



## What's "ACTIVE" All About?

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Troop problems are *not* solved by punishing Scouts.

Scouting is a volunteer movement. The primary volunteers are the youths themselves, and we adults who have chosen to serve them serve at their pleasure. Our responsibility is to deliver the Scouting program, as written, to the very best of our abilities, always seeking to improve and enhance our delivery. Although, to borrow an oft-used quote, 80 percent of success in life is the result of showing up, it is in no way mandatory that a youth do so, in Scouting. It is often said that "Scouts 'vote' with their feet," and they will walk away from a Scouting unit that under-delivers or mis-delivers the Scouting program as described to them in their Handbook. Exit interviews with youth who have disengaged from Boy Scouting in particular reveal that the majority have done so because the unit they joined either under-delivered or mis-delivered what they were told they'd be getting, per descriptions of how their troop and patrol would be functioning, the roles of their fellows Scout elected and appointed leaders and Scoutmaster, and so on, in their Boy Scout Handbook.

In the past six years of writing this column, a significant number of the questions asked by Scouters, parents, and Scouts themselves, relate to advancement, and within this arena, asking about the term, "active" (as in "Be active in your troop or patrol..."), comes up regularly. Unfortunately, what also comes up frequently is the contesting of the BSA's intention in this regard, including attempts to justify denying rank advancement to a Scout who hasn't, according to some misguided if not pugnaciously mis-delivering bunch of adults, met their artificial, arbitrary, and *prohibited by policy* rubrics for "active."

In the advancement arena, one of the BSA's most practical, intelligent, realistic, compassionate, and youth-sensitive decisions was to not attach



percentages, numerics, or any other sorts of rubrics to the term “active.” Instead, the underlying principle of “active” is simply “Do Your Best.” In the same arena, one of the biggest mistakes a troop can make is to attempt to make up their own “rules” for this, and, further, to fail to understand that “active” extends well beyond mere troop and/or patrol meetings and outings. You’ll see why in just a few moments...

Let’s look in on a board of review for an Eagle candidate who up until now has concluded that he’s completed all requirements for the rank. We’ll look in on a pretty much average Scout, in a troop that mostly (but not entirely) understands how they’re supposed to be delivering the Scouting program (their “Achilles Heel” is their misunderstanding and subsequent mis-use of the “active” requirement).

As a Life Scout on the cusp of Eagle, this young man is about 16 years old, and has been a Scout for about five years. In this time, advancing through the ranks of Tenderfoot through Life and on to completing the requirements for Eagle, he’s taken at least one camping trip for Tenderfoot, participated in no less than five non-meeting activities for Second Class, then ten more for First Class, then at least six hours of non-meeting service time for Star and another six for Life, and then perhaps as many as 100 or more for his own Eagle leadership service project. In addition, in the earning of no less than 21 merit badges, he’s met with his Scoutmaster an equal number of times to secure signed merit badge applications, plus up to another 21 times turning in his “blue card” stubs for recording. In the course of earning these merit badges, he’s met with his merit badge counselors at least four to six times per badge (almost none can be earned in single meetings), for a total of, on average, over 100 non-troop meeting-related meetings, plus his hours spent independently to fulfill the requirements of these merit badges. Moreover, in the course of earning the twelve required merit badges, he’s at a minimum done these things: Attended two town council or school board or court sessions, interviewed a government employee or elected official, carried out eight hours of non-Scouting related service, prepared and delivered a public presentation and a public speech, visited a national landmark, toured a state or the US capitol, toured a federal facility, participated in an international



event, written an issue-based letter to an elected official and another one to a news media editor, planned and conducted a personal interview, planned and led a troop court of honor or campfire, had both a physical and a dental examination, carried out a comparison-shopping trip, participated in two family meetings, carried out an emergency service project and participated in a troop mobilization, visited an environmental study site on at least four separate occasions, camped overnight for at least 20 days and nights, and either taken six hikes covering a total of 70 miles or seven cycling trips covering 150 miles. This is, of course, to say nothing about his activities in pursuit of the remaining nine merit badges he needs for Eagle. He's likely gone to summer camp between three and five times, accounting for, on average, another 30 or so days and nights. As an elected or appointed youth leader in the troop for a minimum of 16 months, he's both led his patrol and/or troop and met with his Scoutmaster on numerous occasions for the junior leader training that is the *mandate* of all Scoutmasters to provide. He's had no less than six Scoutmaster Conferences, in which expectations for his advancement, involvement, and leadership, among other non-Scouting topics, have been discussed. He's also participated in five boards of review, with similar discussions ensuing.

As we're observing him in his board of review for Eagle, we know, from the procedures described in various authoritative BSA literature, that had this Scout fallen short of BSA standards in some way, this would have been revealed either through any of his six Scoutmaster Conferences or his five boards of review, or in his junior leader training conferences with his Scoutmaster, and he thereupon would have received a *written* description of the shortcoming(s), instructions for correction, and a time line for successful conclusion. Receiving none, he would naturally have no reason to believe he his falling short in any way.

Now if Eagle Scouts have one thing in common, it's that they're not just involved in Scouting; they're involved in many things. In addition to their Scouting activities, Eagle candidates are likely to be seriously involved in their religious institution and its youth group, at least one if not several sports programs, school clubs such as debate or mathematics or language or



chess and so on, service clubs such as Rotary International's Interact Clubs for high school students, student government, and the list goes on and on, in a variety of combinations, so that Scouting represents hardly the whole of their non-academic away-from-home lives.

From these perspectives, let's now return to our "average" candidate, as he's conversing with the members of his board of review for Eagle. Here, he now discovers that his level of activity as a Scout is being called into question, despite all of the foregoing. He's told that, in the estimation of the board members, he hasn't been "active" enough to qualify for the rank of Eagle. He's shocked. He's well aware of the multiple and multifaceted activities he's carried out in pursuit of the Eagle rank. He's even more shocked when it registers with him that there have been no less than eleven prior opportunities for his Scoutmaster and the troop's committee to bring up this subject, and that hasn't happened.

Has this Scout somehow, this night, failed Scouting or his troop in some way? No. The troop has, in fact, failed him.

Does this Scout have the right to seek remediation and the recognition he's earned through the channels the BSA has established for him to do so? Of course he has. Does the troop warrant censure? Unquestionably.

WE're here to SERVE YOUTH. Let's start by (to borrow a phrase) RT\*H.

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