

## **Advice for Leaders (to avoid Leader Burn-out)**

As a Troop Leader for Dog Scouts of America, you are helping promote our mission on a local level, which is very important to us. You are very much appreciated, and the work you do is very critical. It is very important that you know how much you ARE appreciated, because “volunteer” work is often taken for granted, and that in itself leads to burnout. I have included a few tips here, to help you as a leader to avoid burnout. I hope you find it helpful. If you have anything to add, please let me know. Thanks again!

I am offering these tips, assuming that you have already read all of the other information available to you, to help in the Leadership process (on the [“Start a Troop”](#) page).

**#1 GET HELP!** Not the psychiatric kind...

Having a “co-leader” and a “division of labor” is a really good idea. If you become ill, overextended, burned out, or incapacitated for a period of time, you will have confidence that things can go on as usual. Knowing that you are the only glue that holds something together is very stressful. Everything falls on your shoulders. This is no fun. Those of us with leadership qualities enjoy knowing that we are helping people “be all they can be,” but sometimes you tire of “being the mommy.”

This job is rewarding, but has its ups and downs. A co-leader can help you cope with some of the down side of the job. Two heads often work better than one, and if you can have a co-leader, you can feel more free to take some needed time off, or whatever. There may come a time when you actually have to move from the area or something, and your disappearance could lead to the folding of the troop if you don’t have another person ready to take on the responsibility.

Don’t be afraid to delegate responsibilities. With all that having a troop entails, it can easily be broken up into various categories. Fundraising, Outings, Continuing Education, and Community Service are four categories that leap into my mind. Maybe there are actually one or more of these things that your troop doesn’t actually engage in. That’s fine. And that’s easier. But, you may find that people’s reasons for wanting to join a troop vary, and some people may be very “gung-ho” about the outings, and others very passionate about fundraising. Using their enthusiasm for their favorite aspect of troop membership by placing them in charge of all or some of those duties will take a great load off you. Have someone else in charge of finding a fun place to go hiking each month. Have someone else find a new source for an educational presentation or project to work on. Have someone else be the contact person for Community Service activities, or the newsletter editor, or secretary, or whatever else you can delegate.

Remember why you wanted a troop in the first place. Do what you are the best at. I had someone bring home a very important fact to me at our first Dog Scout Camp of 2001. The camper pointed out that “Lonnie is a very good director and dog trainer, but her strengths don’t lie in hotel management or food service!” After I hired full time food service staff, and an administrative assistant, the camps ran so much more smoothly for the rest of the summer. I was less stressed, and the campers had a much better experience because Lonnie wasn’t trying to do it all.

Do what you are good at, and find someone else to take care of the other things. There will be someone who is good at those other things, and they will surely offer their help if it means the smoother operation of their troop functions. No matter how talented you are, you can’t do it all, and you shouldn’t try to. If you’re like me, you feel that if you want it done right, the best way is

to do it yourself. However, if you will just “let go,” and allow someone else the opportunity, you may be pleasantly surprised--I know I was!

Troops require TEAMWORK! Maintain that theme. If you start out thinking that you're the only one who knows what direction you're going, then you will always just have a group of followers, and you will always be “the mommy.” Get your members involved, and help them to accept responsibility. You will be amazed at the benefits you will receive.

When we started assigning clean-up details at camp, we thought we might get whining from the campers. Instead, we had people tell us how much they actually loved that aspect of camp, and what a great “team building” exercise it was! The more responsibility you give, the fewer noses you'll end up having to wipe!

## **#2 Don't Panic!**

Keep a good attitude. Nothing is insurmountable. If you're having trouble, you can always turn to me or the other leaders for advice or help. Remember my golden rule: **People Vary**. Don't let personalities get in the way. You will always come across whiners, complainers, or other “poisonous” people. Remember that they own their own problems. Don't let them rain on your parade.

Most of us are women, and God knows we have our ups and downs. We tend to go from, “Wow, this is great!” to “I don't want to do this any more!” in one second flat. Don't let a setback or two make you decide to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Settle down, count to ten, relax, do some deep breathing, remember that people vary, and then move on. Perhaps you are overly stressed because you are not taking full advantage of suggestion #1 (Get help!).

