

JULY: CUBMASTER 101

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AMY: Hello everyone! It's the middle of summer and you could be outside soaking up the sun by sailing and swimming, but we're so glad you found the time to click on the July CubCast! I'm Amy Hutcherson, Cub Scout Specialist.

AARON: And I'm Aaron Derr, Senior Writer for *Boys' Life* Magazine. The topic for this month is Cubmaster 101, and I am super excited about this, Amy, because I am a Cubmaster. Like most Cubmasters, I have a lot to learn so this is the perfect podcast. Whether you need a refresher course or just some talking points for recruiting for your next Cubmaster, this is the podcast for you.

AMY: Cubmaster Matt Janchar contacted the CubCast mailbox to see if this was a topic worth talking about.

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AMY: So we invited Matt onto the show to assist us with Cubmaster 101. Matt has been serving as a Cub leader since 2011. He became Cubmaster of Pack 157 in Weston, Massachusetts, in 2013 and hasn't looked back. He's here to share what he's learned and his tips to a successful pack. Welcome to CubCast, Matt.

MATT: Thanks for having me on.

AMY: So, Matt, why do you think that this would be a good discussion for CubCast?

MATT: Like 99 percent of all Cubmasters, I certainly wasn't expecting to end up in a leadership role. I followed a pretty well-worn path that many Cubmasters have probably followed before me. You volunteer to help out with a craft at a Tiger Den meeting, then you help out to plan the next den meeting, and then you find out you're helping to lead the entire den. And surprise! The next thing you know, you're the Cubmaster! So, as a result the role of Cubmaster can feel very overwhelming at first, but I quickly learned that there are a lot of resources, strategies and techniques that can enhance your hope of survival and even success as a Cubmaster.

AARON: I would love it if it was possible to somehow track the average time that elapses between when a Cubmaster first gets involved and the time that he or she becomes Cubmaster. I bet it's short. For me it was about like five or six weeks. So, Matt, why is it challenging to be a Cubmaster?

MATT: The very first challenge that all Cubmasters face are the same ones that all Scouting families do, which is you've got a hectic schedule and you've got pressure from other activities that are competing for family time. You're trying to figure out the best ways to navigate the Cub Scout program itself. But the real challenge of being a Cubmaster is that you're finally getting comfortable as a participant in Cub Scouting and suddenly you become the person who's supposed to have all of the answers and lead the pack forward. That's why it really starts to seem overwhelming at first.

Of all the volunteer positions in Cub Scouting, the Cubmaster is the one that requires the most planning and the most thinking ahead, and that is a big transition from simply showing up at den meetings or pack events and volunteering to pitch in and help lead an activity. As the Cubmaster, I've

realized that by the time a pack event happens now, me and my committee have already been thinking about it for several weeks in advance.

AMY: So, Matt, help us change that “Surprise, you’re a Cubmaster” to “Congratulations, you’re a Cubmaster.” What are the rewards?

MATT: I’m glad you asked, because once you navigate those initial challenges you realize the rewards are great. The good news about being a Cubmaster is that it may actually be one of the most rewarding things you ever do. We’re all involved in Scouting because we believe it’s a great way to build character and the skills of our youth in a way that benefits families, our communities and even society as a whole. And just being a part of even the smallest steps on that journey in a boy’s life creates memories for a lifetime. One of the rewards of being a Cubmaster is that it can be just good old-fashioned fun. I tell people that it’s probably one of the few leadership roles in the world where the job description sometimes calls for maximum silliness. Costumes and songs and stunts... You name it; Cubmasters will do it. I’ve got a box in my Cubmaster closet that looks like it really belongs at the circus. It’s full of wigs and bicycle horns and slide whistles and magic tricks. And it might seem unimportant at first, but that spirit of silliness or fun can be a really effective technique for capturing the attention of your Scouts, connecting with them at their own level, and then setting that tone of fun, adventure and excitement that Scouting can offer.

AARON: All right, Matt, so let’s say we’ve got brand-new Mr. Cubmaster Aaron onboard, ready to go. What’s the first thing a new Cubmaster needs to know?

