



THE SCOUT'S GUIDE TO...

being a Patrol Leader I

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Introduction

After spending a considerable time as a scout with many different Patrol Leaders and Assistant Patrol Leaders leading you and your patrol, you have finally become a PL yourself.

The first thing you will notice is that it is very easy to criticise your PL; but once you are in a PL's shoes and have to carry out a PL's duties and responsibilities, things will no longer remain that simple.

If you had a good PL, your time as an APL (if any) would have served as valuable training for your new leadership. If not, you need not worry; with a bit of effort you have the potential to be one of the best PLs ever. In any case, here's a little secret about leadership... you are *not* perfect and will *definitely* make mistakes. Nobody becomes a good leader immediately. The art of leadership takes time and, more importantly... experience.

The secret of Leadership is that experience comes from one thing and one thing only: learning from your mistakes. A good leader will realise when he or she makes a mistake and learns from that mistake. A really crafty leader goes one step further... by learning from the mistakes of others.

You're probably asking yourself: "Is it that simple?" The answer to that question is yes. Most of the really important things in life are that simple.

(Getting them to work can sometimes be a little more complicated...)

The aim of this handbook is to pass on some of the main lessons others have learnt through their mistakes. If you are crafty, you will learn these lessons and avoid the mistakes others have had to learn the hard way.

1. Know your Patrol

Do you know all the names of the scouts in your Patrol ? Where do they live ? What is their telephone number ? How old are they ? What school do they go to ? What are their hobbies ? Does any one of them play a musical instrument? Which football team do they side with ? Do they like Formula 1 ? Do they have any brothers or sisters ? Do they have a computer ? Do they use the Internet ? Do you know their email address ? Do they have a particular talent or skill ? Do they practice any sports ?

If you can't answer these basic questions about the scouts you are supposed to lead, you are not going to be a very effective leader.

If you know your patrol well, you will know which activities they like and which activities they don't. A PL who knows the members of the patrol well will be able to use their skills to the best advantage. For example a responsible scout who is good at maths and numbers can do the subs, whereas a creative scout who can draw could keep the noticeboard and logbook updated with cool drawings and sketches.

More importantly, as a PL you have the responsibility to make sure that your scouts are happy and that they are enjoying their scouting experiences. If you are not their friend you will not be able to do this effectively. Even more important is the fact that as the PL you will be representing your patrol at a Patrol Leaders' Council. It is impossible to speak on behalf of your scouts if you don't know who they are, what they like and what they think.

Always, keep in mind that the best kind of PL is the PL who is a friend to the members of the patrol. If your were awake during your history lessons, you should know what usually happens to dictators...

2. Lead by example

*My scouts don't obey me!
When I give an order they don't listen!
I can't control them!
Can I give them pushups?*

Sounds familiar ? Well, if it does then maybe there is a little experiment you should try. Pick any two members of your patrol. Tell one of them "You have exactly five minutes to grab a broom and sweep that room... HURRY UP !" To the other one say: "I need your help. Can you help me clean out the toilets please ?". The results will speak for themselves. Which of the two will be more eager to help out ? Which one of them will actually do a better job ?

Now there is a pitfall to this approach... If the PL asks the scouts to help, the only way that they will help the next time is if the PL actually works with them. Giving orders won't do. If a scout is doing the job badly, show him how yourself, shouting and screaming won't help.

Always place yourself in the position of the scout you are giving an order to. If he asks "why should I obey my PL ?" what answer do you think he will give himself ? If the answer is that if not he will get his butt kicked, then that is a classic sign of a bad PL at work.

For scouts to obey their Patrol leader, there must be two very important elements. One of them is RESPECT and the other one is TEAMWORK. These two elements are stronger than anything that the PL can ever do to control his scouts.

3. Respect and be Respected

One of the reasons why a scout should obey his PL is because he respects him. To understand this point we first have to understand what respect is.

Do not confuse respect and fear. "Do as I say or you'll get 20 push-ups" will never bring you respect. Respect is when the members of your patrol really consider you as their Leader. This means that they think that you are the right person to do the job and that they want you to be their PL.

And how am I supposed to do this ?!?! The answer is quite simple, actually. Respect does not grow on trees and you can't buy it. When you become a PL you start off with exactly zero respect, having the rank of PL does not give you the right to be respected. There is only one way of getting respect.... EARNING IT.

