

**THE IMPORTANCE OF
THE UNIT COMMISSIONER**



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Preface

Intentions are to support the Commissioner Concept through personal experiences, reports from other Commissioners, Units succeeding from Commissioner visitations and their assistance with a Units program.

Many Districts and Councils have allowed the District Commissioner Staff to become ineffective. Some Districts have a Commissioner Staff registered but typically they are serving youth at a Unit level and time does not allow them to be as effective in delivering Unit service. Units are not being visited each month. Therefore the connection between them, the District and the Council is lost.

It is at this point that a Pack or Troop is most vulnerable. Shortcuts may be used regarding safety policies, events of the District or Council may not be known and the Pack or Troop pulls further away from the rest of the District.

There are Packs and Troops that work quite well regardless of a Unit Commissioners visit. A trained and well organized Committee and Unit Leader usually lead them.

These Units will work well until the organization breaks down due to the normal turnover in Leadership that most units experience.

It's this type of situation that creates a reactive response from the Commissioner staff that is in place at the District. The Units Leaders will not know them. They will not

be familiar with the Units youth or the program that they have been receiving. It will be difficult for a Unit Commissioner to provide the service that this Unit will need.

To sum it all up, a visiting Unit Commissioner for every Unit is what each Pack or Troop deserves to help them deliver the promise of Scouting.

Primary Role of the Unit Commissioner

The primary role of the Unit Commissioner is extensive in that it includes everything listed in the Commissioner Field Book for Unit service, which include, being a friend, a representative, a doctor, a teacher, and a counselor.

Lets look at each item and break it down.

Being a friend to a unit would mean being around for them at Pack or Troop functions such as attending a Pine Wood Derby and quickly volunteering to judge for the race and encouraging others to do the same. It might mean attending a Troop hike or camping with them on an overnight campout. By sharing in some of the experiences of the Pack or Troop, the Commissioner will become familiar with them and their needs.

Being a friend of the Unit does not mean signing off requirements for rank advancement, helping with Den or Patrol planning, making arrangements for Blue and Gold Banquets, or choosing a camp for the summer.

Being a friend to Unit would mean making suggestions for summer camp, possibilities for a banquet location or advising who should sign off rank requirements.

Being a friend to the Unit Committee by assisting with the Charter Renewal process, giving advice to the Committee on selecting new leaders, assisting the Charter Organization and the Committee on meeting location, dates of important events and presenting the Charter to the Charter Organization. Attending Charter functions if possible such as going to the Church services on Sunday if the Charter is at a Church. Having training information for new leaders and advising the Pack or Troop Training Committee on attendance and the importance of trained leaders.

Helping with Charter renewal and the importance of recruitment and retention of youth in the Scouting program are major roles of the Unit Commissioner.

Being a representative as defined by Webster's Dictionary is: 1. Serving to represent, standing or acting for another, serving as a typical or characteristic example. As a Unit Commissioner you might be the only contact many leaders have with their District or Council. A complete understanding of your role and the people you come into contact with is essential. Being neat in appearance, uniformed properly, and delivering on your promises will influence the Units served. If you called them and asked permission to visit their unit and then did not show up or said you will be visiting them once a month and they welcomed you once and never saw you again, they would look at this as the District does not care about them. They may not be as open to a return visit or be able to trust you. Remember you are a typical and characteristic example of Boy Scouting. If you say you are going to do something, make sure you follow through and be professional.

Being a representative, the policies and procedures of Boy Scouts of America must be available and with you so you can answer questions from a Unit Committee. If you don't know a particular policy, be familiar enough to be able to find the answer for them or find someone who does know the answer. Remember, you are a representative but also a friend, be willing to help them.

Being a teacher will require you to rely on your experience and knowledge of when Training events are scheduled. A close relationship with your District Training Chairman will enable you to have the most current events available. This information should always be with you and updated as needed. Youth protection, Fast Start Training, and many other training aids are available and should be a part of a kit each Unit

Commissioner should have with them. During a Unit visitation a leader may ask advice on a topic. Be sure the answer follows the guidelines of Scouting and is not opinion.

Constantly giving advice and trying to run a Unit is not a function of the Unit Commissioner. It is best to help them find the answer themselves rather than telling them how to do something.

Let them figure out the problem, your position is to guide them towards their correct answer.