MATT: One of the very first survival techniques that I learned was the importance of setting a routine. Working with my pack committee to plan meetings and

the annual calendar became much easier when we took a step back and realized that there are several repeating elements that every pack meeting and every annual Cub Scout calendar should have. There are some great programming guides at Scouting.org that are a good resource for helping build these routines into your pack, but there are a couple of examples that we developed. The first was a custom flag ceremony that we use at every den meeting and every pack event. We looked at a bunch of different flag ceremonies and then came up with one that had speaking roles for multiple Scouts, had specific roles for the flagbearers and the other members of the color guard, and we decided to make that our official flag ceremony.

Another routine is the annual calendar has a bit of a repeating cycle to it, so during the month of October, for example, we'll have our annual Heroes Pack Meeting. We'll have either the fire department or the police department or the search and rescue team or even the paramedics come in and do demonstrations for the Scouts, and we'll build a pack meeting around that with activities and crafts and other elements that build upon that theme. Over December we'll do a Holiday Pack Meeting which is when we focus on community service. We'll do holiday crafts and we'll deliver those to some senior homes in our town. And so once you realize that your programming calendar also has a bit of routine to it, the challenge becomes a lot less overwhelming of trying to put together a full year of programming.

Another great routine to have as you think about things that repeat with pack meetings and pack events, and that's to jot down some notes or ideas on where you can tweak things for next time. So, questions like... What worked well and what didn't? Were there any additional materials that would have been helpful to have? How long did each activity really take? Encourage your den leaders and pack parents to pass along those observations and ideas to you if they see something, and soon you'll have

this library of pack meeting and event plans that are just polished to perfection and they're just ready to use in future years.

AMY: Great stuff. Okay, so for Cubmaster Aaron, what's the most important thing a new Cubmaster needs to know about working with boys?

MATT: Boys love doing. Sometimes they like listening, occasionally they like thinking, but they always will love doing, and that's why the programming guides are full of so many ideas that have boys getting their hands busy working on crafts or skits or other activities. The real magic actually happens when you use that love of doing things to help the boys start to build a sense of accomplishment forming friendships with other Scouts, connecting with their families and their adult helpers by doing things together.

The other really important thing to remember about boys is that they pretty much judge their Scouting experience by just three letters: F-U-N. If they're having fun, they'll leave every pack function eager for the next one. And so as a Cubmaster, I say, "Hey, guys, are we having fun here?" And this is where the Cubmaster really sets that tone as a leader. If you're there with a big smile, lots of energy, your den leaders will catch that spirit, your parents will catch that spirit, and I guarantee the Scouts will catch it and the pack will follow your lead.

AARON: You mention the parents. If I could just share a real quick story. When I first took over as Cubmaster of my son's pack a couple years ago, I'll never forget the very first meeting. We were doing a new fundraiser we had never done before. It was a council-sanctioned, approved fundraiser, but it was different than what the pack was used to. I got up at our first meeting and we were talking about this new fundraiser we were so excited about, and I had not been Cubmaster for more than like 15 minutes when I've got this parent standing up questioning me in front of everybody. So,

Matt, what's the most important thing a new Cubmaster needs to know about the grown-ups?

MATT: The very first skill that a Cubmaster needs to learn, particularly with the parents, is being a good listener. Letting parents know that their ideas are valued really goes a long way towards making those parents feel like they have ownership of the program and can be cooperative with you towards helping the pack move forward.

The second is making sure that everyone understands there's a shared goal, and that goal is to make that pack the best pack it can possibly be. When parents realize you have the interests of the pack and the interest of their sons at heart they'll be much more cooperative and inclusive and eager to help. Our committee and I always focus on making sure that parents will see our Scouts building skills, building their character in ways that aren't being offered by sports, music lessons, school activities and the many other things that are competing for their family time. That way they'll leave every pack event eager for the next one, just like the Scouts are, because they're having so much fun. So, in addition to making sure that there is plenty of fun happening in the pack, we also make sure that that emphasis on Scouting values comes through in our programming loud and clear, and there are some pretty simple ways to do that. You could be ending a pack meeting with a quiet story time that matches the pack meeting theme and teaches the Scouts some principles of character, or you could just do a simple Cubmasters Minute where you talk about one of the points of the Cub Scout Law. This is another reason that our custom formal flag ceremony really resonates with the parents. It demonstrates that value of citizenship that the Scouts are learning by being actively involved and doing it themselves.

