



Scout Training

WAS THE ANSWER

*Scout training changed me; more important,
it changed the young men.*

By Christopher M. Grimes

While serving as the bishop of my ward, I thought I was too busy to attend Scout training. As a result, after being released as bishop and called as Varsity coach, I wasn't sure what a Varsity coach was or did.

What I did know is that we had a teachers quorum of 12 young men—one of them my son—who lacked unity and had difficulty showing up on Sunday, doing their home teaching, and fulfilling other priesthood assignments. They hadn't held activities consistently, and they hadn't gone camping in over a year.

When the teachers quorum adviser and I tried to plan some activities for them, they responded, "Whatever." They didn't follow up on related assignments we gave them, and the more we tried to promote our ideas, the more lackluster the young men became.

A Light Came On

I wondered if there was more I could be learning and doing as a Varsity coach and Young Men leader, so I read several talks by Charles W. Dahlquist II, former Young Men general president. He said:

"It is time we received the training . . . to help us become better priesthood and Young Men leaders and [it is time we] recognized that Scouting is a vital part of the Aaronic Priesthood activity program and can help greatly to build better-prepared missionaries, better husbands and fathers, [and] help prepare our young men to receive the ordinances of the temple, and help reactivate those who have drifted."¹

I thought to myself, "This is coming from our Church leaders. They're not asking me if I would like to go to training if I have time. They're saying that *all* those



with responsibility for young men have a duty to be fully trained in Scouting and Aaronic Priesthood in order to help strengthen and save our youth.”

Out of obedience, I bought a uniform and went to a whole day of position-specific training. Then I went to the Red Cross and got CPR and first-aid certified. Then I completed Outdoor Leader Skills. Then I went to Wood Badge. I also read the *Varsity Guidebook* and the *Boy Scout Handbook* cover to cover, and I got all the books on program features for Varsity Scouting.² I also began to study more earnestly about Aaronic Priesthood and Duty to God.

In the process, a light came on. Suddenly I began to see and feel the vision the Lord has for the young men, which helped me see there was much more I could do to help them.

We’re in This Together

“Here is some of the stuff you can do,” I told the young men after I became acquainted with the 27 Varsity team program features. They liked the idea of a knife-throwing competition, which is part of the Frontiersman program feature. A couple of days later I found my son Blake throwing steak knives into our nice wooden yard furniture.

“You’re really interested in this, aren’t you?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“All right, let’s work on it,” I said. “First, let me get you a board to throw at.”

Suddenly the young men got excited, and we leaders got out of the way. Knives were expensive, so they decided to make their own. Blake called a brother in our ward who had tools and access to metal. Then he called a brother in another ward and asked if they could use his shop. The quorum president, acting as Varsity team captain, assigned the young men as program managers³ and gave everyone something to do.

Next, the young men decided they wanted activity shirts and voted on a shirt logo. When they showed up for our first high-adventure backpacking trip, they all had on their shirts. This encouraged unity, and they wore the shirts for their activities afterward.

Around the campfire during the first night of our hike, I handed out bracelets I had learned to make at Wood Badge. “Put one on your neighbor,” I said. “We’re brothers, and we’re doing this week together.” After our trip, some of those young men would not take the bracelets off.

Where once they had been lackluster about “our” activities, they became enthusiastic about “their” activities, which they chose, planned, and carried out under the direction of their quorum president/team captain.

I Didn't Have to Reinvent the Wheel

Once the young men became engaged, other things fell into place. As they got excited about going on high-adventure activities, they started working together as a team, hanging out, and being more diligent in priesthood service. They started stepping up in ways we never could have imagined. I had no idea that Scouting would play such a big role, but it enhanced everything else and gave us opportunities to teach priesthood principles.

By using Scouting to help the young men learn priesthood leadership, our quorum did a complete 180. The deacons and priests quorums, seeing what we were doing, started stepping up as well.

The teachers quorum president was reluctant at first as we increased our focus on encouraging him to use his priesthood keys. But we'd say, "It's your call. You hold the keys." Success took time and consistency, but he started to feel more comfortable with his responsibility.

My training gave us a uniform, organized way to help the young men plan their activities. I didn't have to reinvent the wheel; I just had to implement my training. Before, we racked our brains about what we were going to do each week for Young Men night. Now we didn't have enough weeks to do all the activities the young men wanted to do. Once they became engaged, we had no problem planning a year ahead.

The more time we spent outdoors with the young men, the more opportunities we had to instruct them on leadership principles and the more chances they had to teach each other.

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My Eyes Were Opened

As I began praying more about each young man, I could feel my love for them grow. And as I studied the *Varsity Guidebook*, the *Boy Scout Handbook*, Duty to God, and the scriptures and then prayed about my calling, my eyes were opened. At times I would receive inspiration, and thoughts would come to me about how to better encourage and strengthen the young men in their priesthood duties.

During one court of honor, a young man presented me with his mentor pin, hugged me, and whispered, "You've been like a father to me." I hadn't realized how much our relationship meant to him. I believe that would not have happened had I not followed the counsel of the Brethren.

If we are having trouble getting our young men to advance in the priesthood, we may not be doing everything the Brethren have asked us to do. Scout training made my calling 10 times easier, and we had 10 times the results. The young men caught fire and carried the program themselves. My training changed me; more important, it changed the young men. ■

The author lives in Washington, USA.

NOTES

1. Charles W. Dahlquist II, "Strengthening and Vitalizing Aaronic Priesthood Quorums," address given at Young Men open house, Sept. 2004.
2. Varsity Scouting has five areas of emphasis that are supported by 27 detailed program features that help Scouts and leaders plan activities.
3. Program managers are young men assigned to oversee each of the five areas of emphasis in Varsity Scouting: advancement, high adventure/sports, personal development, service, and special programs and events.



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