

DECEMBER – THE MERIT BADGE PROCESS; DON'T CUT CORNERS

Music Full then under

ANISSA: Welcome everyone to *Scouting Magazine's ScoutCast* for December. I'm Anissa Hicks, along with Owen McCullough.

OWEN: Hey, Anissa. Hello, listeners! You may remember back in March we talked about the advancement process, part of which is earning merit badges.

ANISSA: We'll be ending the ScoutCast year with an in-depth discussion on Merit Badge Process and why it's so important that you don't cut corners.

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ANISSA: Joining us for the discussion is Jeff Bostwick. Jeff has served as Assistant Scoutmaster, District Chair, OA Lodge Advisor, and Council Training Chair. He is currently the Chair of National Merit Badge Sub Committee. You may remember Jeff from the April 2016 ScoutCast on Community Activities. Welcome Back to ScoutCast, Jeff.

JEFF: Thanks for having me back. It's great to be with you.

ANISSA: With the Merit Badge Process, I'm sure there are many steps, so walk us through that process.

JEFF: It is really basically three steps. Ideally, the first step is the Scout meets with his or her unit leader and discusses an interest in a particular merit badge. The unit leader then identifies a qualified and approved counselor for the Scout to work with towards earning that particular merit badge, hands the Scout a blue card which is sort of the passport to the Merit Badge Process. The second step is the Scout makes an appointment with and meets with the merit badge counselor, works on the merit badge. And

at the conclusion of that process, the third step is the Scout returns to the unit leader, who has a follow-up conference with the Scout, wherein the discussion of how the experience was takes place.

Now, alternatively, we all know that there are group merit badge approaches, merit badge clinics, merit badge fairs, merit badge classes, and other Scouting events like Scout Fairs, and that's all fine. And in that process, basically the Scout approaches the unit leader, indicates a desire to attend one of these classes, obtains a blue card, does the class, works towards a merit badge, on completion returns to the unit leader with a signed blue card, and then the roughly the same three steps occur except in a group setting as opposed to an individual setting.

OWEN: Certainly going through a merit badge and, for ones that I earned as a youth, it really gives you an exposure to new activities, new interests, possible careers, and that the object of it is to really give the Scout that opportunity. Sometimes though I've heard folks might take shortcuts. What kind of shortcuts do you think people are taking?

JEFF: The most shortcuts we see are not so much with the process, although sometimes that does occur a bit maybe at a summer camp, for example, sadly, but most of the shortcuts we see is an attempt to shorten or reduce the number of requirements that the Scout has to meet and satisfy in a particular merit badge by trying to apply something the Scout did in working towards a different merit badge or something a Scout did in another activity that was not involved with a merit badge and seeking to receive credit for that other work toward the particular merit badge the Scout's working on.

ANISSA: Jeff, why are they taking these shortcuts?

JEFF: Benefits primarily come from the experience as opposed to the result. Someone once told me that if you don't like merit badges, you don't like

life, because we cover just about every career field that there is with a merit badge. We cover such a wide array of avocational interests with merit badges, and so the idea is to expose the Scout to the greater world around him or her through the Merit Badge Process. By earning the merit badge and working through the requirements, which are carefully and methodically reviewed and updated now every two years, the Scout can experience that particular area of interest, whether it's a career area of interest or an avocational area of interest. And hopefully the Scout will learn about that part of the world that may interest the Scout either in pursuing a career or maybe pursuing a new hobby or activity. So, by shortcutting the process, it really denies the Scout the full benefit of the journey through the merit badge experience.

OWEN: If you take the shortcuts, what are the downsides?

JEFF: The downside is that the Scout doesn't get to experience all the nuances of the particular merit badge that may interest him or her. It is not about the number of merit badges the Scouter earns. It is not about the particular merit badge the Scout earns, except that the Scout has a goal in achieving a rank and there's a merit badge required for that rank, but it's more about learning about that particular discipline. So, for example: chemistry. So, I pick up a merit badge booklet, I look through it, I gain an interest in that, I approach my unit leader, and then I start working on chemistry. This may open up a whole new career path for me that I hadn't even considered before. Additionally, merit badges should be fun! We have any number of merit badges that involve different kinds of sports, and so maybe through a merit badge I'll experience a different sport. Maybe I played team sports my whole life but now I've gained an interest through summer camp, for example, in archery or rifle shooting, something more individual. So, by pursuing that merit badge, I can take an somewhat in-depth look at these very interesting and fun activities. By

shortcutting that process, it really does the Scout a disservice because the Scout doesn't get to experience all there is to experience with that particular activity or interest.

OWEN: Jeff, you've said something that really caught my interest here - I want to make sure folks understand. As you gave that description, everything you've talked about was from a personal perspective, so it's not about the group going through the merit badge. You might have a group format, but it's about that individual, that youth choosing something that interests them and carrying forward that.

