

**KEYS TO SUCCESS:**

# **GROUP SCOUT LEADERS**

Helping you understand the role, plan  
and lead the Scout Group to success



[scouts.org.uk](http://scouts.org.uk)

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## **EDITOR'S NOTES**

Although in some parts of the British Isles Scout Counties are known as Areas or Islands – or in one case Bailiwick – for ease of reading this publication simply refers to County/Countries. In Scotland there is no direct equivalent for County or Area. In Scotland, Scouting is organised into Districts and Regions, each with distinct responsibilities. Some 'County' functions are the responsibility of Scottish Regions, while others lie with Scottish Districts.

2<sup>nd</sup> edition  
2010

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## INTRODUCTION

**This booklet is designed to help explain the role of the Group Scout Leader (GSL). If you are reading this, you have probably taken on (or are considering) this role and are looking for guidance and further information. It is the aim of this booklet to provide you with advice and support for you in your role. Other members of your Group (such as the Assistant Group Scout Leader, or adults who wish to understand the role of the Group Scout Leader) may also find it useful.**

## WHAT IS A GROUP SCOUT LEADER?

You are the manager of the Scout Group and provide leadership and support to every adult and young person involved with it. You support adults to make Scouting a success and help make sure that the Group provides a welcoming atmosphere to all. Scouting happens most often at Group level so your role is vital in ensuring that the best possible Scouting is available for young people in your area.

## SUPPORTING YOU IN YOUR ROLE

Group Scout Leaders lead a team of volunteers in the Scout Group (including the Section Leaders, Assistant Leaders, other adult volunteers and Young Leaders). Scout Groups are made up of Beaver Scout Colonies, Cub Scout Packs and Scout Troops (some also include Explorer Scout Units). Although the challenges with every Group will vary, and you will need to go about it in different ways, its function is equally important in all situations.



## STARTING POINTS

**As Group Scout Leader, you are the volunteer manager for your Group and are key to leading its development.**

### CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE

Your influence can have an important impact on the atmosphere within the Group. Is your Group very ordered with things running in a disciplined fashion or is it more informal? Do you delegate duties appropriately, or take everything on yourself?

### MANAGING THE GROUP

How will you manage the Group and its leaders? Remember that your support can be crucial, but delivered in a variety of ways. For example, will you have monthly meetings around a table or discuss things informally with leaders after section meetings? Whatever you decide needs to be the best approach for you and your team.

### WHERE DO YOU WANT IT TO GO?

As Group Scout Leader you need to have a plan for the future of the Group. Your vision may be very simple. Offering all young people the chance to camp every year or aiming to recruit suitable adults for all your vacancies within six months are both positive and achievable objectives.

What do you want your Group to look like in three years' time? Will you need to create new sections and appoint new leaders? What about your meeting place? Will it need to be rebuilt? Talk to your leaders and find out what they want. Consider the District too. What are the plans in the wider area and how will you put them into action?

Also look at what's happening in the local area. Could something impact on Scouting that will require your Group to respond? For example, are new houses being built close to your meeting place, creating a need for another section?

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Talk to each Section Leader to identify any issues and consider their ideas for the future. Having regular meetings with your Group team, including the Section Leaders and Assistant Leaders (also known as a Group Scouters' Meeting), and attending section meetings is very important as it allows you to stay in touch with the issues. Once you have a view of the whole Group, you can start to think about your plans for each area – and for the Group as a whole. Having decided on your vision, you need to put a plan into place. The best way to create a development plan is to break the issues into small pieces and work towards achieving each bit. If you are not good at planning in this way, discuss your ideas with the Leaders, other adults and the young people. Putting together a plan collectively for the Group is likely to have many benefits and achieve success.

## PLAN AHEAD

As Group Scout Leader you can support your leaders by anticipating upcoming events. Plan your time accordingly by looking at the Group and District calendars. Check that plans for camp and other events are underway in good time and link with local events and other Scouting activities where possible. Inform parents of your plans through regular communication (eg a monthly Group newsletter or a Group website).

## LOOK FOR THE QUICK WIN

Although planning a long-term vision is important, you should also identify the 'quick wins' – the things you can do quickly (and easily) to benefit the Group. For example, rebuilding the meeting place might be your long term vision, but a quick win could be tidying the existing building and brightening it up with a bit of redecoration or even just with some new posters. Small things can boost everyone's spirits and make them feel part of something exciting and fresh.

## GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

The role of Group Scout Leader is one that will make demands on your time and it is very important to remember to have a normal life as well.

We have all seen adults whose lives have been taken over by Scouting, but remember that your family and your work should come first. Decide on some strategies that will allow you to balance your time. For example, you could put blue sticky dots in your diary for evenings and weekends for your family. Do this at the start of the year and stick to it – you will be the better for it.

### QUICK WINS

Gaining some initial quick wins can have clear benefits: you feel you are achieving and your credibility as someone who does something good starts to be established.

**'LEADERSHIP IS PRACTICED  
NOT SO MUCH IN WORDS AS IN  
ATTITUDE AND ACTIONS.'**

Harold Geneen



# UNPACKING THE ROLE

Having looked at the initial steps in being a Group Scout Leader, it is now time to look at the role in more detail.

## KEY PARTS

The role description for the Group Scout Leader gives guidance on the priority and additional tasks of the role. Details of where this can be found are on page 15. The priority tasks listed are:

- Ensuring the Group has a team of 'fit and proper' adults working effectively together and with others to meet the area's Scouting needs.
- Ensuring that all adults are adequately supported including induction, reviews and development.
- Ensuring that a challenging and exciting Balanced Programme is carried out throughout the Scout Group and that all adults are supported in performing their tasks.

- Resolving problems that may occur within the Scout Group.
- Acting as a charity trustee of the Scout Group.

In addition, a key element of the role is to work with the Group Executive Committee to ensure the effective administration of the Scout Group.

Many of the additional tasks listed in the role description can be delegated to others. Those which cannot only become a priority at certain times.

## BUILD AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

As Group Scout Leader you need to build a team that works effectively. The most successful Groups are constructed around a team that likes working together. In addition to their Scouting they will often enjoy some social activities too.

Team building tasks are a great way to generate confidence among members and help the team bond. Find a project (such as

the Group camp) that all members of the Scout Group (including leaders) can take part in and work to achieve the same goal.

When building a team, having the right person in the right role is key. You need to be clear about what the role entails and what skills a person might need to do it well. It is all too easy to put the first adult who volunteers into a leadership role where you might desperately need the help. However, they may prefer to be in charge of fundraising, and may be much better suited for that. If people are in roles they are happy with they will stay with the Group for longer. It is better to find a single Beaver Scout Leader that will stay with the Group than have four who each leave because the role is not right for them. Being flexible is very important.

## SUPPORT – INDUCTION AND TRAINING

Once you have found the members of your team (or decided who to work with from the previous Group Scout Leader's team),

you need to support them while they learn about the role. Work with others to provide a proper induction, providing a structured programme for their first few months, allowing them to meet the right people, learn about the Group and know where to go for support. For example as Cub Scout Leader you should be introduced to the Beaver Scout Leader, the Scout Leader, the Group Executive Committee, the Assistant District Commissioner (Cub Scouts), the District Commissioner, the Assistant County Commissioner (Cub Scouts) and other Cub Scout Leaders in the District.

A key part of induction will be their training. This means that you will need to find out how training in your area is organised. Most importantly, you will need to know where information about local training is available from and who you need to contact about it. New leaders are often keen to get going with their training and certain modules are best attended early for them to be useful. Existing leaders are also required to do ongoing learning throughout their role. You can support them in this by being aware of things that might be available and thinking about what the person or the Group could most benefit from.

## **SUPPORT FOR YOU**

The role of the Group Scout Leader is one that involves providing leadership to your Scout Group. However, you don't need to do this alone. There are many sources of support for the Group Scout Leader.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

No one expects the Group Scout Leader to be an expert straight away and you should receive a proper induction and support to help you learn whilst in the role. Contact your Training Adviser to discuss the training and ongoing learning you can do to support your development.



## GROUP CHAIRMAN AND GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Group Scout Leader manages the Group and is responsible for its support and development and the Programme it offers to young people. The Group Chairman and the Group Executive Committee exist to support you and ensure the effective administration of the Scout Group. You nominate the Group Chairman and your relationship should be one of partnership and mutual support. The Committee will make sure that you have the facilities and resources needed to deliver

good Scouting in your Group – so be sure to establish a real partnership with its members. Remember that the Group Scout Leader and the other members of the Group Executive Committee are the charity trustees of the Scout Group.

