scouting experience are mixed at best. We can do so much better.

At the beginning of my last tenure of as Scoutmaster, I organized a pot-luck dinner with parents shortly after I was called. I taught them about the eight methods of scouting, delivering much the same message I’ve written here. I told them bluntly that for the first year I would not be the least bit interested in talking about their son’s rank advancement—I would be too busy working with the boys to make the next month’s adventure a success. I assured them that advancement would follow naturally once the boys were excited about the program, but that I was going to intentionally deemphasize it. I then invited any concerned parent to volunteer as our advancement chair to ensure that the method had a champion on the committee—thankfully, one stepped forward. The reality is that you can’t stop a boy who is energized by a vital outdoor program from earning Eagle Scout. They don’t need additional motivation.

If this approach sounds new or radical to you, perhaps you haven’t yet sincerely read and pondered the Troop Leader Guide. That is a difficult position to be in, like a Seminary teacher trying to teach the Old Testament without reading the Bible.

I assure you that as you obediently seek training and study the materials the Church and BSA have provided, you will be inspired regarding what you should do to shepherd your boys. You will likely not do it exactly the way I’ve done it, but you’ll do it the way it needs to be done in your troop.

You’ll do it right.