



**Burnout on the Unit Level**

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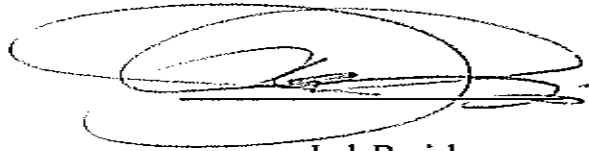
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## Advisor Approval

To the Graduate Council, I am submitting herewith this thesis titled "Burnout on the Unit Level" submitted and written by Tommy L Floyd. I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and therefore recommend that this thesis be accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for Doctor of Commissioner Science.



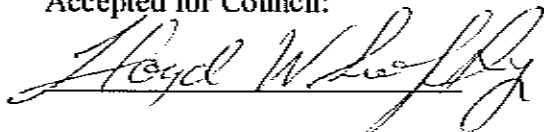
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## **Purpose Statement**

It is the purpose of this paper to provide a tool for Cubmasters, Scoutmasters, Committee Members, and Commissioners to better understand Burnout and how to combat its effects on the unit level. I will give the main causes of burnout and ways to combat it also some case studies of people who have burned out and some that were close but overcame it.

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## What Is Burnout

Burnout is when a professional or volunteer has had more stress than he or she can handle and decide to quit providing the service he or she have been providing. Burnout stems from several causes. It might come from doing too much or it might come from doing too little. Illness, overwork, stress have caused burnout, or it can come from caring too much. A lot of things contribute to burnout, like not enough recognition, too much responsibility, seeing too much pain, seeing their hard work going to no avail. Or uncaring on the part of his or her peers as to what he or she are doing. It is the responsibility of everyone to recognize these things and stop it before it causes us to lose good people.

## **Causes Of Burnout**

### **Lack of Recognition**

A lot of leaders whom I have interviewed say that He or she feel that no one cares what he or she does for the unit, that he or she are only being used. There is also a lot of "everytime the unit needs something the unit comes to me but when there is some recognition to be handed out it goes to someone else. " A lot of leaders say " I don't need the recognition I do it for the boys." But they only say this because he or she doesn't want to appear to be glory hounds. Everyone needs to be recognized for their efforts no matter how much he or she deny it.

### **Too Many Jobs**

Not everyone can handle as much responsibility as others can. I

he or she would have more to do. These people are especially hard to detect because he or she tend to remain silent until it is too late to retain them.

## **Illness**

Physical illness is a tough one to see. Sometimes the volunteers who are ill still tries to handle the position even though he or she are not able. The volunteers will push themselves to the point that it is bad on him or her, because he or she refuses to slow down and accept the fact that he or she are no longer able to handle the position. This usually results in the leader getting too weak to handle the position, and having to step down from Scouting even though there are many positions that he or she can still handle.

## **Overwork**

Overwork comes from the leader not sharing the load with others. These leaders think that if he or she don't do it won't be done right, or the

have had a lot of leaders tell me that he or she are overextended, that he or she doesn't have enough time to do things for themselves. I have seen a lot of leaders who have been wearing multiple hats, some have hats that have as many as five or six bills, you can ask at roundtables or training what are the leader's jobs and get the response, "I am a Den Leader, Troop Committee Member, Unit Commissioner, District Committee Member and Council Whatever." It seems that a person like this is either a superman or is headed for burnout. A lot of these people say "there is no one else to do it," "it is my responsibility," "I do it for the boys," "or I just cant say no."

### **Too Small A Job**

Some volunteers have jobs that are too small to successfully challenge them. The Volunteers say that they don't feel needed and that he or she feels like he or she are not wanted because if he or she were wanted



she are doing every thing in their power to help.

### **Lack of cooperation**

Lack of cooperation can come from many places. The Den Leader who spends a lot of time preparing a meeting, while all the Scouts want to do is play comes from a lack of cooperation. The Cubmaster or Scoutmaster who take a lot of their own time to get ready for an advancement ceremony, while the boys don't show up for the Pack Meeting or the Court of Honor, is a lack of cooperation. Likewise the Cubmaster or Scoutmaster who doesn't prepare is the same as the boys not showing up. When the unit leadership has to do everything, and the committee doesn't help it is the same. The leader and the boys tend to burnout when they don't work together and respect the other's feelings.