## ASSISTANT GROUP SCOUT LEADER (AGSL)

You may have an Assistant Group Scout Leader who assists you in carrying out your role and may well be a suitable future Group Scout Leader. You could delegate some of your volunteer management responsibility to

your Assistant; for example your AGSL could manage the Leaders within the Scout section while you look after the Beaver and Cub Scout sections.

## SCOUT DISTRICT

In the same way that you lead your Scout Group, the District Commissioner leads the Scout District and will provide you with support. They, and their District Team, are a useful source of help for event planning and other organisational activities, but also as advice and guidance for updates, training, appointments and recruitment. If things go wrong you will also need the support of your District.



## PROGRAMME

Once you have an effective team, it is important to ensure that an exciting Balanced Programme is taking place within your Group. This does not mean that everyone is out climbing every week but that a lively and varied programme is happening in all sections. Encourage your leaders to plan ahead and create a programme outline for future meetings (including suitable linking meetings for young people moving between sections). This allows you to support them in what they are doing and lets others step in if they are unable to attend.

## DO THE RIGHT THINGS FIRST

As Group Scout Leader it is likely there will be more things to do than can practically be done. It is therefore necessary to prioritise your 'to do' list. For example, your list might include 'opening up the meeting place every Thursday night for Scouts'. However, getting keys cut for the new Scout Leader on Saturday should be the priority for you as it will save a lot of time in the long run (and

make it a lot easier for the Scout Leader). That is a simple and obvious example and things are often not that straightforward.

Prioritising your tasks is something that is worth spending a little time doing to make sure you are as effective as you can be in your role. When you think about the tasks to be done there are likely to be a number that you will consider 'difficult'. These are often the ones that worry us most. A good way of managing is to try and do one difficult thing at a time rather than avoid them altogether. Finishing one complex task feels a whole lot better than doing several of the simpler ones.

## USE OTHER PEOPLE

As a Group Scout Leader, there are some parts of your role that can be delegated. All leaders will have tasks they can delegate and one way of involving people in your Group is asking them to do something. Try listing all the tasks that need to be done and approach people (especially parents) in an informal way to sign up for a task. These days, people spend more time working than ever before

and it is important that they do not take on too much.

## MAKE MEETINGS EFFECTIVE

Part of your role will include attending, organising or even chairing meetings. These might be, for example, section leader meetings, or Group Scouters' meetings. The key to useful meetings is to have a clear agenda. People need to understand why they are attending a meeting and what they are likely to get out of it. When you are running a meeting see to it that everyone who attends has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Make sure you have someone to record the decisions. Minutes of meetings are an important reminder to people of who needs to do what and should be circulated promptly.

When you are invited to meetings, try and read the agenda ahead of time and ensure that you are the most appropriate person to attend on behalf of the Group, it doesn't have to be you who attends every meeting. Remember to report back any relevant and interesting items to the people in your team.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### BE REALISTIC

As Group Scout Leader it is important to be realistic about what you set out to achieve. By setting yourself smaller and more focussed objectives, you increase the chances of achieving them and maintaining motivation. Remember that it is not realistic for you to do everything on your own. You have a team to support you, so don't be afraid to ask for help and delegate, where possible.

### KEEP THE BALL ROLLING

A key aspect of the role of Group Scout Leader is taking responsibility for your projects. Once you have decided what you are going to do, make sure you follow your plans through to completion. While it is perfectly acceptable to delegate tasks, it is your responsibility to pick the right people to delegate to.

Encourage those you choose to actively take part in the project – there is no point in delegating responsibilities and then keeping

tight control over what everyone is doing. People are happier if they can see progress being made from their own initiatives and contributions. The longer they feel useful, the longer they will probably keep helping. However, it is important that you keep an interest in your projects and take ultimate responsibility for their completion.

One way of doing this is by setting milestones. When delegating tasks, discuss the milestones for each project. Each milestone should have a realistic target date for completion. This will give people something to aim for and a plan of action to help them stay focussed.

### VALUE PEOPLE

Remember to thank people for what they have done for the Group. It is important to remember that all contributions are valuable and should be recognised. A person may volunteer to do something for the Group once a year, which is an important contribution that should be welcomed. Saying 'thank you' sounds a simple action but it means a lot when people have their efforts recognised.

