

A Balancing Act

Scouting: A Balancing Act

Gerry Mulder, The Leader, October 1992

As a Scouter with three different sections over the last 10 years, I've seen a number of successful Scouting programs and watched the people who make them successful. The successful programs balance spiritual needs, outdoor enthusiasm, community responsibilities, and the youth members' goals and personal needs. We can compare the balancing act to a child's wagon. If the program is the wagon and the components are the wheels, then leaders must be able to balance the wheels so that the wagon doesn't become wobbly.

Another balancing act a Scouter must master includes the various components of his or her personal life. Every new Scouter quickly learns that the job takes more than an hour a week. Just as quickly, all Scouters have to start balancing their time to contain this new, exhilarating and all-consuming commitment.

It is very easy to fall into the trap of talking and doing Scouting all the time. Scouters must be prepared to create a balance between Scouting, their friends, their social life, their spiritual commitment, their work, their hobbies, their family life, and all the chores in the job jar.

We often tend to focus on one or two things in our lives, letting the rest slide. When things get too hectic, we scramble to catch up. Although this "seat of the pants" priority-setting may work for some people, ultimately it catches up with us.

If, for example, we reduce the attention we give to our family, we are playing with one of the most important components in the balance. Results can include strained relationships, shortened tempers, arguments and, if not caught in time, even family break-ups. I sincerely doubt that our founder intended Scouting to have that kind of impact on us. And I am certain it isn't the spiritual message we are to live by.

Spiritual commitment is a very important part of the balancing act as Scouters, we've always known that spirituality is important but, for various reasons, including procrastination, ignorance, or fear of hitting some nerves, did not include it in our program.

It becomes very difficult to deliver the spiritual component to our young members if we do not practise it ourselves. When we attend religious services of our faith, participate in the activities of our religious community, and socialize with our faith family, we become much stronger and have much more confidence and credibility when we include spirituality in our program.

When was the last time you got together with friends who are not active in Scouting? Did you spend most of your time talking about Scouting anyway? People

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develop different interests through their lives, and their friends often change as well. But it is vital to retain friends outside of Scouting. It ensures you will remain active in the community, keeps your mind open to other things around you, and leaves open the door for friends to depend on you. It also gives others an opportunity to see Scouting through you; they may even want to join the fun!

Nothing can start an argument more quickly around a house than the job jar. If you are always on Scout outings, who is doing your chores at home? Is your spouse cooking the meals, mowing the lawn, cleaning the house and garage, taking out the trash? If so, delegate the next outing to another leader or parent so that you can balance your home life with your Scouting interests. It will also create an excellent opportunity for someone else to experience the euphoria of an appreciative group of Scouts.

Put Scouting In Context

Since computers were installed at my workplace. I have taken the opportunity to do some of my administrative work during my lunchbreaks. I have to be careful, however, to keep Scouting in its proper context. It's important that you don't let your enthusiasm for Scouting get in the way of making sure your employer gets his money's worth out of you.

In the January '92 issue, *Scouter Blue* offered some excellent ways to keep your spouse as committed to Scouting as you. But what about you? When was the last time you read a good book, completed a crossword puzzle, or constructed a model airplane? When did you last play "tea time" with your daughter, help bake some cookies, or take a walk with your spouse?

Everyone has hobbies, and you have to budget time in your busy life to treat yourself once in awhile, too. Of course, you need to balance this treat with the world around you. If you do things with your family, finish your chores, and run an active and enthusiastic Scouting program, I am sure your district commissioner will understand when you tell him or her that you are taking the night off to work on your Lego set!

It's easy to talk about the balancing act, but much harder to practise it. In the book *Who You Are When No One's Looking* (Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 1987), writer Bill Hybels says that people who have their act together are those who practise discipline. They set priorities and delay gratification. He describes "delayed gratification" as "a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with".

How do you eat your cake? Do you save all the icing until last? If so, you are practising discipline--eating the less desirable part first and leaving the best for later. You can apply the idea to practising balance. If we take care of our family and household priorities

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first, the time we have to offer our Scouting program can be that much more rewarding because we don't need to feel guilty about other things we should be doing.

Scouting is a balancing act. To grow as an adult, family member, leader, role model to young people, member of your faith, and friend to those around you, you have to balance your time and energy. You will not do Scouting any good if you allow the balance to tip so far in one direction that everyone around you suffers.

The point was really driven home when I completed my Wood Badge II. At our closing horseshoe, our excellent leader offered this advice. As much as we were excited about the fun, new friends, and experiences we'd had during the week, he said, the first thing to do when we got home was to ask our families how their week went and what they did.

"You will have plenty of time to tell them about your experiences later," he said. A simple suggestion to help us keep the balance in our lives.

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