OK. How do I earn respect then? Even simpler... to earn respect you have to give respect. Show your scouts that you respect them. Show them that you are a real friend. Show them that you are interested in them. Show them that whatever you do is, at the end of the day, in their interest. Ask for their opinion, and show them that their opinion is important for you. Never tease or embarrass your scouts or let others do so. Be fair with everyone.

When a patrol sees that the person leading them is not an arrogant, violent and bossy PL but someone they can look up to and someone they trust, then you will be respected.

OK what's the catch ?!?

The catch is that sometimes it is difficult for an older scout to be a friend to a younger scout. The age gap can work against you. But if you remember the reason why you are doing this, and the precious reward of respect, then it is worthwhile.

4. Emphasise Teamwork

A team is like a chain. It is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. In a team, every member is important, every member has a role or a responsibility. If that member does not do his job well, the whole team will suffer.

Use the above principle to organise your patrol. Give everyone something to do. Make sure that everyone knows how to do his job. From the point of view of a Patrol Leader, make sure that you always show the members that they have done a good job and encourage them to do better. Remember that the reason which drives them to do better is the fact that they will be praised for their effort. **MAKE SURE** that you never forget this ! A pat on the back for a job well done will ensure an even bigger effort next time. If you ignore the efforts of a scout, no matter how big or small that effort was, you will destroy the scout's enthusiasm.

One of the best ways of creating a strong team is to set a challenge. Challenge the scouts that if they work together as a team they can do better than the other patrol—or even win the competition.

This is a real story..... Once there was a PL who had a particular scout in his patrol who was, shall we say, a very very weak link. After a chat with a Leader, the PL tried an experiment. Instead of shouting at the scout to keep out of the way and not to anything as usual, the PL entrusted him with a vital job. He asked him to count the stones around a particular tree. The young scout was delighted to be entrusted with such a mission and was soon engrossed with his counting.

In the end, the Patrol managed to get their task done and *every* member of the patrol was proud to have contributed. Moral of the story - busy hands and happy minds cause less trouble.

5. Fun Activities

Now that you have established who your scouts are, what they like and dislike and have a strong team you need one more thing - FUN

A good PL will organise at least an activity every four or five weeks for the patrol. The whole idea of scouting is learning new skills and values through fun activities.

Be honest with yourself, do you have a Patrol Activity Schedule? When was the last time you organised a patrol activity (if ever...)?

Let's make one thing clear from the start. A patrol activity does not have to be a hike or a camp. It doesn't even have to be scout related at all. Some of the best patrol activities you can organise would be for example, the patrol meeting at someone's house, a fifteen minute Patrol in Council and then watching a video or having a BBQ. Why not have a joint activity between two patrols—an informal Fire & Cooking Challenge or a Pioneering structure challenge?

As a PL you would organise your activities in such a way that even if you will not be having anything strictly related to scouting, there will be an element of teamwork involved. Always try to achieve something from your activity—better patrol relationship, stronger teamwork, sharpen a scouting skill, find a new campsite or test an activity that might be used for the Troop.

After your activities you must ALWAYS have a debrief. You don't need anything formal. Just ask your scouts what they liked about the activity, what they did not like about the activity and what they would have done if they were organising the activity themselves. Allow them to criticise the activity freely—and don't find excuses for any mistakes made. Remember— a mistake is worth it if you can learn something from it.

6. A High level of Scouting

The advancement of the members of your Patrol in the Troop and the success of your Patrol depends on another factor—the scouting level of the scouts.

First of all take a good look at yourself. Do you have your Scout Standard ? Do you have your Advanced ? Did you start your Chief? Keep in mind that as a general rule, the PL can only test his scouts for their Scout Standard if he has already achieved his Advanced. With a bit of effort, achieving your Standard and Advanced should be quite easy. Remember that you can't encourage the scouts to improve their scouting skills when yours leave much to be desired.

It is always a good idea to keep a chart recording the progress of the scouts' training. Why not organise a training session with another Patrol ? Why not meet for an hour before the Scout Meeting to do some badgework or training ? As the PL, it is your responsibility to encourage your scouts to keep their scouting standard high. As the leader of a team, you should be crafty enough to know that the better trained you patrol is, the less work you will have to do as a PL and the better the results will be. Think about it...

