

NOVEMBER – Participating Parents

Music Full then Under

AARON: Greetings and thanks for tuning in to the November CubCast. I am Aaron Derr, Senior Writer for *Boys Life* magazine, along with International Program Specialist, Amy Hutcherson. So, Amy, I see we got a letter in the CubCast mailbox.

AMY: We did. A loyal listener wants to know if we could devote an entire episode to finding clever ways to get every parent involved in Den and Pack meetings.

AARON: As a Cubmaster myself, I'm always looking for opportunities to get the parents involved, and right here, in the studio, is the man with all the ways and means of getting parents to participate, Mr. Anthony Berger.

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AARON: Anthony Berger began his professional career with the Boy Scouts of America in the Southwest Florida Council, and in 2009 was selected as the Scout Executive of the Chattahoochee Council in Columbus, GA. Earlier this year, Anthony became the National Director of Cub Scouting where he has the overall responsibility of the Cub Scout program and working with the National Committee on Cub Scouting. While serving as Scout Executive, Anthony started a Cub Scout Pack and served as Cubmaster for 5 years. He's one of us. The Pack started with 8 boys and grew to 35 – not bad! Welcome to CubCast, Anthony.

ANTHONY: Thanks for having me.

AARON: So, why is important to have every parent involved? so many parents want to be on their cell phones during the meeting and we always tell them, or at least I do - that this is a family event. You're not just going to drop your kid off. You're going to participate. So why is it important to have every parent involved?

ANTHONY: I have a philosophy about Scouting that I came to when I first started my career as District Executive. During this time of year, a lot of us are out there in schools recruiting kids, getting families involved and engaged, and one time after School Night we met all of our volunteers together at a little restaurant. We had all of our membership come in and it was up over last year and we were all feeling great. And the waitress came by and said, "Would you like anything?" and I said yeah, I would love some French silk pie. And she said, "Absolutely. Can I get I you a slice?" I said no, actually bring me the whole pie. So, I sat down and I started eating this pie, and everyone started looking at me like, "Are you going to eat that whole thing?" I started getting this sugar rush, and I felt so good. I was driving home and you can imagine what happened. I got sick. It was too much. And at that time, I had this epiphany that Scouting is like a pie, right? It's so good, it's delicious, but man, if you eat the whole thing by yourself you're gonna get sick. That's why people leave and they get frustrated. So...

AARON: It's a brilliant analogy.

ANTHONY: So, the next night we had the same restaurant, we had another Membership Night, and we were super excited, and the waitress came by and said, "Would you like something?" I said I'd love some French silk pie. And everyone who was there last night looked at me like "What are you,

nuts?" I said yes but this time can you bring me the whole pie and bring me eight plates and eight forks? Instead of eating the pie by myself, I sliced it up into small slices and passed out to everyone. And I kind of share the philosophy is that, Scouting is like a pie. It's best when it's shared with your friends and you give them just a little bit at a time so that they want more.

AMY: And I love that you use the analogy with the pie! So, we know that retention is our end goal, right? We need to keep our boys throughout the whole Scouting program, so how does parent involvement help with retaining our boys?

ANTHONY: When parents are involved and engaged in their sons' activities, your children appreciate that. They're not going to tell you today, so if you're looking for that instant gratification and reward, it's not going to happen. I didn't thank my mom for being my den mother at the time, until I was married and I thanked her for the time that she spent with me when I was a child. So, that instant gratification isn't there but it is so important to youth growth and development that the child sees their parent involved and interested in something that they're interested in. The beauty of Cub Scouting is it really does provide an opportunity to do constructive activities with your son. That's the basics and that helps with retention. Sons having fun, parents are having fun, everyone is involved and engaged.

AARON: What are some of the things to consider when asking for parent participation?

ANTHONY: One of the things that I always look at when we talk about recruiting volunteers, on any level but specifically when it came to building our Cub Scout Pack, we had eight boys. So, you would think, there's not a real need for a pack committee for just eight boys. But we did anyway and we created the infrastructure. We made it sure that we had a pack committee chair and we decided early on that instead of calling our committee meetings "committee meetings", we called them "parent meetings."

AMY: Love it.

ANTHONY: Very simple way to just send the invitation to let everyone know that they are involved and engaged and invited to attend. From that point we would have all eight parents come once a month and we would talk about the pack –very basic stuff. So, having that foundation from the beginning helped us grow to a capacity to be able to serve 35 families. Now, would all 35 families come to parent meeting nights? No, but 20...

