

Is troop leadership for you?

People contact me every day, wondering if they have what it takes to be the leader of a Dog Scout Troop. It's really rather simple and I've put together the information below to help clarify for you the role of the Troop Leader. People often express concern about their lack of training knowledge or experience in handling the needs of a group. These are normal and as you will read below, usually not as large a concern as you might think.

Dog Scout troops are able to do their own thing and decide what activities they want to do and when. There are guidelines and helpful suggestions offered, but no set schedule of how a meeting should be run or how many activities a troop should do a year. This allows leaders and troops to be flexible as the troop grows and the interests of the members evolve.

There are also few restrictions on who can start a troop and because troops are sometimes far from the national headquarters, the only training offered may come from the info available on the website.

For this reason, this page was developed so you can get an idea of the type of person we feel would be the best type of troop leader. The possession of these attributes (or willingness to strive to achieve them) can make you an excellent candidate for the role of troop leader.

Willing to learn

We all have things to learn. Dog training is an ever changing field of study and an open mind to try new things and a desire to learn more helps a great deal. As a troop leader, people will look to you for guidance in their dog's training. This does not mean you need to be a master trainer! If you can connect with a positive trainer in your area, you can refer people to that person or training center when they need advice or help (as long as taking classes from that person or training center is not a troop membership requirement.) Because people will be asking you "how do I get my dog to..." you'll find that if you are willing to do some research to find the answer for them, you will be learning as well. The DSA website is loaded with training advice for basic training, problem behaviors and specialty behaviors like the ones needed for some of the badges. Attending seminars, DSA camps and Leadership Retreats is a great way to expand your knowledge, if you are able to take advantage of these training opportunities.

Familiar with DSA and the troop program

The Dog Scouts of America website is PACKED with information. By reading the web pages, you can learn about the DSA organization, its programs, camps and training information. You should plan to spend some time browsing through the website to learn as much about the organization as possible. This will help you accurately answer questions posed by troop members (or future troop members or reporters) and will help you become familiar with all that DSA has to offer. Some of the troop websites also are a wealth of information. There are several helpful pages, guides and manuals found at: www.DogScoutTroop107.com/LearnNewThings.html

Organizational skills

There are some organizational skills and information management skills needed for running a troop. If you are lacking these skills, the good news is that you can have other members of the troop designated to many of these “jobs.” Someone can be in charge of planning troop activities and letting the troop know about them. You can have someone in charge of keeping track of the troop member’s contact information and achievements, welcoming new members and removing ones that move on from the troop membership roster. Someone can be put in charge of the finances for the troop as well. If you collect dues or donations, you’ll need a way to manage those funds responsibly.

A good example

It is expected that the DSA troop leaders will set good examples of the Dog Scout way and uphold the Dog Scout laws. Your actions and attitude will be mimicked by your troop members, so be sure you are setting a good example for them to follow. You should use only positive training methods, maintain your dog’s care and health, be responsible in the management of your dog when you are out in public, etc. Your familiarity with the Dog Scout laws and the concepts that DSA strives to increase in the dog owning public will help you tell others WHY you think these things are important. This can help persuade them to follow your lead in their care and management of their own dog(s).

Good communication skills

When you are emailed or phoned by someone interested in joining your troop, it is courteous to answer them in a prompt manner. If a troop member has questions or concerns, addressing them quickly can help them feel they are important. Being able to clearly explain a training technique or give information about DSA will help people understand. Making sure your troop members know about upcoming events in a timely manner is important for high levels of troop participation. Everyone is busy, so getting events on the calendar as early as possible helps everyone plan.

Good intentions

The reason for being a troop leader should be to help others, not for your own monetary gain. Helping others understand their dogs better, present training and socialization opportunities, and help in the community. The troop should not be a means of increasing your income by using the membership list as a sales audience. This does not mean you can’t charge for providing training instruction, but it can’t be a requirement for the troop members.

Now that you have a better idea of your role as the leader of a troop, I hope you will be able to jump in with both feet and start promoting the DSA missions in your area. If you have any questions and can’t find the answer in the troop leaders guide, feel free to ask Chris Puls, the Certification Program Director. It’s her job to be sure you are as comfortable as possible with the role of troop leader.