## **Uncaring Peers**

Uncaring peers is a twofold problem. One is the unit leader who thinks what he or she does is not being appreciated, and who feels that Scouts and their parents do not care. The second problem is the unit leader who does not let the people in the unit know that there are ways that He or she can be recognized. Most parents just don't realize that the leaders also need praise. Perhaps if parents did, parents would give praise more generously.

## **Boredom**

Boredom occurs when a Leader has had a position for too long. Even a challenging position can become boring, if he or she has been doing it too long.

## Ways to Combat Burnout

### Lack of Recognition

The main way to combat lack of recognition is by putting leaders in for awards. This can be done several ways. One way is by putting them in for District Awards such as Cubmaster Of The Year, Den Leader Of The Year, Spark Plug Award, or any other award given out at the annual District Awards Dinner. Another way is by giving them awards at special Pack or Troop meetings, such as at the Christmas Pack Meeting or at a Troop Court Of Honor. Another good time to give out recognition is at a Blue and Gold Banquet. Most councils also have special awards banquets. The Awards don't have to be fancy, a good gag award is good also. Give out as much recognition as possible, because most leaders are just like the boys, they love attention and praise. People who think that their work is appreciated will be happier.

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## Too Many Jobs

A good many volunteers take on too much, they don't know how or won't say no when asked to take on more responsibility. The number of positions a volunteer has, needs to be looked at. If a volunteer has taken on too much and is showing signs of being overworked, then the unit leadership should give the volunteer an assistant to help. Don't wait till the volunteer has burned out to give assistance, do it when needed. Some of the danger signs to look for are: meetings not being planned; a volunteer always on the move at functions unable to give their full attention to any one task: A volunteer being unable to answer one person's question before turning to another person's question. The best solution for this problem is not asking anyone to do more than one job that requires a lot of time. Give the volunteers some free time to themselves. Always let the volunteer know that if they need help, someone will help them as long as they need it. Never let one leader run a Den or Troop by themselves, it is too much for anyone to handle. Always make sure that the parents know that the leader is there for the boys, not to entertain them.

## Too Small a Job

Too small a job can be as bad as too large a job. Always make sure that the job is large enough to be challenging to the volunteer. If the job is too small and the volunteer appears to be bored with it, give him or her a bigger job to go along with it, so that he or she will not feel like his or her services are not needed. Do not let "eager beaver" leaders tell him or her how to do the job. Let him or her run the position unless they ask for help.

## Illness

Illness is one of the things that not much can be done about. Just make sure that if you have a volunteer that has become ill, to take some or most of the responsibility off them. But don't take their positions away from them unless they ask you to. Always ask if they want a small job to do, to keep them in Scouting. If needed make a job for them, it will help them feel like they are still wanted.

## Overwork

If you have leaders who will not ask for help even though they are being pushed to the limit, then ask them if they want some help. Advise them to go to training where they will be shown that if they have some help it will make their leadership role more enjoyable. If the leader is an “eager beaver”, then there may be a problem. There is not much that can be done with leaders who will not accept help from others. The only way that leaders like this can be helped, is by explaining to them that their’s is not the only way, but this is only as a last resort if the Den or Troop is being adversely affected by it. The best way to avoid this problem is through training, always try to get the leadership trained as much as possible.

## Stress

When leaders become stressed out they tend to become irritated easily. When leaders becomes irritated they need to back off and calm down before working with the boys or their parents. One way to prevent stress, is to make sure the leader is having fun with the boys not just working

with them. Let leaders know that they can act like a boy and have fun with Scouting. The most successful leaders have as much fun Scouting as the boys do. Another way to prevent stress, is to make sure leaders have enough help or assistants so that they won't wind up doing everything themselves. Make sure that the leaders have enough time to relax for themselves. One good way for the unit leaders to get help, is for the Unit Commissioner to offer help on events.