The touch of a really good PL would show up when a PL is able to organise an activity which is fun, makes the members of the Patrol to work as a team and will require the scouts to be well trained on one or more scouting skills. That should be the ultimate aim of the PL.

An example would be a beach BBQ. Two members of the Patrol will be the first aiders, so they will need the First Aid, First Aid kit and Bandages and Slings tests done. Two more will take care of the fire lighting and cooking while the other two will bring their properly packed rucsacs and chop the wood with a hatchet. Someone else could build a small structure to provide shade... get the picture ??

7. Be Prepared

There are two very important facts you need to remember if you want to be a successful PL. First of all, half of the job of leadership is careful planning, secondly, crap happens ! so make sure you have a backup plan.

Planning is the most vital activity of a good leader. He will carefully consider what he intends to do, how he intends to do it, what he needs to achieve his goal and finally; will plan his activity so that it will be as successful as possible. A good plan will list what equipment is needed, note any special help or training needed for the activity and will outline the duties and responsibilities of every member of the team. Think of the risks and dangers you may encounter... are you prepared in case you have a casualty ? What about bad weather ? What if the campsite you wish to use is not available on that day ? What if the activity you plan to have gets boring and your scouts lose interest?

It is a known fact that plans very rarely survive the first five minutes of an activity. Make sure you plan your activity with enough extra time so that you are on the safe side if something goes wrong. That time can be used up for a game or relaxation.

Especially in the case of patrol instructions during meetings, make sure that you are well prepared for the lecture you would like to give. Prepare handouts and diagrams. Use a chart or drawings to explain as much as possible. Make your lectures more lively by preparing activities which require your scouts to learn by doing rather than sit and stare.

The final word of advice is taken from a book of military strategy. Don't react to your scouts; make *them* react to *your* plans and activities. When you notice that they are getting bored have a quick break and let them move around a bit. Finally remember the key word in scouting - FUN...

8. No man is an island!

As a PL, one of the most important tools you have to run a Patrol properly is your APL. A good PL will make sure that his second-in-command is well trained and confident to lead the patrol when needed. If the APL is still young or inexperienced, then the PL should give the training of the APL the highest priority.

One of the biggest mistakes a PL can ever make is try to run the Patrol without the APL—or only using the APL when it is convenient. It's a big mistake which will eventually lead you to a number of problems... don't do it. Always consult your APL before discussing something with the Patrol. This will help you get an idea of what reaction you will get from the patrol—and the APL might give you an idea or point out a problem you may not have foreseen.

Make sure that in case you cannot attend a meeting or activity, your APL can handle the situation. In your absence, he effectively becomes the leader of the Patrol... Is he prepared to take over from you? Can he handle the patrol alone? Do the scouts respect him as their APL? Does he need a bit of practice or some leadership advice? The element of planning we mentioned earlier also applies to the APL!

Very Important — NEVER criticise your APL in front of the scouts and make sure that he does the same. If you need to criticise or correct him, do it in private so that he will not lose face. Always have a five minute briefing with your APL before or after an activity to see what went wrong and how it can be improved.

Use your APL as the 'eyes and ears' in the patrol - so that you can find out what the scouts really think in your absence. Finally keep one thing in mind - good communication between the PL and APL usually results in a very strong Patrol.

9. Regular Patrol in Councils

The purpose of a Patrol in Council (PiC) is to allow the members of the Patrol to freely discuss what they like, dislike, wish, want and dream about in relation to scouts. I used the words wish and dream here on purpose. If a scout can't express his dream of going abroad with the Patrol or his wish to win the next Troop Competition during a PiC, then when can he do it??

The PiC is very important in scouting for two main reasons:

1. It allows the PL to know exactly what his scouts want, what they think and it is a very good way of seeing if he is doing a good job as a PL or not.
2. The PL acts as a 'filter' and passes on the general impressions and the best ideas that came out during the PiC to the Patrol Leader's Council. When a PiC functions properly, the Leaders will know exactly what is going in the troop and how to plan future activities.

At this point you should stop and re-read the title of this section.... Did you notice the word 'regular' up there? Now be honest with yourself, how many PiC's have you had ever since you've been a PL? Need we say more ?!?

Always keep in mind that a PiC is not meant to be a long, boring, formal meeting. The following are a few tips to make your PiC's successful...