JEFF: Yes, it is all about what interests the Scout. And sure, there are merit badges required for a particular rank, notably, there are X many merit badges required to qualify for the Eagle rank. That's all fair. But it's also about the Scout's individual interests and what he or she wants to learn about, and our methodology here is a learning experience with a recognition at the end. And that learning process is critical and it is optimally the best when it's an area of interest of that particular Scout. Whether the Scout pursues the merit badge with a counselor or in a group merit badge format, it is still the Scout's work. The Scout's interest should drive the work that the Scout does for that particular merit badge.

ANISSA: OK, we'll be right back with more on the Merit Badge Process, right after this.

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ANISSA: Are there Scouting resources available to assist with the Merit Badge Process so one can avoid having to take shortcuts?

JEFF: We have a very carefully planned and structured process to support the merit badge program. So, the rules, if you will, about how to properly pursue a merit badge are contained in the Guide to Advancement, and in particular, Section 7 of the Guide to Advancement deals with the Merit Badge Process. I mentioned at the beginning of our discussion some of the steps that a merit badge candidate takes in pursuing the process. Well, those steps are outlined in Section 7.0.1.1 and 7.0.0.2 of the Guide to Advancement. Now, I don't expect everybody to memorize those sections, but the point I'm making is that the Guide to Advancement is the rulebook, if you will, for how to properly pursue a merit badge and following a process that we've discussed. So, this process is not haphazardly put together. It's very structured with a defined set of goals to accomplish the purposes of the merit badge program which, in turn, support the aims and methods of the BSA. So, we would hope that parents and unit leaders follow the process because it's carefully outlined in the Guide to Advancement, the merit badge pamphlets, and the merit badge counselor training materials so that the Scout can have the best experience possible.

OWEN: Jeff, you've given us great information on why to avoid cutting corners in the Merit Badge Process and as well as the resources that are available. Is there anything else about the importance of the Merit Badge Process that you think ought to be shared with our listeners?

JEFF: If you sit down and look at the Merit Badge Process, you really have to ask yourself, what is there in the world to know? And once a Scout starts asking that question, and maybe with the Scout's parents or guardians, , helping open up the Scout to that type of question, then the Scout can look down various paths and say, "I'd like to know more about this or that, and I bet there's a merit badge that addresses this or that." And once a Scout connects that interest with that merit badge, then the Scout can

learn through the work of the merit badge, from the material in the merit badge pamphlet assembled by leading experts in that particular area more about what interests the Scout about the world. And so, the Merit Badge Process is much more than just about earning a badge, a rank, or a patch. It is about learning about the world around us and becoming more knowledgeable how to navigate through our world and having a great time, a great Scouting adventure along the way.

ANISSA: So, a Scout doesn't just tick off the requirements to earn a badge. There's a process in place and it's important to stick with it. We thank you so much for this discussion, Jeff.

JEFF: It's been my pleasure, as always, and great Scouting to everyone.

OWEN: We'll be right back with Reminders and Tips right after this brief Safety Moment.

Safety Moment - Frostbite

OWEN: Time for Reminders and Tips. Let's start with a pop quiz! Do you know who your local Scouting professional is? This person is also known as your District Executive or Youth Serving Executive. If you don't know who that is, call your council to find out.

ANISSA: If you don't know your council name, go to Scouting.org and type "local council locator" in the search field. Also, you can download the October 2013 ScoutCast, Who's Who in the Zoo, for more information.

OWEN: And even though you're probably thinking more about the holidays than next summer, now is the time to start planning for summer camp. Since

you already planned for camp and put it in your budget, it's now time for signups!

ANISSA: And it just wouldn't be Reminders and Tips without a *Boys' Life* plug. This month follow a troop from Idaho as they go on a snowshoeing excursion at their state's City of Rocks.

OWEN: Also, in that issue is a cool article about Chicago's Air Camp, where Cub Scouts, Scouts BSA members, and Venturers gather for all things aviation-related.

ANISSA: In the November/December issue of *Scouting Magazine*, get some tips from other Scout leaders as well as experts in time management on how to balance your Scouting job and your paid job.

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ANISSA: But now our December episode comes to an end. Thanks to our guest, Jeff Boswick, for joining us.

OWEN: And thanks to you for listening. Now I'm sure you've been meaning to, but haven't gotten around to it, but don't forget you can send us your ideas and comments to make ScoutCast an even better tool for you. Just send that email to Scoutcast@scouting.org, or tweet [@BSAScoutcast](https://twitter.com/BSAScoutcast). With that, I'm Owen McCullough.

ANISSA: And I'm Anissa Hicks. From all of us here at ScoutCast, happy holidays, everyone.

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