

## **FEBRUARY – GATHERING THE BOYS TOGETHER FOR A PRODUCTIVE MEETING**

### **Music Full then under**

AARON: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to our CubCast for February.

PAT: February 8<sup>th</sup> is considered the birthday of the Boys Scouts of America, and there's usually lots of fun ways to celebrate.

AARON: Which means activities with lots of kids.

PAT: From our survey with leaders and parents, we know that whether it's a big activity or a den or pack meeting, they'd like to know the secrets of getting those rambunctious screaming Scouts settled down so that the meeting or activity can be more organized and enjoyable.

AARON: I bet we've got someone standing by who will help us figure it all out, but before I introduce our guest, this reminds me of a Think & Grin joke I once read in *Boys' Life* magazine. What military unit has the most kids? Give up? It's the infantry! Get it? *Infantry*, infantry.

PAT: (Laughs)

### **Music Fades**

AARON: Bobby Lester has been involved as a Den Leader or Cubmaster with the Longhorn Council in Fort Worth, Texas, for just more than four years, but in that short time he's completed Wood Badge, re-launched a local troop

that hadn't been active in more than 20 years, and his pack has had a 50% growth in membership. So it's no surprise that Bobby was presented in 2012 with the Driving Force award for being a volunteer who has exemplified the concept of a driving force helping to make his unit successful. Welcome to CubCast, Bobby.

BOBBY: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

AARON: Now these questions hit very close to home for me. I'm a brand new Cub Scout leader out here in Frisco, Texas, and it can be a challenge getting these kids to settle down and pay attention. Let's be honest, just because they're Cub Scouts, it doesn't mean they're always the best behaved eight-year-olds. My son is a perfect example of that. Is this a behavior issue or is this just, you know, the fact that they're eight-to-ten year-old boys?

BOBBY: Well, it's kind of one of those things, where you see in the dictionary where it says "see another word." Well, "behavioral" issue has "see little boys" right next to it. They've got tons of energy pent up from a day just listening to their teacher talk.

PAT: One of the biggest complaints or frustrations that I see in the surveys that we do when we're talking to Den Leaders is how do I get these kids to settle down? What tips or tricks can you give us?

BOBBY: The old staple is we use the sign of Akela - two fingers in the air - but it means nothing unless you have total buy-in from everybody there, not just

Scouts, but parents and even siblings. From the very first meeting and sometimes even before that during recruitment, we always tell the Scouts and parents what the sign means and what is expected. I expect every person in the room to quietly put up the sign when it's given and pay attention and then stay quiet until everybody is ready. Occasionally I have to remind people, and I don't mind explaining that in the middle of a meeting to remind people what it means. Every year it is a challenge getting everyone in the swing of it but consistently staying with it, that's the key, but that's only how you get their attention. You got to keep it, and to keep their attention you've got to put on a good show.

When my son just started as a Tiger, the PTA brought in a magician to put on a show for their own recruitment drive. And after having wrestled with about three Cub Scout meetings, I was about ready (laughs) to pull out my hair just trying to get these balls of energy focused. Then I saw this magician, and I know it sounds weird but this guy was slick, he was polished, and he kept a group of about 80 kids under complete control for a full hour. It was cool, and it was kind of an "aha" moment.

I'm not saying that we, as (laughs) Cub Masters, need to do magic tricks, but the showmanship is what you're really after. A kid magician doesn't talk to a room of kids the same way that you might imagine a math teacher would; he's goofy, he's energetic, he relates to the kids, and that's what we need to be doing, especially as Cubmasters and Den Leaders.

And so the biggest thing that I did to make sure that I got everyone settled down was I went on YouTube and I did a search for "kid magician." I took some notes and came up with some ideas, and I incorporate that into all of my meetings.

AARON: I think I've got the goofy part for myself, no problem. I probably need to work on the rest of it though. So we talked about the leader's role. Do the

boys have a role in a productive meeting? Do they have a part to play as well?

**BOBBY:** Absolutely. I always like to say that boys give legitimacy to anything that a leader says or does. When it comes from a leader it's just another adult. They may respect you, they may think you're cool or funny, especially if you've been up there doing jokes and stuff, but the magic happens when one boy demonstrates the behavior we're after. That's one of the key reasons that Den Chiefs are so important. They show the boys what a model Scout should look like. If I have a boy who is particularly good at a certain task or subject, or even one who's just willing to help, I put them front and center. And the whole objective of Cub Scouts is to get them ready for Boy Scouts, and so anything I can do to get an individual boy into some type of leadership position, I do. This includes leading flag ceremonies, leading prayers, asking questions, leading activities, greeting people as they arrive. I know we're on the right track when a boy comes up to me before a meeting and asks, "What can I do?"