Being a teacher to your Units also means on occasion you will have to work with the youth of a Unit. They are why we exist. Being familiar with Tiger Cubs up to Venture Crews is a must to be able to cover Unit service completely.

New Commissioners have a lot to learn. Be available and willing to assist the new Commissioner whenever asked or called upon.

The Commissioner Field Book states as a Commissioner, you will have a wonderful opportunity to participate in the growth of unit leaders by sharing your knowledge with them.

The Commissioner is a counselor and there will be times when even the experienced leader needs some reinforcement of ideas or issues. Not every leader sees things the same way and many have different ways of accomplishing the same tasks. This can create problems and with counseling, problems sometimes can be corrected. Many experienced leaders can get stale in their positions and may need a boost by the Commissioner recommending more training or an outing that the unit has never done before. Sometimes adults just won't get along because of conflicting ideas or methods.

Commissioners have to be certain not to choose sides in cases where adults are in conflict with each other. Be prepared to work both sides towards reconciling their differences and getting on with their main task of providing a program of scouting for their youth. Help them solve their own problems.

Being a doctor to a unit is being able to recognize when a unit starts to have problems such as poor attendance, no leadership, the unit is not meeting, there is not much of a program. Recognizing these symptoms and recommending ways to improve the situation to the unit committee or leader before the problem gets out of hand is the best medicine. Being proactive and not reactive goes a long way in unit problem solving.

The Unit Commissioner is suppose to be a friend, representative, doctor, teacher, and counselor. Those are all large tasks by themselves but the successful Unit Commissioner works at and excels at all of them.

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Recruiting The Commissioner

Selecting the candidate for a Commissioner needs to start with deciding how many Commissioners are needed to achieve a 3 units to 1 Commissioner ratio. Once the number of Commissioner is decided, then who becomes a Commissioner?

The guide, Selecting District People should be used as well as all other resources available in selecting quality people to become Unit Commissioners. The unit commissioner should be but not necessarily a veteran scout leader, they should be open to new ideas, and be willing to learn new skills in dealing with adults. Much of the work of the Unit Commissioner is working with Committee's, unit leaders and the parents of youth.

Some of the people you can recruit from are leaders who's son's have grown too old for the scouting program, eagle scouts, past leaders who like the program and want to continue in scouting and another area is finding the large unit that has good leadership in place and new adults coming into the unit want to be involved in scouting but there does not seem to be a place for them in the unit. This is an excellent place to recruit from because the opportunity to recruit from existing leaders who want a change of pace or from the leader who does not have a defined task within the unit are all possibilities to be a Unit Commissioner.

Many leaders are already occupied with tasks at a unit level because their son may be in the unit. This is fine because that is where they should be. Some leaders cannot say no to volunteerism and be careful not to recruit someone whose time is already committed.

A position as a Unit Commissioner is going to require some evenings visiting units and there will be a Commissioners meeting to attend. If the Unit Commissioner has three units to visit (3to1 ratio), and a Commissioners meeting to attend, that is four evenings out and there may not be time for other commitments in scouting. This is the largest obstacle in maintaining the 3 to 1 ratio and a full Commissioner staff. Ideally the Commissioner has no other responsibilities in scouting and can devote all his scouting time on Commissioner duties.

From the Commissioner of Administration of Unit Service it states "Commissioner must not be registered as unit leaders. Although some commissioners may be registered on a unit committee because they have a son in the unit or because of previous personal history in the unit, their principal Scouting obligation should be with commissioner responsibilities.

Commissioners can not be assigned their own units, Commissioner can only be registered in one commissioner position and another area which needs attention is that a unit commissioner should not be assigned to an assistant district commissioner where there could be a conflict of interest. A unit commissioner reporting on a unit that an assistant district commissioner is currently registered as a committee member could be a conflict.

In recruiting the commissioner, be sure to explain the position and the responsibilities that come with the position. Be sure to explain the time that will be required. Make sure the candidate understands your expectations. Some may want to try and be a commissioner but won't do it because they are not sure what they have to do and are afraid of not doing well. Give them an out, let them know that if in a couple of months if it does not work out, they can be relieved of their commitment, no questions asked.

Typically if this is done, they may find out that they enjoy the position and they will continue on as successful commissioners.

