

Board of Review Training

Training Summary

This module will train troop committee members and others in the purposes of the board of review, offering suggestions for the types of questions that can or should be asked.

Time Required

60 minutes

Target Audience

- Troop committee members and other adult troop leaders who would serve on a board of review
- Scoutmasters and assistant Scoutmasters

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants will be able to

- State the purpose of the board of review and how it is used to further the Boy Scout program.
- Plan a board of review with an eye to the individual Scout.
- Conduct a board of review.

Training Format

Lecture and discussion. Although the module should take no longer than one hour, discussion can be extensive.

Required Materials

- Flip chart and markers

Training Resources

None

Board of Review Training

Summarizing the Boy Scouts of America charter, the purposes of Boy Scouting are to develop in young men the ability to do things for themselves and others, to train them in outdoor skills, and to teach them patriotism, courage, self-reliance, and kindred virtues. The techniques we use to accomplish these lofty purposes—the methods of Scouting—include, among other things, advancement, the outdoors, and adult association.

The board of review is how the troop committee (or the Eagle Scout board of review) tracks the progress of a Scout to determine his understanding of the ideals of Scouting and how he applies them in daily life in the troop. If the board of review is for rank advancement, the board will satisfy itself that the Scout has done what he was supposed to do for that rank and will review with the Scout the requirements for the next rank. The board of review is also a way of reviewing the troop's progress.

This review is not and should not be an examination or retest of skills learned. Rather, it is an attempt to determine the Scout's attitude and his acceptance of Scouting's ideals, both in the troop and outside of it. The board should get a sense of the importance that the Scout attributes to Scouting in his home life, at school, and in the troop. It also shows how the Scout perceives the troop and its adult leaders.

Who Conducts the Board of Review?

In almost every case, the board of review is conducted by at least three members of the troop committee. The Scoutmaster and assistant Scoutmasters are not members of the board of review. The Scoutmaster can introduce the Scout to the board members and may sit with him to hear the board's decision, but should not be present during the actual board of review. Obviously, the Scout's parent should not serve on his board of review panel.

All boards must constitute at least three and not more than six members who are all 21 years of age or older.

The Eagle Scout Board of Review

The Eagle Scout board of review is chosen by the local council based on its experience and tradition. Councils may constitute Eagle boards of review from among the Scout's troop committee members, but only if at least one member a district or council Eagle advancement representative. The board can be constituted of district or council Eagle representatives only. Or it can be constituted with members of the community who are not registered Scouters, but then only if they have an understanding of the importance and purpose of the Eagle board.

Because of the importance of this board, the decision to accept an Eagle candidate must be unanimous. If not unanimous, the board may be reconvened at a later date for a second determination.

When and Where to Hold a Board of Review

A board of review should be held where the board members and the Scout are the only ones aware of what is going on. There should be no possibility for embarrassing the Scout in front of others. And a Scout should be comfortable speaking his mind to the board.

Some possibilities may include a room in the chartered organization's facility or a conference room at the office of a board member. A campout or summer camp can be an ideal place for a board of review, assuming your committee members can assemble, since the relaxed atmosphere of the out-of-doors can go a long way toward making a Scout comfortable.

An ideal troop might hold monthly boards of review, possibly at the same time as a troop meeting. A troop with few Scouts might conclude that monthly boards are unnecessary as too few Scouts present themselves for advancement, but that would miss one of the functions of the board. A board should be set up to review accomplishment and lack of accomplishment. The board can counsel with Scouts who are not advancing to determine reasons for lack of progress and to stimulate these Scouts to greater participation in the program. This function is of equal importance to the function of reviewing boys who present themselves for advancement.

Types of Boards of Review

A board of review focuses on a Scout's accomplishment and progress. The issues addressed can be about the Scout or the troop. The board of review is a chance for the troop committee or other adults in the community to get a sense of how the troop is doing and to permit them to offer support where needed. It gives three to six other sets of ears to hear how a Scout is doing, how he feels about the troop and his role in it, how he is advancing, and whether he is striving to live up to Scouting's ideals. It is a good idea, therefore, to hold boards of review regularly and often.

Some reasons to have a board of review may include a Scout's lack of advancement, perceived trouble in the troop, or a certain event at the last campout or troop meeting. Ideally, a Scout should sit for a board of review every six months, whether he is advancing or not.

The most common type of board of review is for advancement. By making a board of review a requirement of advancement, a Scout will have at least one opportunity at each rank level to review his progress in Scouting.