**PAT:** So, Bobby, we have pack meetings and pack activities, and we have all the boys there, but we also have a lot of siblings that just add more to the mix and the mayhem of what's going on. How do you handle that since this is a family program and we want them to attend it and we want them to be there?

**BOBBY:** Yeah. Siblings play a big part of it. My younger son, he's been coming with us since day one. I think he was two when we started, and that was a challenge. The big thing that we do is we always tell parents along with the sign of Akela, there's another thing I tell directly to parents. "When your son is here, you're here," and I make that a very pointed statement

whenever I talk to them because that phrase goes beyond simply being present on the premises during a den or pack meeting. Sometimes all I see for the rest of the meeting is the top of some parent's head as they play on their smartphone, and we've all seen that.

But much like the boys, you've got to engage the parents as well. If they don't feel there's any need for their active involvement, they won't be involved and then their kids, both the Scout and sibling, can very well just twist off. So it requires a little bit of planning on our part as leaders. We can't just say, "Hey, please help me." That's too general. Most parents want to help, but I know me personally, I don't want to step on someone else's toes. So what I do is, I will give a parent a specific task so if their child, whether it be a Scout or a sibling, is acting up, I will discretely -- I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings here -- but discretely go to the parent before the meeting and say something like, "Hey, little Johnny has been really disruptive the last few meetings, and can you sit beside him and keep him focused?" Sometimes I will give a parent a very specific task to do with the kid so it's not just me that they're looking at the whole time. Sometimes the change of pace with a different adult really keeps the kids engaged and focused because the parents are focused as well.

PAT: Bobby, I like that you really get in there and talk to the parents and help them understand what your needs are, also because I think there is sometimes a reticence with leaders to do that because they are afraid of hurting feelings.

BOBBY: You can't be passive. You can't hope and maybe whine or complain that people aren't doing enough. I mean sure, as leaders we all say, "Man, I wish this happened." You have to make it happen. You've got to be assertive in telling people what you need. You have to identify exactly

what you need from a parent and say, "Do this for me, please." Very few people are going to say no outright if you give them a specific task.

AARON: I'm in the same boat as you are. You don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, and I'm just sort of thankful that the parents have elected to enroll their kids in the program. At the same time though, like you say, you do have to just sort of be direct. I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit more about how you approach a parent whose child has maybe had some issues. I don't know if you have any experience with special needs children, but how do you deal with that?

BOBBY: We have several kids that their parents have come to me. Most of them tend to volunteer that information--

AARON: Right.

BOBBY: -- because they wanted to be helpful, and there are a few that, maybe their kids are and they don't want to put that label on them, that's fine. The important thing is to focus on behaviors, what the kids are actually doing. If one kid keeps getting up and running around the room, or a kid is not sitting with the rest of the den and they're sitting off on the side somewhere, I will go to the parent and say, "Hey Mr. Jones/Mrs. Jones, I noticed your son hasn't been sitting with us, or he hasn't been doing the activity that we want everyone else to do. What can you do to help us?" Focusing on the behavior you really get the parents engaged, and they know that you're not attacking their child or them. We're talking about a demonstrable behavior that you want their child to exhibit.

AARON: I would be curious to know if you've ever had an experience with a parent who was maybe a little overly sensitive or defensive when you talked to them about that.

BOBBY: Yes, we have had that before where we've had some fairly significant reactions to how their child is behaving. Maybe the child was really over-reacting like Pinewood Derby. That's a really good example where someone really thought that they were going to win, they didn't, or they misunderstood the rules or something like that, and the parents really blew that out of proportion. Without getting too legalistic, one of the things that our pack is really good about doing is we document a lot of things. The big events we document what we're expecting to do. This is how we're going to run Pinewood Derby. This is how we're going to run this event. And so we talk a little bit about that, they hear the rules, and if a parent disagrees with it, this is what we talked about. This is how we handled it.

But the important thing to do, I think more importantly than hiding behind a piece of paper, I personally make it my mission to be more than just someone who gets up there and talks on Monday night. I try to get to know the folks, be approachable, so that they can feel free to talk to me and say, "Hey, Bobby, this isn't working. I don't like this at all. What's going on with this kid, or this other kid, or you? How come this isn't being done the right way?" And from a leader perspective, that's where my magic happens because whenever I have a parent questioning how something's being run, that's my chance to bring yet another parent into leadership saying, "You know what? If this isn't working the way you think it should and you have a better idea, then let's work together to make it happen."

