

Tips For The New Cubmaster

The best (and funniest) advice I ever received on being a Cubmaster was: "POOF!" You're nine. Think like it. Act like it.

While a great method, and a valuable planning tool, this doesn't give much insight on how to run your monthly Pack meeting! To that end, I've written up some helpful little hints to add a little spice to your meetings, or revive a tired program!

First, don't think of your meeting as a 'meeting'. Start to think in terms of a one-night show, a production. Meetings are dull; we go to them every day and rarely (if ever) look forward to them. A show, however, is entertainment! People want to be entertained, and while they'll forget to go to your meeting, they'll remember that they have tickets to your show!

As the Cubmaster, you should plan your meeting agenda out beforehand. Remember: "Failure to plan is planning for failure!" Include everything from the pre-opening to clean up, and the responsible party for each item. Make sure that those responsible parties get a call beforehand to remind them that they need to bring or do something.

Further, you'll need to plan for contingencies. What if someone forgets the flag? What if a speaker doesn't show? Have a backup in mind.

Set an example to your leaders and your boys by wearing your uniform and looking your best. Your personal pride will be mirrored by your Pack, and soon enough you'll have few if any problems with the boys and leaders looking just as good!

Plan a pre-opening activity, especially if families tend to show up late. The boys will soon realize that they're missing something by not being on time, and pressure the parents to arrive early. Another thing that contributes to lateness is not starting your meeting on time. If nothing is missed by being late, why be there on time?

Use a variety of openings at your meetings. We used to march the flag to the front and repeat the pledge, but it becomes dull for your audience. There are a number of ceremonies already written, from simple to complex, which will keep your audience anticipating the next one!

At the very least, make notes for yourself and all your program participants. You might consider something closer to a script. Your notes/script can be on 3 by 5 cards, which makes it easy and unobtrusive to carry and read from.

A script serves several purposes. It keeps you from straying off subject. It reminds you of everything you wanted to cover. It documents all the names of people to be recognized at your meeting. It provides timing for run-ons. It allows you to practice, either individually or as a group of presenters. It keeps your program flowing smoothly. And it helps a speaker that otherwise is afraid of public speaking to maintain their composure.

Number your cards or pages, since you *will* drop them five minutes before you start. Bring an extra copy of two to your meeting since a critical participant *will* forget his or hers. Use lots of cards and big writing as opposed to a few cards and small writing. If you have any bad habits, include personal reminders on the cards to help you avoid them, like "Hands out of pockets", "Project" or "Eye contact".

Make sure to make eye contact with your audience. Glance down at your cards and absorb what

you're going to say, then look up and say it, instead of looking down and reading to the group. Scan the room slowly. If you don't like speaking to groups, pick people you know in the audience, fix on them, and talk as if you were talking directly to them, and switch every few sentences.

Don't position your audience too far from the action. Distance makes it tougher to see and hear, while proximity creates an intimacy and means it's more difficult to *not* pay attention to what's happening.

Provide your parents with a newsletter or program that includes details for all your announcements. If not, you'll invariably end up fielding calls for two weeks after your meeting about what time the campout starts, or where your next event is being held, or who's in charge of popcorn. On the other hand, if it's already written down for them, all you need to do is hit the highlights and sell the events. All the details are on the paper in front of your parents, making it easy for them to know what's going on. And the easier it is, the better the response!

Don't be afraid to share the stage with others. One person talking (or even joking) for an hour can get dull, but when you add another personality to the stage, you add interest. Also, there are more things that you can do as a speaker when you're sharing the spotlight.

A second person can be used to create an interesting and informative exchange, too. Standing on opposite sides of the stage, both speakers must project in order to be heard, meaning that everyone in the room should be able to hear. You can carry out a conversation that can be humorous while delivering a message. And the back and forth nature of the conversation keeps your audience active--they're not staring straight ahead at one person, but looking back and forth from one speaker to another.