- Have an agenda of what you want to discuss
- Keep the meeting short and to the point
- Take notes of what was said and decided in a logbook
- The PiC should be followed a fun activity e.g. watching a video or playing a game - this results in better attendance
- Know what you want to achieve during the meeting
- Summarise the main points at the end
- Let everyone speak—no matter who or what is said
- Finally, report your conclusions back to the Leaders

10. Good Communication

As the PL, you need to have a good communications network in two directions; firstly with your APL and the rest of the Patrol, and secondly with the SPL and the other Troop Leaders.

Why is this important ? Two main reasons; first of all you should always know what's happening in the Troop and what activities are coming next. The best way to do that is to contact the SPL or an ASL two or three days before the Troop meeting, so that if there is anything new, you will have plenty of time to prepare before meeting. Secondly, you will know exactly what your scouts are up to, who is sick, who is abroad, who is grounded, who is studying etc... The best way to this is for the PL and APL to split the Patrol into two and each phones his 3 or 4 scouts to see what's up. If the members of your patrol have email, this can be even easier...

How do I set this up ? First of all make sure you have the phone numbers of all the scouts in your patrol. If you don't ask the SPL or an ASL to give them to you. Check with the scouts when it is best to contact them e.g. at 5pm after school or at 8pm after dinner. Secondly make sure that each scout knows your number and that of your APL so that if anything crops up they can contact you.

How should it work ? As a general rule, the scouts who attend regularly need not be contacted every week unless something new crops up. Make it a rule that a scout who cannot attend must phone the PL or APL before the meeting. If a scout does not attend without reason, the PL or APL should phone and find out why. If you think that there are other problems, speak to a Leader immediately. Do not speak to the parents of the scouts yourself, leave that to the leaders.

11. Be Positive

Nobody enjoys speaking to people who are always negative. Pessimists have a very bad habit of destroying the morale in a Patrol.

It is sometimes incredible what a high morale can do to the teamwork in a Patrol. If my leader encourages me to do better, tells me that my team is going to do very well, and shows me that he is proud of my achievements - no matter how small they are; then it is an automatic human reaction to try harder and do better.

If, on the other hand, my leader tells me that I'm a loser and criticises everything I do, no matter how hard I try; then I'll give up and send him to...

Get the picture ?!?

Secrets for a Patrol with a high morale:

- Everything they do is an achievement, no matter how small - talk in terms of improving on that achievement
- Nothing is impossible if there is good teamwork and everyone does his bit well
- Every member of the team is important - if you leave someone out you will destroy the team-spirit
- Be proud of your Patrol. If you aren't, ask yourself why and fix the problem fast... before the ship sinks
- Never criticise, embarrass or call someone stupid in front of the others. A real leader will call the scout aside and explain what he did wrong and how he can improve. This will give you instant respect from that scout.
- A good team needs a good team leader, Make sure you are worthy for the job. Do you deserve to lead these scouts ? Could you do better?

12. get help from the leaders

Being a PL does not mean that you automatically know everything and that you don't need anyone's help. Remember that you are still learning the ropes of leadership yourself... the leaders may be able to help you.

When you think you have come up with a really good idea you shouldn't be too proud to ask a leader to have a look at your plans and give you his comments. Remember the trick we mentioned about leadership earlier on - learning from other people's mistakes. The chances are that the leader has already organised a few of the activities you have planned. He can give you a few helpful hints. In the end you only stand to gain.

On a different note, there are times when PL MUST turn to the leaders for help. There are some areas of responsibility which a PL should NEVER take on alone. The following are a few examples:

- In every case where a scout is injured during a meeting or activity - no matter how small the injury is
- In every case when the parents or other outsiders are involved - no matter for what reason
- In every case where a scout seems to be acting strangely, seems to be in pain, unhappy or there is some other problem which you may or may not understand
- In case where a scout wants to quit or is not allowed to come to scouts
- In every other case where, in your opinion, it would be safer to ask a leader for advice.

"it is better to ask for help and seem stupid for a second than to keep quiet and remain stupid for good"... this meaning has particular importance considering the fact that the PL is responsible for his scouts...

13. You're a role model!

This is one of the hardest responsibilities a leader will ever have to accept. Whether you like it or not the members of your patrol will look up to you. You automatically become a role model.