Each rank involves a progressively greater mastery of Scout skills, advancing leadership growth, and a growth in the way a Scout understands his world and his role in it. Therefore the different advancement boards of review reflect the increasing maturity of the Scout.

Another issue to be considered at the board of review is the elusive concept of Scout spirit, which is part of the advancement process.

How to Hold a Board of Review

As has been said, the board of review is not an interrogation, not a retesting of a Scout's competence. It is not an examination; rather, it attempts to see that the examinations that went into getting the Scout signed off were up to standard. It is a checkup to see that what should have been done actually was done. It is a friendly growth experience. All this should be accomplished in 15 minutes, though an Eagle Scout board of review may take up to half an hour.

This can be accomplished by simple questions like "What did you cook for your First Class meal?" Questions like Where and When or How will soon tell the board whether achievements were properly accomplished without actually retesting. It is sufficient to know what a Scout's "camp gadget" was in order to understand whether he had been properly tested on his lashings.

But be aware that a Scout who is poorly prepared for the board, one who clearly has not achieved what his book says that he has, is a product, as much of his own merits as of the merits of those who have brought him the board, to those who have signed off his accomplishments without actually having them properly achieved. Thus, a Scout may not be as responsible for his lack of preparation as might be thought. This does not grant carte blanche to the ill-prepared Scout, but it does give the board a way to understand what must be done and to assist the Scout in doing it.

A board can expect a Scout to be neat in appearance and properly uniformed.

The actual meeting should be a give and take, an informal conversation between the Scout and a group of adults who are interested in his welfare and are supportive of his efforts. In all cases,

open-ended questions are good to prompt comments by the Scout. You should encourage the Scout to come to conclusions on his own, not simply tell him what you think.

When the Scout has not advanced, the board of review may be focused on a problem, either with the Scout or with the troop. In these cases, you will be counseling the Scout, helping him form his own conclusions on the problem at hand. In a good board of review, you may listen more than you speak.

Listen carefully to what the Scout is saying, then listen to what he is not saying. Skilled counselors often respond to comments by simply smiling or giving encouraging sounds like “uh-huh” or “OK.” Trick questions are not worthwhile. You are attempting to put the Scout at his ease, not interrogate him. Sometimes you can ask the Scout to repeat what he is saying a different way to get a different take on the situation. You can summarize what the Scout is saying so that you can confirm your understanding, but try not to use this device to put the boy in a corner.

If there is a solution to the problem, try to have the Scout come up with it. Perhaps he cannot formulate a solution, but could choose from among several you can think of. In all events, try to have the Scout make the conclusions. If a solution cannot be reached, there is nothing wrong with agreeing to meet in the future to see if circumstances have changed or whether the Scout has found an answer to his problem.

Some Scouts may freeze up at the board of review and become silent or monosyllabic in answers. Or they may forget simple items. Eagle Scout candidates have been known forget the Scout Oath, for example. The board should encourage and support these boys in a friendly, kind, and courteous manner and help them to become more comfortable.

In the board of review, you will certainly be assessing the Scout’s achievements and his growth in the ideals of Scouting. Those ideals include patriotism and citizenship and the values embodied in the Scout Oath and Law. Have no fear of speaking to those values. Ask a Scout how he is getting along in school. Ask him how he is serving his religious institution, if he has one, or, if not, ask him how he satisfies his duty to God.

You could ask a Scout about leadership opportunities he has taken at school or in his religious institution. It is important to see how the ideals of Scouting have affected him in his daily life.

You can and should ask a Scout how he felt about certain accomplishments, how he felt he handled himself on a service project. Ask a Scout about his leadership position, whether he believes he was successful or whether he had problems. You can discuss those problems, hopefully with an eye toward solving them.

You should always end a board of review by praising the Scout for the positive aspects of his character, his skill level, and/or his accomplishments.

Once you have interviewed the Scout, the board will ask him to leave the room so that the members may deliberate. As this is often the most stressful part of the process for the Scout, this

deliberation should not be long. However, it should be long enough to have a discussion that leads to a unanimous decision. When the meeting is finished, the Scout should be invited back in to hear the board's decision, which, of course, should be delivered in a friendly and supportive manner, regardless of what the decision is.

If the Scout is not advancing, the board should certainly give the Scout the opportunity of learning what he needs to do to advance. He should be given a definite time for a subsequent board of review. Finally he should be given information about appeal procedures. In a good troop, having a Scout deferred for advancement by the board of review is unusual. If there is a problem with a Scout, normally he will not be presented to the board of review.