Once again from the Administration of Unit Service, make sure commissioner's priorities are known. Because of the many programs and activities of Scouting, unit commissioners might find themselves promoting projects, carrying messages, acting as judges, running Friends of Scouting Campaigns, etc. While all these activities are important, they are not the primary responsibilities of the unit commissioner. Let the District Committee handle these areas. Unit commissioners are expected to cooperate with other Scouting personnel related to specific programs but should not be responsible for them. A unit commissioner's job is to help units succeed!

Unit commissioners can be recruited from many areas but the most important thing to remember is to explain the duties and obligations of the unit commissioner before commissioning them. Its better to have a few well-trained unit commissioners than it is to have a full compliment of commissioners that do not visit units. Visiting units and unit service is what a commissioner does.

Tools of the Unit Commissioner

The tools of the Unit Commissioner are not hard to find or expensive. The list is rather long if not endless. From the Council Service Center every Commissioner should have:

The Commissioner Basic Training Manual
Commissioner Helps for Packs, Troops, and Crews
Commissioner Field Book (Commissioner's Bible)
Commissioner Administration of Unit Service
Continuing Education for Commissioners

These are only the start of a Commissioner's library. During a unit visitation a Commissioner might be asked for advice on safety! The Commissioner could be asked to help a Pack Committee plan an outing that they have never done before. A Troop may ask for advice on the possibilities of going rock climbing and want to know the policies to do this event. A Venture Crew might want to go scuba diving. A new Scoutmaster might need assistance in advancement requirements. The Commissioners literature listed before may not have this area's covered.

A suggestion would be to acquire The Scoutmaster Handbook, Cub Scout Leader Book, Venturing Leaders Manual and any other associated literature. The local Council newspaper could also be a resource for the Commissioner.

A commissioner's library could also include the Boy Scout Handbook and the Boy Scout Field Book

Example:

The Commissioner goes and visits a new unit or a unit that has experienced a complete turnover in leadership. It happens! One of the first things on the agenda for the new adults is to know how much scouting is going to cost. While working with them they will want to know how much the uniform costs, how much are the books, how much are awards, trophy's, ribbons and many other items that will run through their minds as they try to prepare themselves as leaders of youth.

They know the adults in their unit will ask them these same questions. So, why not have a Boy Scouts of America retail catalogue available for them. Have several available for all the new leaders so the information can be shared among themselves at their Committee meetings.

So, in addition to handbooks of Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting and Venture Crews, a Commissioner should have:

The Guide to Safe Scouting

Health and Safety Guide

Safe Swim Defense

Scouting Magazine and Boys Life Magazine are also excellent resources.

The list of resource material is endless that a Commissioner can acquire. There are brochures on camping, hiking, state parks, trails, and backpacking that are available locally that a Commissioner could have with them or have access too.

These and more are the tools and resource materials of the Unit Commissioner.

The Training of the Unit Commissioner

The training of the Unit Commissioner begins with Basic Training for Unit Commissioners. There is also the College of Commissioner Science with a multitude of topics. A Commissioner could also attend the Philmont Training Center and take courses, which would be useful to them and their units.

Hopefully the entry level Commissioner is beginning as a Commissioner with Youth Protection Training, which is taught locally or on line. The next step would be that the Commissioner has attained training in Cub Scout and Boy Scout Leader Essentials. Wood badge is also an excellent resource and training that would be useful to the Commissioner. The role of the Commissioner will require that being a trainer will be necessary at times so the Trainer Development Conference would also be needed to round out the training portfolio of the successful Commissioner.

With the Cub and Boy Scout Leader Essentials the Commissioner will get the basics of what Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting is trying to achieve with the youth. This training will introduce them to the structure of Scouting, rank advancement, uniforming, and the ideals of scouting. The patrol method will also be covered as well as a history of the scout movement.

Youth Protection will train the Commissioner to recognize potential abuses of youth, and what to do if abuse is suspected or detected. Wood badge training is the premium-training course for the leader. A commissioner can expect to be introduced to teamwork and management skills that will be useful in the operation of a Cub Scout Pack

or Boy Scout Troop. The training received would also be useful in daily life as well as in Scouting.

Unit Commissioner basic training will cover what the Commissioner needs to have to get started in the position of Unit Commissioner. It will include the role of the commissioner, counseling leaders, charter renewal, unit visitations, serving the unit, history on commissioner service, and expectations and responsibilities of the Unit Commissioner.

