7—YOUR COMMISSIONER STYLE

There is increasing awareness of the importance of a commissioner's style to a commissioner's success. Diplomacy, exceptional service, and service recovery are part of that style.

Frontline Diplomat

Units are people. To help units succeed, today's commissioners must be people-oriented more than procedures-oriented. They are truly a council's frontline diplomats. Because they operate mostly by persuasion rather than by legislation, unit commissioners should exercise the highest degree of diplomacy.

Good unit commissioners operate with skill and grace in their relationships with unit adults. They handle new and difficult situations in a way that maintains good relations and avoids offending people. They help unit leaders operate more effectively without arousing their hostility. Unit commissioners can conduct negotiations between several people who might not be working well together.

Unit commissioners also are sensitive to different personalities, cultures, socioeconomic lifestyles, and unit circumstances. As Lord Baden-Powell once said: "What suits one particular troop, in one kind of place, will not suit another within a mile of it."

What are the qualities of Scouting's diplomat? A model commissioner should

- Be an effective communicator
- Be a good listener
- Have sound judgment
- Be tactful
- Have Scouting background or be a fast-track learner
- Be both persistent and patient
- Be adaptable
- Know and practice Scouting ideals
- Be enthusiastic
- Treat everyone with respect, even when they annoy you

Exceptional Service

Exceptional commissioner service has three important qualities:

1. It **exceeds unit leader expectations** rather than barely meets expectations. Simply meeting the expectations of unit leaders is not enough in our increasingly competitive society. Most people expect more than just "good enough" service.

   Here is a formula for successful commissioners:

   EXCEPTIONAL DISTRICT SERVICE EQUALS UNIT LEADER PERCEPTION OF HELP RECEIVED MINUS HELP THE UNIT LEADER EXPECTED.

   Think about ways to exceed the expectations of unit adults.

2. It provides **caring service**, not just competent service. Commissioners must truly care about units. Commissioners must believe in unit people. Commissioners must have a solid relationship with their assigned units.
3. It is provided **promptly.** Unit adults want service now, not when we get around to it. Commissioners respond promptly to unit needs. If they don't, they may not get a second chance to help—or worse, there may not be a unit left to help. Exceptional district service results in successful units.

Service Recovery: How to Right a Wrong

"To err is human; to recover divine," says Harvard customer service expert Earl Sasser. He adds that we may strive for perfection, but we won't be perfect; so when there are mistakes, we must have a process to make them right.

Such advice is as valuable for Scouting as for businesses, schools, and other organizations in the community. We do make mistakes: the national office prints conflicting information in two of its publications; a local council double-books a favorite summer campsite; a district changes the roundtable location and forgets to tell all of the leaders; a commissioner fails to show up at a pack committee meeting; a Scoutmaster forgets to award a Second Class badge at a court of honor.

When a mistake happens, what should we do?

- Find a sincere way to say "I'm sorry." Admitting a mistake might not be easy, but it sets the stage for overcoming a blunder in the future.
- Act immediately. People appreciate prompt action. Don't let problems fester; they often get worse—at least in the minds of the offended.
- Take the initiative. It's often wise to notify a unit of a blunder and start the recovery process even before unit Scouters discover the mistake: "Bill, we lost your charter renewal envelope. We'll help you redo the paperwork, and the council will reimburse you the bank fee to stop payment on the check you wrote for registration fees."
- Smooth ruffled feathers. Remember that some people might be upset not only with the person or group who blundered but also with the whole Scouting organization.
- Let them know you care. Council and district attitudes toward unit people are crucial. Unit Scouters must be treated like the champions of Scouting they are. Commissioners must assure them that "We care about you!"
- Turn a blunder into an opportunity. When a mistake happens, don't think just about damage control. Find creative ways to handle the problem to maximize unit leaders' satisfaction with the district or council so that they feel better about Scouting than they would have if the mistake had never happened.
- Be prepared. Commissioners are empowered to handle, correct, and make restitution for blunders that affect unit people. Know how to listen for a problem, interpret what you hear, and take appropriate action.

Be thankful if a unit adult promptly expresses dissatisfaction to you so you can try to do something about it. You may have a worse problem if that leader simply leaves dissatisfied or lets the problem fester, thus affecting unit operations.