One really important aspect of working with the parents is to make sure that they understand the pack calendar. Our committee put a tremendous amount of work into our communications strategy with parents. We do a

weekly or a biweekly email dependent on the pace of our activities that are scheduled for that month. And we also are very careful to keep our website calendar updated with specific times, locations for every single event. And the way all of that comes together is, at the end of each year, we begin planning for the next one. Then as soon as we set that calendar, we make sure it's available to the parents of our pack, and that really goes a long way towards helping them navigate that hectic challenge that we all talked about initially which is trying to balance the various demands on each family's time and make sure that there's always room for Scouting.

AARON: Matt, you mentioned the committee. When I first took over as Cubmaster, I don't think I even knew what a committee was, didn't know that it existed, (and) didn't know what they did. I would love it if you could talk a little bit about the relationship and the role that the Cubmaster plays with the committee chair and all of the other leaders in the pack.

MATT: When you think about all the resources that are available to Cubmasters. the parents, and the adult helpers in your pack are the most important resource, whether they're den leaders, members of your committee, or just parents that have become increasingly involved in helping you make the pack go. One of the most important things a Cubmaster needs to do is to actively work to get more of those parent volunteers involved and excited about the pack and its programming. I guarantee you that some of the best programming your pack will ever have is programming that's led by other parents that are knowledgeable, or passionate about a particular topic. So, that very first step is to get to know your parents, and be sure you set aside some time to do that.

The second step is to encourage them, whether they hold leadership positions or not, to participate in training, whether that's position-specific or something more general like Basic Leader Outdoor Training. In our pack, we require everyone to volunteer in some small way, even if it's just

spending an hour helping decorate the annual Blue and Gold Banquet room or set up for the Pinewood Derby. And then each year we encourage our volunteers to take on a broader role so we can have a constant pipeline of engaged parents, despite the attrition of families that cross over into the Boy Scout troop each year.

AMY: I am so happy to see the way that Cub Scouting packs are structured with the committee and in the way that you really just feel like, if you have a functioning committee, you have great support and that you're not in it alone, so that's great to hear you talk about the relationship between the Cubmaster and his or her committee. So, are there any other additional resources that might help a new Cubmaster to figure it out?

MATT: There are plenty - everything from position-specific training that you can do, roundtables that are hosted by your council that are very valuable. There are programming guides online at [Scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) which are extremely helpful, everything from the annual calendar down to specific pack meetings, *Scouting* magazine, of course CubCast, to name a few. That [Scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) website has an entire section on setting up a plan and calendar for your pack and some guidelines with how you work with the adults that are in leadership roles as well as your committee. In fact, the avalanche of available resources can sometimes make the Cubmaster role seem even more overwhelming, starts to become more than you could possibly absorb as you're trying to get through those first few challenges as Cubmaster. But I think once you've completed your basic position-specific training, you can take your time growing into the rest of the training program as you're ready, after you've set up some of those routines that we talked about, navigated through your first few pack events.

AARON: That's a good way to lead into my next question about kind of growing into the role. Once you're the new Cubmaster, you're set, you've got it all figured out, the pack is running smoothly, what happens next?

MATT: This is actually where they really get to have a lot of fun and you tap into the rewarding part of being a Cubmaster. Once you've survived that initial challenge, that initial phase of, "Surprise, you're the Cubmaster," you begin to realize just how deep and rewarding the Cub Scout program really is. There's so much great content within Cub Scouting that it can literally take your Scouts anywhere you'd like to go. You'll never run out of ideas, challenges and achievements to pursue, and this is where all of your efforts to utilize your parents and your adults in leadership roles and their position-specific training really starts to pay off.