College of Commissioner Science is additional training for the Commissioner staff of a District. There are 38 training sections for the Commissioner, which includes but is not limited to the Introduction to Commissioner Science, Unit Charter renewal, Unit visitation, Health and Safety, Counseling Skills, Effective Unit Service in Rural and Urban Communities, and a section on Consider your Spouse and Family. There is not a topic covered that could not be used by the Commissioner. The College of Commissioner Science is organized on a higher education theme as the name implies. The first step is to earn the Bachelors Degree; the Masters Degree is earned next and then the Doctorate Degree to demonstrate that the Commissioner has taken courses.

A Commissioner will at times have to train leaders as discussed in chapter 1. A Commissioner may have to be a teacher. Having experience does not mean that a Commissioner will be able to share their knowledge with other leaders. It only means that they have endured the experience. The Trainer Development Conference is an excellent training course covering presentation of topics, how to develop outlines, team work, time limitations and keeping the training interesting. Some of the overall objectives are the

principles of learning, training methods, planning a training event, and putting "pizzazz" in training.

The Unit Commissioner can also attend The Philmont Training Center in Cimarron New Mexico. The conferences are a week in length and are conducted by divisions of the National Council and are instructed by a faculty of volunteer and professional Scouters. There are 96 separate conferences and cover topics from Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, District and Council operations.

With all the training available to the Commissioner, the importance of the Unit Commissioner to the Units they serve should be obvious.

The Units Monthly Visit

A Unit Commissioners responsibility to visit the unit monthly is needed to develop a track record of the unit's health.

By visiting them once a month, a commissioner can see how many youth are attending, what kind of program does the unit have in place, how many adults are involved. The commissioner will find what type of committee is in place and can make recommendations when asked.

There is a constant change in scouting leadership, as a youth grows and moves on typically so does his parent. That parent may be the Cubmaster, Troop Committee Chairman or Scoutmaster.

Therefore, a monthly visit is suggested to keep up with the changes that occur in a Pack, Troop, or Crew.

The monthly visit is not limited to the Troop or pack meeting but also includes meeting with the Pack or Troop committee to help in selecting new leadership, charter renewal, assisting the Charter Organization and Charter Representative with policies of Scouting.

The monthly visit is also important to see how many new youth are joining the unit. As the older youth move on it is important that there is a flow of new youth entering the unit to provide for the future of the particular Pack or Troop. There may be the need to help develop a program of Webelo to Scout transition, or assist the Pack in a school night to recruit new youth into the program. Next would be to observe the program and make sure it is fun and challenging for the boys.

Being available to the leadership of the unit as a representative of the District and Council is also important so information on recent District and Council events can be available to the leaders. The monthly visit could also be attending a Troop hike or a Packs pine wood derby.

Experiencing the program with the unit will help bond the relationship between the Commissioner and the Unit leader and will help keep communications strong. With continued unit visitations from an active Unit Commissioner a leaders response to a Commissioner's visit will not be, "why do I need a commissioner" but will be "where is my commissioner".

The commissioner's observations are also discussed at the monthly commissioners meeting. If there are problems in a unit, the problems and solutions to these problems are discussed at these meetings.

District Commissioners Staff Meetings

A District Commissioner's staff meeting is focused on the needs of individual units. During these meetings is where the unit commissioner's monthly visitation and observations will be discussed. Not every unit has problems, but the affirmative knowledge that scouting is taking place supports the program of scouting in each unit. Priority is given to the units that have issues. Corrective measures are discussed and implemented to help the unit in the next month.

Sometimes there may be issues that are more than one Commissioner can handle alone and assignment of additional Unit Commissioners or an Assistant District Commissioner may be needed.

Each unit commissioner is assigned to an Assistant District Commissioner (ADC). Each ADC is assigned up to five Unit Commissioners. It is during these meetings that the ADC's and their Unit Commissioner's meet and discuss the units assigned to them.

It is also during this time that the district commissioner and district executive can sit in on the ADC meeting and be available to help with any problems.

The commissioner never gets rest from training. Part of this meeting is also a brief training session. It could be on charter renewal, counseling, uniforms, changes in policies, quality unit requirements, and other related topics.

The district commissioners meetings are also a time for recognition of commissioners for their service to units.

It also might include a visit from the council commissioner or executive.