AMY: Wow. That's amazing.

ANTHONY: And with 20 people in a room, as a Cubmaster and as my committee chair would say, it made it a lot easier for us to get a lot of things done.

AARON: You can get stuff done with 20 parents, sure.

ANTHONY: One of the tools that we highly recommend is that you use the Family Talent Survey every fall when people come onboard, getting to know each family, getting to know their strengths and weaknesses. Not everyone

wants to put on a uniform and meet with boys once a week. Because you don't want to do that doesn't mean that you don't have resources that can help make the pack grow. So, one of the things that I recommended that you do is you get together and know what you need. That's something that we don't do right off the bat. We just kind of stand up in the middle of the room and say, "We need help." But we're not specific with what exactly the help we need, so doing an inventory of what you would like to have and what leadership roles you need in your pack. Do you have someone who is going to help coordinate Cub Scout Day Camp? We had a parent that their only job was to send out text message reminders about parent meetings. Everyone has a role to play and discovering those roles is important. Having a written position description of what you're asking that person to do also helps a lot, that person that understands what are they committing to. This is really important for when you're identifying assistant den leaders and den leaders. If you just stand up and say, "We need den leaders," most people don't know what that is. But if you sit someone aside and give them a very detailed description of this is what we'd like for you to do, you're going to have a higher success rate and a higher quality program. One of the things that I also recommend that you do is, this is part of getting to know families and getting to know the individuals, is if you have a position to fill, take the time to write down the skill sets that that person needs to have. For example, what comes to mind when you think of a den leader?

AARON: Outgoing, a loudmouth. (Laughter)

AMY: Very organized.

AARON: Organized, bubbling personality.

ANTHONY: Absolutely, and those are types of things that you would sit down with your committee of parents and say, "Okay, what are the qualities or skill sets we're looking for someone as a den leader, as a Cubmaster, as a community chair," whoever it might be, and then say, "okay, what are the top three, and what is the top one? What's this one thing that we're not going to negotiate on?" And then once you have those skill sets, you have a profile of someone that now you know what you're looking for instead of 20 parents in the room and say, "Hey, we need someone to be the popcorn chair." No one knows what that is. And the first person that raises their hand may not necessary be the best person for the role.

AMY: I 100% agree. When you speak about having the things that you need help with as a den leader, I do this all the time. especially now my boys are Webelos, are getting to the point where we're utilizing a lot of the Scout skills that a lot of the boys that are in our local Boy Scout troop, they have those skills. I've practiced many, many times but I still can't say I'm proficient at tying all these knots. So, I am recruiting these Boy Scouts in, and parents can help me coordinate them. I have one parent coordinator that helps with the Boy Scouts. She brings in those skills to our den because, you're right, one person cannot do it all, nor can they be an expert on every single thing that the boys are expected to start to learn and to be proficient at.

AARON: Absolutely, yup.

ANTHONY: The other tip I have is that after you list skill sets, you know exactly what you're looking for, make a proper ask. Don't ask someone in the bulk of the meeting or at the end of the meeting. When we recruit volunteers we like to do it with another volunteer but in a setting that's designed just to

recruit that individual, not as an afterthought. Because what happens is, when you ask someone after a pack meeting to do a role, it kind of seems like it was an afterthought. Compared to asking someone, “Hey, tomorrow morning can you meet me for coffee and discuss a little bit about Cub Scouting?” And then ask them there in that setting.

AMY: Yeah.

ANTHONY: The pressure to say yes is gone to some degree, but also it give you a chance to have a conversation and let them know, the committee has met, we need this position filled, and you are the best person for that job.”
Wow, you’ve elevated that ask.

AMY: It’s a congratulations! *You* are the best person for this job.

ANTHONY: That’s right. It’s all in how you present it. And then following up with them. Once you’ve asked them to do a role, make the role worth doing and allow them to do it. That’s another hard thing for some folks to do.

AMY: Well, with the holidays coming up, starting with Thanksgiving later this month, how do we get parents involved to keep the den active during that busy holiday season?

