

The best advice I ever received on being a Cubmaster was simple and to the point:

“POOF! You’re nine. Act like it. Think like it.”

While some of the most successful Cubmasters I’ve ever met were natural nine-year-olds, there is no reason that a fully-grown adult can’t do an equally good job. It just takes a little more practice and preparation!

The monthly pack meeting is the biggest, most important job of the Cubmaster, yet many have a hard time getting it right. I’ve run and observed a lot of pack meetings, both good and bad, and noticed what works and what doesn’t. Interestingly, good packs, with lots of involved and motivated parents and leaders, are often the packs that have great pack meetings! They set the tone for the entire pack program!

The first thing you should to improve your pack meeting is to stop having them altogether. Eliminate the word “meeting” from your Scouting vocabulary. “Meeting” has too many negative meanings for most of us. You go to a meeting to discuss things, learn about the latest layoffs, or have more work assigned. Meetings are dull. Nobody looks forward to meetings.

On the other hand, everybody likes to be entertained. So instead, focus on presenting a “Pack Performance” every month! That is a much better description of what your monthly gathering is—a show! Every month represents a one-night-only premiere, and as the Cubmaster, you and your cast are the producers, writers, directors and master of ceremonies!

Now that you have the right frame of mind, what should your performance contain? Make it interesting to both boys and the adults. If it isn’t, one or the other will stop paying attention and you’ll lose control. The show should appeal to the boys, but be fine-tuned for the adults. The overall program should be short and entertaining, and each act should be as brief as possible within the larger show. Keep it loud, visual and dynamic. Physiologically, boys have short attention spans, process information visually, and don’t hear a good percentage of what is said to them. (Read Michael Gurian’s “Wonder of Boys” for details on this, gentleman. The ladies already know men don’t listen!)

Plan an even mixture of skits, run-ons, songs, ceremonies and games. Use costumes, props and decorations for atmosphere and visual appeal. Involve parents and leaders in the program. Sprinkle brief, informative moments throughout the show, but work on eliminating gaps, pauses, extensive preparations, long speeches, or readings.

No performance has announcements. Instead, print up a monthly newsletter with all the important information that parents and boys need to know, and make sure that everyone gets a copy. What you may find useful is to print a calendar for the coming month on one side of your newsletter, which will invariably find its way to the refrigerator doors of most families in your pack. It is better to remind parents of an event every time they reach for the milk, than to read the date out to the group during your performance. I guarantee that nobody will memorize it, and few will write it down! With the newsletter going out to all the families, you can instead concentrate on quickly pointing out how fun and exciting the coming month will be, without going into boring details.

You should also avoid having any single act deal exclusively with one boy or one den for too long, especially during recognition ceremonies. If you’re handing out awards to Den 2, nobody but Den 2 will be paying attention. Instead, try to incorporate the entire pack into your recognition segments. Boys and parents alike will soon realize that their name could come up at any moment and pay closer attention to your program, instead of gossiping or goofing off!

Finally, pull parents and leaders, boys and siblings into the program. No matter how naturally entertaining you may be, a one-man show gets old after a while! Use older siblings to help with lighting, stage setup, and ceremonies. Involve parents and boys in skits and run-ons. And get your entire audience into the act with songs and audience participation stunts. Personally, I use two assistant Cubmasters: one is my partner in crime, and one is my "announcement person" (and better half). I'll recruit one or two other leaders, one or two parents, a few older siblings, and one den each month to help out. All the adults and siblings get a script that we write on the Saturday before the meeting, based on a general plan we hash out the week before over the phone and through email. In all, it takes a couple of hours to write, and another couple to gather everything together. We'll scatter run-ons, skits and songs between the segments that take more preparation to prevent lulls while we prepare for them.

So what if it's been a long time since you were nine, and you've forgotten what it was like? What is the secret to being a great Cubmaster?

As the Cubmaster you should plan on making a fool of yourself, because it has ageless appeal—kids and adults alike are inexplicably mesmerized and amused by a grown man or woman performing "Tooty-Ta", talking in a weird accent, or otherwise embarrassing themselves. It means you need to plan and practice your show, and most of all, have no pride.

Being loud enough to be heard without a microphone is helpful!

You should also think back to what it was like to pretend. Remember, as a kid, how you could turn a cardboard box into a house, racecar, space capsule, submarine or jet fighter with just a few quick crayon marks? That's the idea! "Let's Pretend" are two mighty powerful words! Your props and costumes don't have to be the quality of a major motion picture set, just enough to get the idea across! We use lots of props and costumes, even if it's just a bandana over the face and a sign hung around someone's neck that says "Bank Robber."

I don't claim to be the ultimate Cubmaster, or an expert by any means, but I can count on one hand how many times I've needed to put up the Cub Scout sign at a meeting. These methods work for me, and I've seen them work for others. The boys tell me they're always wondering what's going to happen next, and the parents tell me they can't believe that we did some goofy, silly thing. They pay attention (and show up on time) because they don't want to miss something, and are excited about what's coming up next.