There are two important reasons for the commissioner's staff meeting and that is to have the ADC breakout sessions to review the needs of the units and to have a training session.

These meetings are not included or to be a part of the districts committee meeting.

The entire function of these meetings is service to units and to assist the commissioner's s

Serving them. These meetings are held monthly. This is done so if a unit has an immediate need, it can be addressed and resolved as soon as possible.

The district commissioner then presents the information from these meetings to the district committee and the health of the districts units can be determined.

The planning of district camporee's, friends of scouting campaigns, unit leader training sessions is not a part of this meeting. Those are strictly functions of the district committee.

Without the district commissioner's staff meeting the unit commissioner's monthly visitation would not get the attention or input from all the resources that are available.

Helping Units Succeed

In defining the importance of the unit commissioner, the primary role of the unit commissioner has been discussed. The commissioner's interaction with a unit and the responsibilities to a unit's success has been covered. The right type of person to be a unit commissioner was described to make sure it is understood what is to be expected of the unit commissioner.

Tools of the unit commissioner were covered to demonstrate the overall topics the commissioner needs to be able to handle both in Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting. The training needed to be a successful unit commissioner was reviewed as well as the monthly visit and the district commissioner's monthly staff meeting.

All of this wraps up under one umbrella of helping units succeed.

Working with the adults of a unit can be compared to the role of the Boy Scout troops "Troop Guide" or the Cub Scout Packs "Den Chief"

The unit commissioner is the guide for the Cub Scout Pack or Boy Scout Troop's leaders.

Examples of the work of the visiting unit commissioner are:

A Boy Scout Troop meets typically at their charter organization, which is a church. A new Pastor is in place and he is not familiar with the Boy Scout program or the evenings that they meet. He changes locks and relocates the Troops equipment to a storage facility without notifying the Scoutmaster. The scoutmaster becomes frustrated and decides the church must not want the troop to meet at the church any longer. He insists on a new charter organization. He has his own church in mind. Meetings get

cancelled at the last minute; parents are getting frustrated as well. The problem may not have existed if a commissioner had been making monthly visits..

The reality of this situation is that the new Pastor does not have a communication with the Troops leadership; the equipment that was removed to a storage facility was going to be made available to the troop as soon as the Pastor could find out whom he needed to contact. The locks were changed because with a new Pastor, the church elders decided that too many keys to the church over the years had been handed out. They wanted to regain control of access to the church and provide the new keys to all parties interested, including the troop.

With a unit commissioner's help, understanding of the scouting program was explained; a service project for the church grounds was developed to demonstrate the value of sponsoring a youth organization to the church congregation.

Then a bond between the church and the troop committee was created so a line of communication was always in place. The role of the Charter Representative was discussed and both parties would always know future changes in leadership.

Another situation would be a unit is undergoing changes in the background of its members. A particular unit has been a troop for a number of years and it has been historically a small unit due to the small number of people in the area. In the past 5 years much of the farmland in the area has been developed into new expensive homes. There is a clash in the members in that a small unit led by working class leaders are now having a core of professional executives join their unit. There are different ideas on how the administration of the unit should be tracked. The veteran leadership wants to keep the records of the unit in paper form using the record books available at the local service

center, the new leadership wants to use the available technology and put all the records in computer form.

The veteran leadership also states that the unit is still small and having it all on paper is easier for them. The new leadership makes a stand that the unit will soon grow and that putting it all in the computer is the best way to keep records.

A unit commissioner that is visiting this unit might recommend that both ways to keep records are good methods. The commissioner may ask the new leaders if any of them are willing to help the veteran leadership put the troop records in computer form and show the committee how much easier it can be keeping the records. There are some records that may still need to be kept in paper form and that would support the veteran leaders on the need for simplicity.

There are countless issues that can be reviewed but the need for the Unit Commissioner is evident. Who would be the guide in these situations if the unit commissioner were absent from these units?

This is a demonstration of the importance of the unit commissioner.

Work Cited

Boy Scouts of America, Commissioner Administration of Unit Service

Boy Scouts of America, Commissioner Basic Training Manual

Boy Scouts of America, Commissioner Fieldbook for Unit Service

Boy Scouts of America, Commissioner Helps for Packs, Troops, and Crews

Boy Scouts of America, Continuing Education for Commissioners

Boy Scouts of America, Selecting District People