

Issue 383 – February 4, 2014

BY [ASK ANDY](#) ON FEBRUARY 4, 2014 IN [2014](#)

Dear Andy,

My question's about the National Honor Patrol. Req. 8 states: "Have eight members in the patrol or increase patrol membership over the previous three months." What does a small patrol or a small troop do so that this award may be achieved?

Our troop's one patrol has six second-year Scouts and can't get any new boys to join; therefore, they have no growth or the maximum eight Scouts. They'll never be able to earn this award, even though they excel in every other area. Any ideas would be appreciated. (Fred Weissert, ASM, Mt. Lebanon, PA)

Yes, the requirements, especially those for National Honor Patrol, can't be altered, no matter how much we'd like to help our Scouts along. National Honor Patrol and all the others would lose their meaning if we just let stuff slip by.

Besides, one of the requirements for First Class involves inviting an eligible non-Scout to visit. The obvious intention being that, with luck and a good troop program, they'll want to join up!

My recommendation -- especially since even a Tenderfoot Scout can work on a First Class requirement (without being Second Class) -- is to emphasize this with the Scouts of the troop and give them the "tools of persuasion" they'll need to succeed!

So, what can be done...?

Show Scouts how to develop a "hit list" of friends, classmates, neighbors, sports team, church group, and other boys potentially eligible to become Scouts.

Then, brain-storm with them on how to "do the ask," remembering that the best joiners are those who ask, "Can I join your patrol?" (Notice, it's "join the patrol" -- not join the troop! That's because the fundamental and most important "unit" of Boy Scouting isn't the troop; it's the **patrol!**)

Teach your Scouts how to "buddy-up" with the newly invited friend, and not just let him drift or wander around during the troop meeting or patrol activity.

Show your Scouts how to welcome visitors by name, with personal introductions more than "This is my friend, Johnny." Introductions need to be more like, "This is my friend, Johnny, and he's in 6th grade. His favorite subject is math and he hates history; he's a star Little League pitcher and plays a skilled piano. Johnny was a Cub Scout, but didn't cross over to our troop a year ago because his parents thought he couldn't play sports and be a Scout too! His favorite breakfast cereal is Cap'n Crunch and he likes Big Mac's." (Are you getting this? Are you getting that, for this kind of introduction to happen, the Scout who invited Johnny has actually gotten to know him better than he ever did before? This makes Johnny feel real special, and removes the barrier of his feeling like and "outsider"!)

Then, in the troop meeting, be sure to play some inter-patrol games that non-Scouts (with a little instruction from their friends) can join in on and enjoy!

Finally, let your Scouts know that it's more than okay for them to invite their friends again -- including an upcoming camping trip (even though they haven't joined up!).

Yes, it takes effort. And solid coaching. And it's best done by the Senior Patrol Leader, who coaches the Patrol Leaders so they can go back and coach their patrol members! (Peer-to-peer always works better than adult-to-youth among boys and young men of Scout age!)

"Wow, Andy! That's a lot of work!" you're thinking. And you're right! Tell me: What is there of true value that doesn't come by solid, smart effort?

But now there's one more thing... You mentioned that this troop has just one patrol. One patrol isn't a troop! A troop is defined as a Boy Scout unit with two or more patrols. This means, if I understand you correctly, that you don't really have a troop yet, if you really have only one patrol. Moreover, with only one patrol, there's no Senior Patrol Leader and there can't be any inter-patrol competitions! So, if this is really the situation, and you only have six Scouts in the entire troop, then the very first thing that has to happen is to have two patrols of three Scouts each. These Scouts need to divide up (let them pick which three Scouts will be in each of the two patrols--DON'T do this for them!). Then, "borrow" an older Scout from a neighboring troop to act as Senior Patrol Leader for a couple of months (we can talk more about this if I've actually read your situation correctly here). Each patrol of three names itself (two new names -- not one patrol keeps the "old" name and the second patrol doesn't get this opportunity), and then each patrol elects its own Patrol Leader. NOW, they can really go do some recruiting, because they want to get a fourth member as fast as possible, to make it easier to go camping (two-man tents) and such!

Also, be sure to recruit from local Cub Scout packs (we're entering "open season" on Webelos dens right now!), and, when a den does join, be sure they're kept intact and not "salted" into the existing patrols.

How does a small troop "recruit" Webelos dens in order to grow? Simple. The Scoutmaster tells the parents this: "Yes, you'll find larger troops, and they're good ones. But your son's about to enter a new stage of development and maturation. In our troop, I can personally guarantee you this: He won't get 'lost in the crowd.' As his Scoutmaster, I'll know him personally, and he'll know me as a person he can come to, to learn, to grow, and -- yes -- when he has a problem and he's not quite sure who to turn to! It's my responsibility to get to know your son and what makes him 'tick,' and I take that responsibility very seriously."

You all can make this work, and have a healthy, growing troop. I hope you all decide to roll up your sleeves and make this happen!