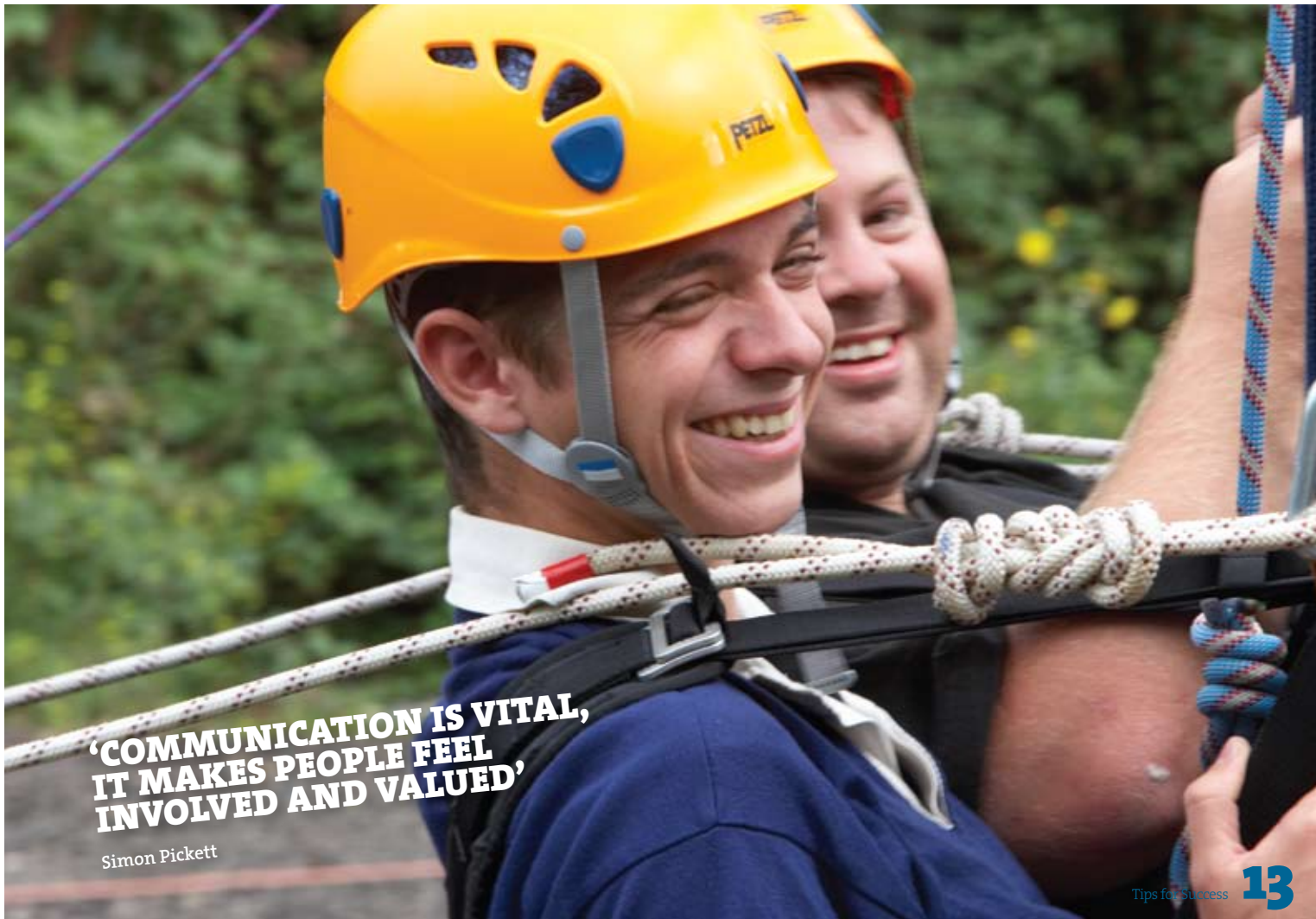
### WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Accept that sometimes things will not go as planned. In Scouting, as in life, things do go wrong. Be prepared to rethink your objectives or re-plan your milestones to accommodate any mishaps. Remember to let your team know of any problems and changes to your plan.

### LISTEN AND BE RECEPTIVE

Part of being an effective leader is listening to those around you. It is important to remember that you are not simply there to instruct and delegate, but to allow people to talk freely and openly about any issues (good or bad) that they might have. By listening carefully and not immediately telling them what to do, you will make them feel valued and supported.