The Scout holds his new rank as of the date of the board of review. For ranks where a period of tenure is required, that period begins with the date of passing of the board of review for the previous rank.

The following discusses the general nature of specific advancement boards of review. Checklists of questions have been developed for each of the specific ranks, but the Scout's Boy Scout Handbook or your troop's advancement chart can provide the skeleton for questions of that nature. The following are simply guidelines for the specific boards of reviews.

The Tenderfoot Through First Class Boards of Review

The Tenderfoot through First Class boards of review are ways of getting to know the Scout better, reviewing his progress in achievements, and discussing how he felt about the various steps he has taken on the Scouting trail, including his individual achievements. This should not be a time of retesting, but rather a time to reflect on the skills learned and how the Scout has absorbed the ideals of Scouting.

Questions here will naturally deal with a certain campout, or the difficult time the Scout had with knots. But it may deal as well with how he is getting along with certain other Scouts or how he exhibits Scouting ideals outside the troop.

Other aspects of the board of review should never take a back seat. This is the time to ask the Scout how he feels about the troop program, whether he feels he is learning anything, whether he is having fun. It is also a time to assess his Scout spirit and how he is absorbing Scouting's Ideals. Remember that if you ask a same question ("What does 'loyal' mean to you?") at successive boards of review for ever higher ranks, you should expect ever more sophisticated answers.

Possible Questions

- Who is your patrol leader?
- What do you think of the problems he is facing?
- How are you doing in your first aid skills?
- What are your goals for the next few months; how do they meet advancement requirements?
- What do you think would make the troop better?
- How do you fulfill your duty to country? To God?

The Star and Life Boards of Review

The Star and Life boards of review will be a bit longer than previous ones. The Scout will have acquired many more skills and will evidence more maturity. Leadership will be one of the significant topics to be discussed. Each of these ranks involves service projects, and you should ask the Scout how he felt about the projects.

As before, you will also be evaluating his Scout spirit. Certainly, by this time, you will have reached certain conclusions about the Scout, but remember that at these ages, the Scout will be able to change fundamentally much quicker than you would imagine and the board of review may be an occasion for you to reevaluate the candidate.

Possible Questions

- What merit badges did you enjoy, and why?
- What merit badges did you get the most out of, and why?
- How did you fulfill your Swimming (or other merit badge) requirements?
- How did you feel about your leadership position?
- How did you feel about how you exercised that position?
- Did you feel that you accomplished anything in that position?
- What were your frustrations?
- Who do you think is doing a good job in the troop?
- Have you thought about achieving Eagle?
- Have you thought about a service project for Eagle?
- How do you fulfill your duty to God? To country?

The Eagle Scout Board of Review

At this point, if you have watched the Scout from the date he joined the troop, you may know this Scout very well. He should be congratulated on all he has accomplished.

This is an occasion to review the Scout's Eagle service project, but not an occasion to criticize it, rather you should review it with the Scout so that you are comfortable with his completion of it.

You will be speaking to a very accomplished young man, one who has an experience with the troop that is inherently different than yours. It is wise to understand what the Scout feels are the strengths and shortcomings of the troop.

You can also ask the Scout whether he believes he is an Eagle. Does he believe he has accomplished all he needs to in order to become an Eagle?

Of course, Scout spirit is a part of this discussion. The Eagle candidate's spirit should be such that he is an example to other Scouts.

Possible Questions

- How did you feel your Eagle project went?
- Did you run into any rough spots?
- Did you plan enough to get you over the rough spots?

- How did you work with the agency for which you did the project?
- Where they clear in their goals?
- Would you do the project differently now?
- How do you think the troop is doing?
- How do you intend to help the troop now?
- Do you have any goals for the troop?
- What are your goals for yourself?
- How to do fulfill your duty to country? To God?

The Eagle Palm Board of Review

Like the Eagle Scout board of review, the Eagle Palm board of review is an opportunity for you to learn. Listen carefully to what is being said.

The Scout before you will have accomplished much and will be approaching his 18th birthday. You should encourage the Scout to remain connected to the troop in a visible way. You should not be discouraged if a high school student is less able to devote his spare time to Scouting. Thus you may find that this Scout's activity with the troop is less than you would desire. However, you should be able to tell if a Scout is living up to the ideals of Scouting outside the troop as well as inside it. Again, always conclude these boards of review with words of encouragement. Eagle Palm boards of review are opportunities for you to have a give-and-take discussion with the very best in Scouting. Enjoy it.

Possible Questions

- How do you plan on contributing to the troop now?
- What are your goals for the troop?
- What are your personal goals?
- Will your Scouting experience help you?
- How do you fulfill your duty to country? To God?