Re-examine your priorities. Are there things you're doing that you could do without? Are you doing **too much**? Maybe you should just focus on the most important things. If there are other things you wish to do, too, see #1 (get help!). Remember that as a troop leader, there are very few requirements made of you from national headquarters. You can do as much or as little as you desire. I personally choose to run my own troop rather loosely. I have two very fun outings each year, and a couple of FUNdraisers, and we do some community education. I am the epitome of sloth and selfishness. If it's not **fun**, I don't want to do it. I don't ask you to have a minimum of so many fundraisers, outings, meetings or anything. I don't require monthly reports, monthly meetings, or any kind of official documentation to run your troop on a day-to-day level unless you have applied to be a non-profit. If you are going “above and beyond” the call of duty, I suggest you re-read suggestion #1 (get help!), or read on (learn to say “no”).

Learn to say, “no.” This goes along with re-examining your priorities above. Some of us just keep taking on additional responsibilities, and filling up our days with work. You find it hard to say no to the person who wants free help, or to the garden club, who wants you to run for secretary, or the school that wants you to head up the PTA. My own urge to please everyone makes me want to say YES now, and figure out how I'm going to do it later. I often wish later that I had said NO when the opportunity presented itself. I have had to make a resolve not to accept Judging assignments for 4 months out of the year. When people call, I feel bad, because I don't have a previous commitment on the calendar now, but I know that if I accept the assignment, I will be sorry later, because November through March is sledding season, and I know I will be wanting to be at races or practice sessions during any or all of those weekends. I've also had to say no to good things, like vacations in the Caribbean and being on television, because I just couldn't make the commitment.

Take advantage of outside help. If you are finding that your troop needs more than you are capable of providing to them, don't be afraid to refer them to an outside source. If you see that your average troop member needs more extensive training, for example, that is not something you are required to provide as the troop leader. You can always refer the members to a training class in your area, where they can get the help they need. They should not join your troop with the idea that you are going to provide free training classes for them.

An occasional educational meeting which covers important concepts like "leave it", skill-building games or indirect access exercises is one thing. In-depth training is quite another. Don't be afraid to refer a member to a good local training facility. If there is no good training facility in the area, and you end up being forced to offer a class yourself to cover the necessary items to help your troop members learn how to positively train their dogs to do the things necessary to be good Dog Scouts, you can do that outside of your job description as troop leader, and charge a fee for your services.

Don't "whine" about it. Whining isn't constructive. If you whine and complain to other people, you will depress them, or possibly cause them to join you in having a feeling of unhappiness (misery loves company). Discontent can spread like a bad disease. Please don't start a "Woe is me" club. If you talk to me about it, I would be happy to listen to your woes, but am I really in a position to change anything? I make very few "demands" of my leaders. Remember, you are free to do as much or as little as you choose. You might think about WHOM you need to talk to, that will actually bring about change.

If your troop members are putting too much pressure on you, then THEY are the ones you need to complain to (or make your feelings known to). You need to speak to the people who are able to affect a change in the situation. Are you putting too many demands on yourself? Better see #1 (get help!), or learn to say no.

### **#3 Don't lose the vision!**

Keep sight of the long-term goal. Remember, you are changing the world. You are spreading the concept of responsible dog ownership and touching many people's lives. You are making the world a better place for future generations. You are helping people to engage in activities that will magnify their bond with their dog. You are creating responsible dog owners. You are helping keep dogs as valued members of the family, and not as something to be discarded at the first sign of problems. You are reducing the number of unwanted dogs in the country, by making them **wanted, valued** family members, who have more freedom to accompany their owners because of their good behavior and their owner's commitment to responsibility.

Feel GOOD about yourself! You are important. If you weren't here, doing what you do, the world would be different. Think of all the lives you've touched. Remember the ripple effect. You may think that what you do is small potatoes, but those ripples go out and continue to have an effect on people and the world. If this doesn't make you feel important, it should. You are important to me. And you are important to a lot of other people, even the ones that don't tell you so.

Take it one step at a time. Pace yourself. We can't change the world in a day. But, be certain, we ARE changing the world, one step at a time. Don't overload yourself trying to "do it all" right now. If you're like me, you want to do it all, and you want it done yesterday! This can't always happen. Just keep telling yourself that you're doing the best you can. Take it easy. Just do what you can do. If you take on too much, and become overloaded, you will be subject to burnout, you may decide to pack it all in, and then we wouldn't have you at all!

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