Remember that the people in your Group will have lots of useful knowledge and experience that you, as Group Scout Leader, might not. By listening to your Section Leaders you may discover new information that could help you to be more effective in your role. Try to understand that everyone is different – some people will talk openly in meetings while others prefer an informal chat on a one-to-one



**'COMMUNICATION IS VITAL,  
IT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL  
INVOLVED AND VALUED'**

Simon Pickett

basis. You should create opportunities for people to talk to you in their preferred way (by arriving early for meetings for example). Remember to let people know you are doing this though – if no one knows, no-one will turn up.

Finally, try not to avoid talking to people because you think they might bear bad news. As Group Scout Leader you should encourage people to raise issues and concerns. Often, the sooner problems are out in the open, the easier they are solved. If ignored, however, they tend to grow and become more serious.

## REVIEWS

Take the time to regularly review how things are going with each adult. This might be an informal chat or a formal meeting. It's an opportunity to take stock of the situation, address concerns and to help plan the adult's personal development. You should also formally review the appointments in the Group (using *Form AR*) where you assess whether the adult should stay in their current role, apply for a new one or step back from

Scouting involvement. Think about their induction, training and ongoing learning for the five years or so between appointment and review.

## GROWING THE TEAM

As we've already seen, having an effective team is an important part of your role and will play a key part in your successes. This means that, as the needs of the Group change, you may need to reshuffle your team to make sure you have the right people in the right roles. You may also need to bring in new people with different skills to do certain tasks.

You may reshuffle to meet the needs of one or more of your team members. It is important to keep people interested and motivated and sometimes a change of role is enough to do this. Talk to your team – ask them how they are feeling. If someone is not happy, they may appreciate you suggesting a new challenge in a new role. You could do this formally or informally through regular reviews, to ensure you find out what people want from Scouting. You may not be able

to change someone's role immediately, but understanding his or hers wishes will help you plan for the future.

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

You can also look to the future by succession planning. Consider who would be good in a certain role before it becomes available. That way if your Beaver Scout Leader decides to leave or change their role, you will already have an idea of who could take their place. Remember, appoint people to roles they are suited for, not just where there's a vacancy. Succession planning is all about making life easier for you in the future.

## AND FINALLY...

There is no standard correct way to carry out the role of Group Scout Leader. Everyone is different and different methods will work for different people. If you use this booklet as a guide, however, and pick out the bits that work for you, we hope that you will be equipped with some advice to help you be effective and successful in the role. Good luck.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, contact the Adult Support Team at Gilwell Park:

- Phone 0845 300 1818.
- Email [adult.support@scouts.org.uk](mailto:adult.support@scouts.org.uk).
- Write to Adult Support Team  
The Scout Association  
Gilwell Park  
London  
E4 7QW.
- For help with Scouting development locally (in England), the Regional Development Service can be contacted via the Scout Information Centre.
- For general enquiries, please contact the Scout Information Centre on 0845 300 1818 or email [info.centre@scouts.org.uk](mailto:info.centre@scouts.org.uk).

More information can be found at [www.scouts.org.uk](http://www.scouts.org.uk). The following resources in particular may be helpful:

- *Role of the Group Scout Leader – An Introduction* (FS310100).
- *Role Description for a Group Scout Leader* (FS330063).
- *The Group Executive Committee* (FS330077).
- *A Guide for the Group Chairman*.
- *Review – Helping Adults Choose the Right Path*.
- *Appointment Review Form (Form AR)*.

- *Induction – Starting Adults in a New Role*.
- *Recruitment of Adult Volunteers*.
- *The Appointment Process: Guide for Managers*.
- *Policy, Organisation and Rules of The Scout Association* (POR).
- Programmes Online (POL) [www.scouts.org.uk](http://www.scouts.org.uk).
- The *Focus* supplement is distributed with *Scouting* magazine and is aimed at providing guidance, information and support to managers in Scouting (particularly Group Scout Leaders, District Commissioners and County Commissioners). [www.scouts.org.uk/focus](http://www.scouts.org.uk/focus)



# Support for you

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING ON THE ROLE OF GROUP SCOUT LEADER; IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF SCOUTING.**

**EVERY GROUP AND PERSON IS DIFFERENT. HOWEVER, WE HOPE THAT THIS GUIDE GIVES YOU SOME SUGGESTIONS THAT WILL HELP YOU TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN YOUR ROLE AND TO ENJOY IT MORE.**

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