Duty to God

Scouting maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise, the member declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law." The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgement of his favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members. No matter what religious faith a Scout might be, this fundamental need of good citizenship should be kept before him. The Boy Scouts of America, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and the organization of the group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life.

In practical terms, this means that the Scout is expected to subscribe to these principles. Bear in mind that a Scout is trustworthy and further that he and his parents have subscribed to these principles when he joined Boy Scouting and that he has pledged his duty to God each time he recites or pledges the Scout Oath and Law.

The Boy Scouts of America does not define God for a Scout, nor does it interpret God's rules. Those are matters, as said above, left to home and to the religious body to which the Scout belongs. The board of review does not serve as an inquisition into the correctness of a Scout's perceptions, rather it seeks to determine whether the Scout has fulfilled his duty in a way he sees fit, keeping in mind his profession of a particular faith.

Discussion of a Scout's religion is very appropriate at a board of review, but it should be done with respect and appreciation for the variety of faiths and beliefs in the United States. An open-ended question like "How do you honor the 12th point of the Scout Law?" will allow the boy to discuss his religious beliefs. A blunt "Do you believe in God?" should be avoided as there are some religions that do not use the name "God" for their supreme being or higher power.

A Scout may fulfill this duty without being a member of a particular denomination or religion. In these cases, a board will want to understand, through informal discussion, what a Scout feels about this particular duty, how he sees himself in relation to his beliefs, and how he fulfills them. It is very common for adolescent boys to question religion, particularly formal religion. If a candidate indicates that he is not certain about religion, the board should ask how he is trying to address his uncertainty and to fulfill his duty to God.

As in many questions asked at boards of review, the older the Scout, the more sophisticated the board may expect the answer to be. For a very young Scout, going to religious services regularly may be a complete answer to the question. For an older Scout, you may expect a description of service to his fellow man or the community. You may even find that a Scout will state his inability to meet his own expectations of duty, but that he strives nevertheless to do so. It may be that this humble answer is a sign of the greatest devotion.

Appeal Procedures

In the ordinary course, appeals of board-of-review decisions will not be made, principally because the Scout believes in the justice of the decision. Generally, appeals are sought only when a Scout sees his opportunity to achieve Eagle diminishing.

When can appeals occur?

First, if the troop leader or troop committee does not recommend a Scout for a board of review or fails to sign an Eagle rank application, the Scout (or other interested party) may appeal that decision to the next highest level.

Second, if a board of review does not find favorably for the candidate, the Scout may also appeal to the next highest level. This appeal can be taken by the Scout, his leader, or the Scout's parents. An appeal from a local board of review would be taken to the district advancement committee, and from there to the council advancement committee, and finally to the National Boy Scout Committee.

When an appeal is made, the committee to whom the appeal is addressed will promptly review the facts. All parties must be interviewed by the committee, hopefully without confrontation. A

written report with all details will be prepared by the reviewing committee and forwarded to the National Boy Scout Committee.

Appeals to the National Boy Scout Committee are made only through the local council. There is no direct appeal. In Eagle matters, a copy of the Scout's Eagle Scout Rank Application must accompany the national appeal.

The Board of Review and the Healthy Troop

Thinking about the questions we have been discussing should give you an appreciation for how the board of review can contribute to maintaining a healthy troop. It is the ideal place to encourage leadership, to check on problems the Scoutmaster sees arising, to head off future problems, and to make sure the Scout is on track to accomplish the goals and methods of Scouting.

There should never be a heavy-handed approach to a board of review; this is no attempt at disciplining a wayward Scout. Rather it should be thought of as a way to make it easier for a Scout to do the things that contribute to the health of the troop. Perhaps a Scout can be encouraged to work with younger Scouts, or to let other Scouts perform their roles in the troop without badgering—this may be especially necessary for a first-time patrol leader or even senior patrol leader.

The Board of Review and the Healthy Scout

Most importantly, the board of review should be a way of encouraging the individual Scout. The Board of Review is the most personal method in Scouting to assess the needs and desires of a Scout, to encourage and support him, to learn of his fears and hopes, to help him to see himself in the greater context of Scouting, and to encourage his personal growth, both in skills and in living up to the ideals of Scouting.

We are, after all, a values-based organization with a goal of developing in young people and adults a life of service to God and to country, to others, and to self. We do this by holding up the Scout Law as a guide for personal conduct in all contexts. Our world can be a better place if we succeed in this process.

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