



The Thing That Matters Most

Scouting today can seem complex. Everyone has their own priorities, their own goals and objectives. Each program area has its unique challenges and requirements. There seems to be no end to the paperwork and other distractions facing leaders, commissioners and staffers at every level. Journey to Excellence, Friends of Scouting, online this and that, endless meetings and demands all seem to distract our attention from why we joined Scouting in the first place – the youth we care so much about.

Given all the demands placed upon us, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and perhaps even lost as to what to do. If you boil everything down to the basics, there is only one thing that matters most. That one thing is delivering the promise of Scouting to our youth, families and communities. We deliver the promise with every effective unit meeting that we conduct, with every youth we get in to the woods, and with every youngster we watch grow.

How do we deliver the promise of Scouting? That is summed up in one word – ***retention***. We cannot deliver the promise if there is no one there to deliver it to. The one thing that matters most is sustaining our youth and families from year to year through engaging unit programs that are responsive, innovative and challenging. This needs to be the driving force behind all we do or all is for not. Everything else is secondary.

Where do you fit into the retention picture? How do you make a difference? That's easy to answer. You fit in and make a difference by being there. Our youth depend on each of us, in whatever role we perform, to be there for them. They look to each of us to "*do our best*" to give them the chance to do their best. When we do this we are giving them a purpose. A sense of self purpose is what drives Scouting. Forget all the other hype,

cute slogans and catch phrases, without creating that sense of self purpose, that inner drive to do my best, there is no Scouting program. What feeds that drive – retention does.

So then, if retention is what matters most, how do we do it? Well, the key to retention is in providing a safe, engaging and responsive program. You have to feed a fire with fresh wood to keep it burning. The same thing holds true with our youth. Scouting provides a wealth of resources to help us innovate and challenge our members. Some are obvious such as manuals and camps to visit. Others aren't so apparent.

Journey to Excellence is a great example of this. JTE isn't just a report; it's a powerful retention planning guide. If we model unit programs around its suggested activities and frequencies we build that sense of drive and purpose in our scouts. We engage and challenge them. We deliver to them the things that keep them coming back year after year. JTE isn't about a patch; it's about retaining scouts and delivering the Scouting promise to families and communities.

Unit Commissioners, Roundtables and training events all provide fresh wood to keep the retention fire burning. Successful leaders avail themselves to all these things. We have to prepare ourselves before we can teach others to be prepared. The more we feed the fire the brighter it will burn. Successful leaders don't view external requirements as distractors but rather as tools to bolster their units. "How can this help me retain my scouts?" is the foremost question each of us should keep in mind when facing a new challenge. If it builds unit strength, cohesiveness and sense of purpose then embrace it and use it fully. If it doesn't then it's not part of the only thing that matters.

Feed the Fire – Think Retention