Another technique we used to sell Popcorn sales this year involved speakers at the front and back of the room. The speaker at the front delivered the information and facts. The speaker at the back of the room asked questions, sometimes silly, sometimes serious, while moving from one side to the other. The effect was that the audience couldn't fix on the rear speaker--they would have been spinning in their chairs! Instead, they focused on the message from the primary presenter. Because the conversation took place "over the heads" of the audience, everyone in the room heard everything. The front speaker wasn't comfortable talking to a crowd, but because they were just carrying on a conversation (albeit a loud one!) it didn't really occur to them that they were standing in the spotlight. And the injection of humor at regular intervals (in the form of silly or obvious questions) kept the interest high.

Don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself, but don't lose the boys respect. Remember, you're nine, but you're still in charge and need to maintain control. That doesn't mean that you can't be the butt of a joke, play the victim of a prank, or tell a lame joke.

One of the most effective ways of keeping an audiences attention is to break up your meeting into "bite sized chunks". There are a couple of ways to do this. The first is to alternate serious/informative with humorous. Your program might include introductions, then a skit, then announcements, then a song or some entertainment from one of your Dens. The second is to punctuate your longer serious segments with brief moments of humor. This is where run-ons are so very valuable.

For example, if your announcements are lengthy, arrange for one or two boys or a leader to "interrupt" with a groaner. The keys are to have the interruption at a natural break in your dialogue, and appear the whole time as if you're an innocent victim of the prank. Then, pick up with an "Anyway, as I was saying...", which brings your audience back into the tempo of your presentation. You can also punctuate a segment by telling jokes yourself, though if you can't tell a joke (find out from someone who will be brutally honest with you) you should shy away from this!

Recognition is possibly the most important part of your meeting. Avoid reading names and passing out awards, since nobody will listen to anything besides their own (or their child's) name! On the other hand, a ceremony, whether serious or funny, will keep your audience in line. Remember, you're entertaining to inform! You're also recognizing the efforts of your boys. By putting an effort into the ceremony, you validate their work and show them that their achievement is important to you, their Den, their Pack and their parents!

Costumes and props can and should be used if possible. It adds to the effect, and re-enforces to your boys that their accomplishments are important enough for you to make a fool of yourself and worthy of your time and effort. Use impressive and meaningful ceremonies for badges of rank, arrow points and activity pins. Use fun, less serious ceremonies for minor awards like activity patches and belt loops.

Be sure to recognize the parents and leaders that have made a difference in the past month by volunteering or taking training. A simple thank you to the group can make the difference between a valuable resource you can depend on time and again, or a disgruntled parent or leader who won't help out. "Stroking" someone's ego may give incentive for others to pitch in, too. Just be sure to remember everyone, and recognize everything!

Let your boys (and leaders) entertain the group by performing skits, plays, magic shows, puppet shows, run-ons, telling jokes, or reading and acting out stories. In this way they contribute to the Pack--remember, "The Cub Scout Helps the Pack Go"!

If time and facilities permit, plan a game for the boys. This should be one of the last things on the agenda, since getting them back to their seats may prove difficult! Keep the game simple and fun, and make sure that the rules are obvious or can be quickly explained. Be sure to have more than enough of whatever equipment or supplies are necessary, and to have tried out everything beforehand just to be sure it really works the way you planned. Last, recruit parents or leaders beforehand to help as necessary with organization, supervising or regulating the activity.

Close your meeting formally, either with a prayer or reflection, a retreat of the colors, a song, a brief closing ceremony, or some combination of the above.

Above all, a successful meeting is short (60-90 minutes), moving, and upbeat. Incorporate the more important elements into your program early on, so that if you find yourself running late you can skip or edit things. I put announcements at the end and include the information on the program. If the meeting runs long, I generate interest in events by quickly selling them, then referring parents to the detailed information they have in hand.

Resources for skits, ceremonies, jokes, run-ons, games and more are available through BSA and the internet. MacScouter and Baloo's Bugle are two fine examples of "one stop shopping" for meeting ideas. Our links page includes many more that I've encountered.

Copy, Plagiarize, Modify, Adapt, Create!

Good Luck!