What is a role model? A role model is the person who the members of the patrol will automatically look at when they need guidance. Many times, they will not ask a direct question to their role model—they will simply observe what he or she is doing and imitate. For example— a new scout doesn't know if he should put his kipmat on to or underneath his groundsheet... the first thing he will automatically do is look at the way his PL has set up his equipment...

Why is it hard to be a role model? The first point to note is that you may not necessarily want to be a role model in the first place. But, I'm afraid it comes with the job of PL. Secondly, the problem about scouts looking up to you and observing the way you act and doing like you do, is the fact that you now have the responsibility to set a good example. Can you imagine what will happen if a PL were to light up a cigarette inside the patrol tent and offer a cigarette to the rest of the patrol ?

Practice what you preach! The biggest pitfalls of being a PL is giving instructions or orders and then not following them yourself. The PL shouts : "Don't touch that !", and the next thing the scouts see is the PL touching it... Do you think that the PL has given an effective order? Do you think the scouts will obey him ? Do you think the scouts will respect him for giving that order?

Are you worthy of being a role model ? OK ! this is a hard one to answer. Ask yourself if your actions and words in front of your scouts are worthy of the role model you are. Are your scouts learning from seeing you act as a PL or are they learning the wrong things ? Food for thought...

14. When to draw the line

In every situation there is a time to fool around and have fun and there is a time to be serious and work hard. Scouts know the difference between the two but sometimes find it difficult to realise when it is time to stop.

One of the finer arts of leadership is to show your scouts when it is time for fun and when it is time for work. If you do not do this properly, the consequences may be disastrous...

After explaining to the patrol that they were now going to spend ten minutes seriously discussing proposed activities for next camp, the PL starts throwing papers at his scouts, saying silly jokes and laughing hysterically.

After two hours of hard work pitching their ridge tent and preparing their campsite, the patrol sits down outside their tent for a drink and a rest. One scout says a joke and the patrol starts laughing. The PL arrives and starts screaming because one guylines is not in line. He tells everybody to fall in and....

What do you think about the two examples above? What did the PL do wrong? Have you ever made that mistake? What would you have done instead ? Why?

The morale of the story here is that the PL should know when it is time to work hard and when it is time to relax. The trick is to understand what the patrol needs and what the members of the patrol want.

Finally, the most successful way of getting scouts to work together is to give an incentive : *"If you manage to pitch this tent properly in 30 minutes we'll play a game of..."* That will work much better than the usual *" If you don't Then I will"* Remember - treat your scouts the same way you would want to be treated yourself.

15. Train Your Successor

The classic signature of a good PL is seen when he leaves the Patrol.

A really good PL will make sure that when it is time for him to move up to the Unit or otherwise stop being the PL of the Patrol, the change between the old PL and the new PL will have a very small impact on the Patrol. These are a few points to keep in mind

- Make sure that your APL and No.3 are prepared to take over from you. Let them lead the Patrol for short activities or a meeting to test their leading skills and help them out if they have problems.
- Make sure that the patrol logbooks are up to date. The new PL will need to look back at what the Patrol has been up to. This will also ensure that your name and memory as a PL of your Patrol will remain.
- Leave a copy of all the handouts, Scout Records, training material, Patrol in Council logbook, and all the other Patrol records so that when you leave, the new PL and the rest of the Patrol will have all the material and information they may need to continue running the patrol.
- Give a proper 'handing over' to the new PL. This is usually done with a short meeting between the old and the new PL where they discuss the members of the patrol and they discuss the future plans of the new PL. At this point, the old PL will also warn the new PL of any special attention needed by particular members of the Patrol.
- Once you say goodbye and do your handing over, let the new PL do his job and don't interfere - it will be easier for him and the scouts to adjust to the new situation.

Lord Robert Baden-Powell's Letter to a Patrol Leader

What I have often told to gatherings of Patrol leaders, I repeat now to you who read this; namely, that you have great power to do good or to do harm to the Scouts placed under your charge. It largely depends on your character and your example to them which way they go.

There are three steps you should take:

First, win your boys by making yourself their friend and helper.

Secondly, influence them by your example in conduct and in doing things.

Thirdly, control them with your good sense and by keeping them to the teaching of the Scout Law.

Your key to success is to thoroughly understand the inner meaning of the Scout Law, to carry it out in all that you do and thereby to give the lead to your boys.