PAT: That's really a positive way to be handling these issues, and that's great advice.

AARON: Let me ask you this, Bobby. As the kids get older, my son is in a Wolf den right now, and it's a little bit hectic at times. Is it going to get easier as he gets older?

BOBBY: Absolutely. I've got a big smile on my face just thinking about that now because the Tiger and Wolf years are a real hair-burning experience.

AARON: Oh, my gosh (laughs).

BOBBY: Yeah. (Laughs) Bears and Webelos, that leadership is really starting to sink in. Our pack does several community service projects throughout the year, but we restrict some of those to Bear and Webelos mainly because at that age we're pretty confident in their ability to stick to a task and not have a meltdown 30 minutes into it.

PAT: Bobby, are there any resources for leaders who want to know more about keeping the kids together?

BOBBY: Planning is key. One of the reasons these magicians are so good is that they practice and they plan. You can't hope to pull off a good meeting if you wait to pull something together at the last minute. And one of the things that I have relied on from day one are the BSA pack and den meeting plans that you can find on BSA's website. They give you a really good framework to start on at least a week in advance so that you can

make phone calls, send emails, and talk to people to make sure that things are in place before the meeting.

PAT: Is there anything else about gathering the kids for a productive meeting or activity that you think ought to be shared with our listeners?

BOBBY: Absolutely. This is something that I picked up in Wood Badge. It had been many, many years since I'd been in Scouting, and Wood Badge reminded me of this, and that is the old standards such as song, chant, cheers, and applause; they are so much fun. There are tons of websites out there that are dedicated to Scouting activities, and Google is your friend. Just do a search for Cub Scout cheers, and you will not be disappointed. You'll find lots of that to help keep people engaged and having fun.

AARON: Excellent! The goal is to have the boys have fun and build adventures while also obtaining some order to the madness. Bobby, thanks so much for being on CubCast and helping us, especially myself, how to do that.

BOBBY: You bet. Thank you.

PAT: And now a sneak peek at the February ScoutCast. Then we'll be right back with Reminders and Tips.

**(ScoutCast – How to Motivate a Scout on His Trek along the Merit Badge Trail)**

PAT: Okay, now it's time for Reminders and Tips. Aaron, take it away!

AARON: Let's start with succession plans. Having a succession plan means being prepared to replace volunteers in key roles because the den or pack leader may have committed to their responsibilities, but alas, they may not be able to keep that commitment.

PAT: And since our motto is Be Prepared, a successor needs to be identified for the role should something unexpected happen. With a succession plan in place, you won't be scrambling around trying to fill a vacancy, and the pack can maintain its tradition of 100% trained leaders. Tune into CubCast this April for more on succession plans and cultivating new leaders.

AARON: This is also a good time to be thinking about recruiting more boys in the pack with the Spring Roundup. Talk to your district executive about coordinating your recruitment efforts with local schools. Point out to the boys that just because they're on a soccer team or a baseball team, they can still be a Cub Scout. Even though they can't attend all the meetings, they can still advance and have fun in Scouting. In fact, you can go back to the January 2015 CubCast to learn how Cub Scouts and sports can complement each other.

PAT: So do you ever find yourself in a group with other Scouters discussing how Scouting could be an even better program? Don't keep those thoughts to yourself. Sign up to join our Research Panel. We'll send you three surveys a year where you can feel free to let us know what's on your mind. Just go to [scouting.org](http://scouting.org), scroll to the bottom of the page, and click

on "About" and then you'll see the research panel portion.

[www.scouting.org/about/research/ResearchPanel](http://www.scouting.org/about/research/ResearchPanel)

AARON: And all the comments will be read and taken seriously, Scout's honor.

### **BEGIN MUSIC UNDER**

AARON: The music cue means the February CubCast has now come to an end. Special thanks to our guest Bobby Lester.

PAT: And thank you for joining us. Be sure to come back next month as we learn how to transition into the new adventures in the Cub Scout program.

AARON: Don't forget to send us your thoughts and ideas for future CubCasts. It's easy. Just send an e-mail to [cubcast@scouting.org](mailto:cubcast@scouting.org) or a tweet to @cubcast. We look forward to hearing from you. With that

I'm Aaron Derr –

PAT: And I'm Pat Wellen--

AARON AND PAT: Happy Birthday, BSA!

### **MUSIC FULL TO FINISH**