Earlier this year, we had a number of our Webelos Scouts receive the Supernova Medal. It took them three years of work under the mentorship of several trained parents in our pack. They built a medieval trebuchet with one mentor. They programmed robots with another mentor. They watched some experiments with liquid nitrogen with a third mentor from our pack. And they also toured the Science Museum and the laboratories at MIT here in Boston. When those Supernova medals got placed around their necks at the Blue and Gold Banquet, we had a room of Scouting families that were literally bursting with pride. And no one was prouder than their Cubmaster because all of this was a great example of just how far the Scouting program can really take you if you build that team of enthusiastic and trained parents around you.

AMY: That is awesome. I love stories like that about Cub Scouting. So, Matt, is there anything else at all for our session of Cubmaster 101 that we haven't talked about that you think ought to be shared with our listeners?

MATT: One of the most significant things I've learned in my initial years as Cubmaster is that there are two magic words that are more important than any other words a Cubmaster could ever say, and those words are, "Thank you." No matter how hard you and your pack committee are working to lead a winning program, you've always got to find time to say "thank you" to the parents, the volunteers, the members of your community, even the Council Executives that are all contributing to your success in some way. And here is why those words are so magical. They help other people realize that they're actually the ones who really make Cub Scouting great. And the next thing you know they're taking more ownership and helping your pack grow.

In my pack we actually instituted what we called a "Superparent" Medal, and this is a formal medal on a ribbon that is placed around the neck of two deserving parents at each pack meeting each month. And the highlight of the whole ceremony is that it's actually the Scout, their son, who places the medal around their neck, and then we take an official formal photo for our Hall of Honor that we put up on our website. It's really special for the parents to see how proud their sons are to put that "Superparent" Medal around their necks, and it really makes people realize that we appreciate their efforts and that they are really helping to contribute to make the pack great and it will work magic for your role as Cubmaster.

AMY: Wow that is fantastic. Well, I, for one, am so glad that we had this episode because the new Scouting year is soon to start and there'll probably be a few new Cubmasters and, hopefully, the folks that recruited them will steer them to this podcast. So, Matt, thanks for your suggestion and coming on the show to share all of this great stuff about Cub Scouting 101.

MATT: Thank you.

AARON: Now, don't go anywhere. We'll be back with Reminders and Tips right after this sneak peak of the July ScoutCast.

(July Scoutcast: Jamboree Door Closed? Here's How to Open It)

AARON: Okay, Amy, it's time for July Reminders and Tips.

AMY: You should be in the middle of completing the requirements for the Summertime Pack Award. A pack can earn the award by doing three pack activities for the summer: one activity each in June, July and August.

AARON: Hopefully, you had a pack activity back in June. Qualifying packs get a colorful streamer for the pack flag. Dens that have at least half of their members at the three summer pack events can earn a den ribbon. Pack members who take part in all three events are eligible for the National Summertime Pack Award pin.

AMY: And it's never too late to earn the World Conservation Award. You can find the requirements to earn the award by going to [scouting.org/awards_central](https://www.scouting.org/awards_central).

AARON: Speaking of awards, maybe your den is interested in getting the National Den Award. Check out the June CubCast for all the different activities your dens can participate in to earn it.

AMY: Your fall program planning should be complete by now, including your calendar for the entire upcoming year's activities and events. Be sure to share all that information with every parent in your pack. Today's parents are super busy, and the sooner they get the Cub Scouting events on their calendar, the better.

AARON: To make sure you've dotted every "i" and crossed every "t," download the June 2015 CubCast for full details on everything you need for planning the Cub Scouting year.

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AARON: So that's it for the July CubCast. Thanks to our guest, Matt Jancar, So, Matt told us what he thought would be a good idea. How about you? Just send us an e-mail to cubcast@scouting.org

AMY: Be sure to tune in next month as we figure out the next steps after the big first-nighter. And don't forget to tweet @cubcast with your Scouting leadership position or why you listen. Until next time, I'm Amy Hutcherson.

AARON: And I'm Aaron Derr. This Cubmaster 101 made me think of a Think-n-Grin joke: What is a balloons' least favorite subject? A pop-quiz!

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