

Suggestions for your first troop meeting

Something I suggest for the first meeting is an overview of what DSA is (and isn't) as well as what you'd like the troop to do (if you have any specific plans or goals.)

DSA is a scouting organization for dogs. It is not a training club (although you will learn a good deal about dogs and positive training methods when troop leaders use the info on the DSA website and in the leaders manual as a teaching guide.)

Only positive training methods are encouraged. We realize it takes some time for people to switch training methods so using only positive methods is not required for membership. However, during DSA functions and outings (or any time a DSA logo, bandanna, dog uniform, etc. is being worn or dogs/people are representing DSA), no harsh methods can be tolerated (no yelling at the dog, no harsh use of any training equipment, no abusive contact with the animal, no "alpha rolls," etc.) DSA strives to be a leading example of how positive training methods can increase the bond between people and their dogs. If there are questions about how to use positive methods to teach a desired behavior, there are many resources available (books, websites, classes, etc.) The DSA talk list is also a great place to pose a training question to get positive advice.

Invite everyone to join the DSA talk list:

http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/DSA_TalkList/

Read over "the Dog Scout Way," "Dog Scout Laws" and understand that the mission of DSA is to help people and dogs deepen their bond and to educate both so they can help each other and the community. Through training and better understanding, DSA hopes to reduce the number of dogs being surrendered to shelters for behavioral issues and pure misunderstanding of what a dog is and naturally does and can do. Troop activities should be fun, but also a learning and bonding experience for the people and their dogs.

Be sure that people understand:

- That DSA dues need to be kept current because troop participation is a perk of national membership and membership provides insurance coverage during troop activities. However, it's OK to allow folks to visit a meeting or two before they join.
- That paying dues to DSA does not make their dog a Dog Scout. The Dog Scout title is earned by the dog and parent when they have done enough learning and training to pass the Dog Scout certification process. This can now be done by anyone in the world through the "worldwide Dog Scout Certification" using videotaping of the training and testing as well as a written test for the handler. Standards for the Dog Scout title and earning the badges are high. We want to always have it be an accomplishment to be proud of when a dog/handler earns a badge. A guide to earning the Dog Scout title can be found at:
www.DogScoutTroop107.com/LearnNewThings.html
- Dogs need to earn the Dog Scout badge/title prior to being able to turn in any paperwork for the specialty badges. Anyone can work on and learn the specialty badge behaviors at any time, but only Dog Scouts can turn in the paperwork for the specialty badges.

- All of the badges are available in the same way as the Dog Scout badge (video for people that don't have an evaluator near them.) There are several badges available (for Dog Scouts) that do not require videotaping or written testing: Community Service, Therapy Dog, all 3 letterboxing badges & all 3 geocaching badges. These are earned through record keeping and submission of a log sheet.
- There are fees associated with the badges but only if paperwork is turned in to get the actual patch. The Dog Scout title/patch is \$35. All other specialty badges are \$25 each. Print and handout "how a badge is born" to help people understand the reason for these fees. Anyone can learn the badge behaviors at anytime for free, but if they want a patch to show for the accomplishments (and they want DSA to keep the records of their accomplishments) then the fees help cover that (as well as all the things covered in how a badge is born.) The learning is encouraged, getting the patch is optional :-). If you are a trainer and want to charge for the training, you may, as long as it's not required for participation in the troop. You can't use DSA to increase your training business in that way. See the troop policies in the Troop Leaders manual for more details.
- There are many activities troops can do (based on the desires of the troop members.) Here's some examples: meetings (at our meetings, a training topic is covered, dogs get to play off lead and we do games that work on obedience), hikes or walks in parks, agility fun days (rent a ring or make your own equipment), fundraisers for local charities (or make up your own fundraiser for a local shelter or even DSA), parties, swimming outings, campouts (our troop rents cabins that allow dogs), the list goes on & on. Ask the members what they want to do and learn. Guest speakers are also a great way to learn new things if no one in the troop is ready to teach a particular behavior or topic.
- Speaking of getting the troop involved... Delegating tasks is highly recommended! I tried to do it all when I started and it takes a LOT of time that way.

Have someone take care of:

Troop promotion department- prints flyers, brochures and business cards. Makes sure these are in place and well stocked at locations around the area (vet's offices, groomers, doggie daycares, dog parks, etc.) All troop members can help with distribution of flyers and in telling others about DSA and the troop.

Hiking/walks coordinator - Picks the locations for the troop walks, notifies the members of that location and time and leads the walks.

Fundraiser coordinator- Gets info about area fundraisers and notifies the troop about them, keeps all the fundraiser display table items, helps any troop member that wants to create a fundraiser for the troop to participate in, collects money to be turned in as a "donation from dog scout troop ###" at walk-a-thons or other fundraisers.

Meeting planner- Sets date/time of meetings and lets troop members know when they are. Also makes sure that a topic is ready to be presented by a troop member or a guest speaker.

Treasurer- If the troop has its own dues (it's up to the troop how much those dues are) this person keeps track of troop membership and troop funds. The troop membership could also be handled by another person.

Co-leader- If the troop leader gets sick or is busy, it helps to have another person "in charge" to keep things running smoothly.

Camp coordinator- If the troop likes to camp, this person scouts out possible locations, helps select campout dates, etc.

I'm sure there are more titles and jobs that can be delegated, so take advantage of that and put the troop members to work! :-) If everyone helps a little, then one person doesn't get bogged down. Helping the troop in an active way also helps people feel they are a cohesive part of the organization.

That should give you lots to cover, so I'll stop there :-) You'll find more info in the troop leader's manual. Most of all, have fun, relax and let it happen. You just guide the process, the troop is really all about the desires and motivation of its members.

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