#### Lack Of cooperation

The best way to prevent lack of cooperation, is to let the leader know that the boys need some kind of discipline and rules at the meetings. The boys need to know that there will be consequences to their actions. One way to restore order to an unruly meeting is by use of the conduct candle, another is by time-out. The conduct candle is lit at the beginning of the meeting, and as long as the boys are paying attention and behaving it stays lit, if not, then the boy that is being unruly is asked to blow it out and it is not relit until the

next meeting. When the candle has been used up the boys receive a special prize such as an ice cream party. A boy who continues to act up should be given time-out and told to sit by himself until he does behave. If time-out does not work, then let the leader know that there is nothing wrong with telling the boy's parent that he wont behave, that he is on probation and that the next time he is unruly he will be asked to leave. All meetings should have rules set up and signed by the leader and boys as to rules of conduct, and should be followed to the letter. let the leader know that if his program is prepared, interesting and fun and the boys and parents don't show up it is not his or her fault and he or she should not take it personally. A lot of parents and boys have more than they can handle, and a lot of times they can't make everything. The best leaders can do is being prepared and hope for the best.

### Uncaring Peers

Let the leaders know that all his work is being appreciated and his or her work is needed. Tell leaders that his or her contribution is worthwhile



and is making a difference in the program. Have the unit committee make up special awards for them and let him or her know that the unit appreciates all his or her hard work. Most of all give him or her pride in his or her position.

### Boredom

Boredom is probably the easiest Burnout to remedy, just ask leaders if he or she would like to change positions regularly.

## Case Studies of Leaders with Burnout

### Case 1

This leader was a Den Leader. She put all her ability into the position, was trained and had an assistant. She said that she would work all day getting ready for her meeting, and that the boys would not behave. She would have meetings at a bowling alley, and the boys would show up without money, even though she told the parents that they needed money for bowling and food. She would then pay for these things herself. She finally had enough and quit the program.

The leader was asked why she could not have the boys behave, her reply was that she did not want to make the parents or the boys mad at her. She was asked about den meeting rules, there were none in place. No conduct candle was used even though she knew about them. When asked why the parents sent the boys without money, her response was that the parents knew she would pay for them. Her assistant did not help her at all, just showed up for the meetings. This leader needed to be told that it was not her responsibility to provide funds out of her own pocket for activities.

Either she did not receive enough training, or she did not understand the training she received. She burned out before the Cubmaster could help her.

#### Case 2

Leader 2 started out as a Tiger Cub Coach and went all the way to Scoutmaster filling every position in-between. While serving as Scoutmaster his health went down to where he could no longer hike and camp. He started feeling like he was letting the boys down and that he was not doing everything the position required. He was on the verge of dropping out.

When he talked to the Unit Commissioner about dropping out, the Unit Commissioner asked him if he thought he could handle being a Cubmaster. He agreed to try, and is doing very well in that position. A good job of retaining a good leader.

#### Case 3

Leader 3 was a Den Leader, Unit Commissioner, and a Committee Chairman. She did a great job but was never recognized for her achievements. She finally had enough, saying that the only people that get

recognition are the ones who were popular and that she saw a lot of people get recognized who did not do nearly as much as she did.

This volunteer could have been retained through some simple recognition, she was committed to the program but felt like no one cared about what she did. If only someone had pointed out what she did for Scouting, she would still have been a leader.

#### Case 4

Leader 4 started as a Webelos Leader then became an Assistant Scoutmaster, and finally a Scoutmaster. He started burning out when he could not get any help with the Troop. He started feeling like he was just a baby-sitter, all the parents wanted was to bring the boys to the meeting and drop them off. He always had to set up transportation, Camping Permits and most everything else the boys could not do by themselves. This led to his almost quitting.

Through advice from other leaders and district personnel, he called a special meeting of the boys and parents, and told them that he needed help

and lots of it, or they would have to find a new Scoutmaster. The parents then volunteered and helped take a big load off him, turning a headache into an enjoyable experience.