ANTHONY: One fun thing could be to ask people to share some of their faith traditions that they might have. We have family traditions that we do; we have faith traditions that we do. Our family is Jewish and we always share, Hanukkah and how to spin the dreidel and we make dreidels and those

types of things with folks. And people always enjoy learning a little bit about everyone's family and heritage and cultural differences, so that's one good way to get parents involved.

AARON: What resources are available for leaders to learn more about parent participation?

ANTHONY: One of the great things we just launched from the National Service Center is the New Member Coordinator. It's a new position within packs and troops in all of our units. It's not like a den leader position where you only do that one role. It's kind of a concept of someone who helps and is designated to help get new families integrated into the Cub Scout Pack. So that someone might be the one uh, facilitates the Family Talent Survey and then brings that information back to the committee and say, "Okay, here are some resources or here are some prospects of people who could help us with the Pinewood Derby Race or building a new track," or whatever it might be.

AMY: Sure. You mentioned the Family Talent Survey. That is really one of the best-kept secrets for den leaders. I've been using it consistently over the last several years. I had one dad and he loved to fly fish. I would have never known this man was a fly fisherman. He never spoke of it, other than just writing it down. That was one of my son's favorite meetings as a Cub Scout was going to learn how to fly fish, so that survey is fantastic. You can really find some amazing things out about all the talent your parents have.

AARON: Very cool.

AMY: So, Anthony, is there anything else that you can share with us about parent participation that you think our listeners will benefit from?

ANTHONY: Absolutely. When, I was involved in a pack, one of the things that we really focused on was just getting to know each other as parents. Just think about the fact that the parents that are in your Cub Scout Pack, you all have so much in common. You have boys that are probably going to the same school, probably have the same teachers, you live in the same neighborhood, you're dealing with the same community issues. And the more you talk to each other about non-Scouting stuff, it really helps you connect and relate and maybe do activities outside of Scouting to get to know each other. And no one says that a pack committee meeting has to be in a formal room with a round table and chairs all around it. The setting can be very informal, in a place where, maybe the kids can go off and play for a little bit while the parents are talking to each other and don't feel like everything that you talk about has to be centered around Scouting.

AARON: Well, I know I picked up a thing or two that I'm going to try on my own pack and I'm sure our listeners did too. Anthony, thanks so much for being on CubCast and helping us think outside the box when it comes to getting all the parents involved in the dens and packs.

ANTHONY: Well, thank you, Amy, and Aaron for what you do for CubCast.

AMY: Now before you go running off, let's check in with this month's Safety Moment. Then we'll be back with Reminders and Tips.

Safety Moment: Transporting Scouts

AMY: Let's jump right into Reminders and Tips for November. First let's talk membership inventory. By now all your new youth and adult applications from your recruiting drive should be submitted to the council office. It's a good idea to compare the My.Scouting Tools records to your own to make sure there are no discrepancies and that all those new folks are properly registered.

AARON: It's also a lot easier to get people registered now electronically online.

AARON: We did that in our pack. When someone wasn't registered you just send them a link and, boom, they get registered. Very convenient.

AARON: Now, ask yourself this. Do all your dens have Den Chiefs? Talk to your commissioner or Scoutmaster about recruiting a Boy Scout to serve as the Den Chief. Being a Den Chief counts as a leadership position for the Scout's advancement so you're doing a good turn by "hiring" He'll also make a great program assistant. I've been a den leader for several years and it's not a coincidence that the easiest year was the year we had a Den Chief. In the market for another one, by the way.

AMY: As a bonus, you'll find you have a lot more time for yourself, and having this assistant will make being the leader so much easier. Download the October 2013 CubCast to learn all about the joy of having a Den Chief.

AARON: Now here's an ongoing piece of business: Remember: Cub Scout Adventure Loops do not require an advancement report. They are to be presented at a den meeting whenever each adventure is completed. It's all part of the instant recognition program of Cub Scouting. Stock up on the adventure loops ahead of time so you have them ready. And there's got to be something in that process that a parent could help out with.

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AARON: And that, sadly, brings us to the end of the November CubCast. Thanks to our guest, Anthony Berger, for joining us.

AMY: So, did you enjoy this CubCast? Even if you didn't, please let us know. Just send us an email to Cubcast@Scouting.org, or tweet to @Cubcast. Tune in next month for Religious Emblems. With that, I'm Amy Hutcherson.

AMY: And I'm Aaron Derr. From all of us at CubCast...

AMY AND AARON: Happy Thanksgiving!!

Music full to finish