#### Case 5

Leader 5 did everything he was asked, he never said no. He was a Scoutmaster, Unit Commissioner, District Committee Member in charge of advancement, worked on all District Camporees, and anything else he was asked. He started dreading going to Roundtables and District Meetings because he was afraid he would be asked to do more. He started avoiding people he thought were going to ask him for more of his time.

This leader finally talked to his District Commissioner, and was told that if he was too overwhelmed to let others take some of his jobs on, so he trimmed his responsibilities and started enjoying Scouting again.

#### Case 6

Leader 6 was recruited on a Scout School Night Program. When he volunteered the Cubmaster promised to be available to guide him through

the first few meetings. After the Scout School Night Program the leader never heard from the Cubmaster. He tried to run the meeting by himself but he was overwhelmed.

He called the Council Office and was told to talk to the District Executive and was given his office number. The leader talked to the District Executive and was told about training. He went through training and asked all kinds of questions and was taught how to run meetings, and about all the books and help programs he could get from the Boy Scouts of America. He found himself an Assistant Den Leader and started having meetings, and was confident with them. He finally became the Cubmaster and is still doing well.

#### Case 7

Leader 7 was one of those individuals who loves doing for others rather than himself. He always said that he was doing Scouting for the kids. He was always at Roundtables and took all the training available. He made

every award dinner even though he never received any recognition. After a while people started realizing that he wasn't putting as much effort into the Troop as he once had. The boys had started realizing that he didn't seem to care as much as he once had.

The boys got together with the Troop committee, and talked the situation over, and they realized that the Scoutmaster had never been put in for any awards. So at the next Court of Honor they gave him a Spark Plug Award. At the next Awards Banquet for the District Leaders he was put in for the Scoutmaster Of the Year Award which he won. After that he became his old self, saying that he had begun to think that no one thought much of his efforts, and that he now realized that they really appreciated him.

#### Case 8

Leader 8 was the District Commissioner for over 10 years. He never complained about anything. Everyone assumed that he was happy with his position until one day he just up and told the District Committee that they needed to find someone else, because he was tired of doing the same old thing all the time.

The District Committee thanked him for his service and asked him if there was some other position he wanted to serve in, and he replied he had always wanted to plan and chair Camporees. He is doing great in this position and the District Committee always asks now if any leaders want to change jobs at the start of every Scouting Year.

#### Case 9

Leader 9 had his son go up from Webelos to a Scout Troop. He volunteered to serve as an Assistant Scoutmaster. The Pack Leadership was well trained and did everything the way they were trained. When he went into the Troop the other leaders and the Scoutmaster were not trained. They did things their way and did not follow the program. The boys did not advance very much and most of the time all they did was play and act up, while the leaders sat around talking. Leader 9 asked why they did not train the boys to run the troop the proper way, and was told that this is the way things always were done. Leader 9 finally had enough, and pulled his son out of the troop and went to another Troop that did things the Scout way. This Troop finally dropped.



This leader was saved by being trained, and knowing that their were Troops that did things by Boy Scouts of America policy. If the other leaders had gone through training the other Troop might have been saved.

#### Case 10

Leader 10 Became the Cubmaster when the Pack was formed; all he was told was that everything he needed to know was provided by taking training. The next session training was several months away. He waited to start Pack Meetings until he was trained. When the training was available he could not attend and the Pack folded before it started.

This is an example of a leader that gets burned out because no one put any extra effort into assuring that the new Cubmaster had all the support he needed, a little effort by the Unit Commissioner or the District Training Staff might have prevented this burnout.

## **Conclusion**

As I worked on this thesis I learned a lot about burnout that I never knew. I hope everyone else who reads this thesis gets as much out of it as I have. I interviewed a lot of people in different volunteer roles and organizations and they helped me greatly with this dissertation. Some of the volunteers I talked with were irreplaceable but I hope that at least a few will think over what we talked about and return to Scouting. A lot of the volunteers I talked with are still in Scouting and gave me great insight into burnout. I strongly feel that if this paper saves one person from quitting Scouting, it will be worth the work I put into it.

## **Acknowledgments**

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