

GUIDED DISCOVERY

The Guided Discovery Process is a fancy term for what? Guided Discovery is an approach where Scouts are asked a question which leads them to examine a situation, and then discover the best way to proceed. Put another way, Guided Discovery enables Scouts to think for themselves in order to solve problems and find solutions. This approach is Scout-based. By Scout-based I mean the focus is on the learning and the Scout, not on the teaching and the teacher.

Asking a question is a big part of this process. Asking the right questions takes as much skill as giving the right answers. The idea is, the right kind of question is going to get the Scouts thinking. It's their thinking that leads them through a path of discovery where they can figure out for themselves what they need to do.

When Scouts are faced with a challenge or have a problem, it's natural they'll frequently have their own questions. But with Guided Discovery, we don't just spoon feed them the answer. Instead, in order to guide them through this path of discovery, we present them with a counter question—a question which requires them to find their best answer by applying what they know, using their resources, and coming to their own valuable conclusion. And why is their conclusion so valuable? It's, because whatever a Scout learns through a process of discovery is his. It's something he's arrived at through his own efforts. So, he owns it.

Guided discovery as a process. There's a lot that junior leaders have to go through before they can take the reins and run the troop. All through their ranks and as they mature, Scouts are gaining knowledge. Not just facts, but skills and techniques too. Let's talk about a brand new troop where we want to enable the newly elected SPL to run things. With the Guided Discovery Process, the first thing he needs is a vision. He can be given a picture of a troop that's involved with an exciting program that reflects what they want, they're learning, they're advancing and they're having a lot of fun. And also, everything's planned and carried out by them. In this vision, the only time the Scoutmaster's in front of them is for a minute at the end of the meeting. The rest of the time, it's all up to them.

Now once the Scout is given a vision like this, the second thing he needs is the strong desire to make it happen. We'll assume he already has desire, that he's motivated to be an effective Senior Patrol Leader.

The third necessary thing any junior leader needs are the prerequisite tools to carry out their job. And here, it's the Scoutmaster's responsibility to make sure they learn or at least have access to all these necessary tools. For example, the new SPL needs to know that putting up the Scout sign is a means to getting the troop's attention. This is a basic tool. Now, discovering how to use this tool most effectively, that's something else. See, this is a technique. And techniques can be gained... through Guided Discovery.

Back to the Scout sign. Like maybe the SPL had a terrible time at a meeting to get his troop quiet when he held up the sign. After the meeting, the Scoutmaster might ask, "So, how do you think things went tonight? Were you able to control the troop the way

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you'd like?" And the SPL might answer, "The troop doesn't ever really get quiet when the sign goes up." The Scoutmaster might then ask a guiding question like, "Well, when you hold up the sign, what do you think the Scouts see?" Now, after mulling this over, if the SPL just scratches his head, the Scoutmaster might ask, "What do you want them to see?" That question should serve to further guide him and get his wheels turning.

Through this process, he can start zooming in and find his own answer. If he pictures the troop as he's holding up the sign, he might remember how even some of his own leaders were still carrying on. Ah-ha! There's a key! He's gotta make it clear to his leaders that as soon as he puts up his sign, they need to quickly get quiet and put up theirs. This way, the rest of the troop is going to have a good example to follow. What's important here is that he comes to the conclusion on his own. He was guided to find a solution for himself. but it's actually his discovery. See how this is different than just telling him the Patrol Leaders Council leads by example!?

So through guided discovery, a junior leader can find the solution to his problem and gain needed techniques. Learning these techniques by discovering them is a way he can make these techniques his own. You know what I mean? When he finds a solution to his own problem, through his own efforts, he owns that solution!

So, now as he gains techniques, he can use them to do a good job. And this is good. Because doing a good job gives him confidence. And with confidence, a motivated junior leader can start using his own initiative to make everything better. Junior leaders using initiative is amazing. All I can say is, when this happens, it's awesome! (So the process? A vision, a desire, the tools, the techniques to use them, gaining confidence, and finally using initiative.)

How does a Scoutmaster shift the attention off himself as the leader to the Senior Patrol Leader? When a Scoutmaster is approached by the SPL with a question or problem, with guided discovery, he won't just dole out hard and fast answers. Instead, again, he asks a counter question. "This is your troop. What do you think needs to be done?" If it's not a matter of health and safety, then reflecting the situation back onto the SPL with a question, is shifting the attention off of himself. As for the rest of the troop, have you ever seen T-shirts for the adults with the back saying, "Ask the Senior Patrol Leader?" I even came across a little, round, patrol medallion sized patch for a Scouter's right sleeve saying, "ask the SPL."

How does the Scoutmaster instill his knowledge to the Senior Patrol Leader? Well, first, by inspiring him with a shared vision, and of course encouraging him whenever appropriate, then by providing him with all the necessary resources so he can do things independently. Along the way, the Scoutmaster serves as a mentor, but a Scoutmaster really needs to lead by following one step behind. Can you picture that? That means, he knows where the SPL and the troop are heading and what they need, but from there, he enables them to discover things on their own.

Some other examples of the Guided Discovery Process. The December, 2015 Scoutcast addressed the advantages of always having a Plan B. Plan-B-Prepared. A

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perfect example of a Guided Discovery question that will get a Scout thinking is: “What if?” Asking Scouts questions beginning with what if is a good way to get them thinking about alternatives and also getting them to develop their troop’s resources.

Here’s a couple more guided discovery scenarios: Recently, I videoed a troop and saw two Scouts carry a third through a 4-foot wide track as part of an activity. Are you familiar with Handicap Obstacle Course? Anyway, these two Scouts really struggled to carry the third. They hadn’t learned the “two handed carry?” or the “four-handed seat?” Now, after their struggle, it could just be explained to them how to do these carries. But, it would be better to ask them, “How would you like to find out how to carry an injured person a whole lot easier, even if he was heavier?” and then guide them: “Where can you see how to do this in your own handbooks?” They’re most likely gonna want to check this out, because after what they just went through, they’re definitely ready to learn something better than what they did, but the emphasis is on them to discover it themselves, and that’s what carries a whole lot more weight. See, when we pour ourselves into finding our own solutions, we become invested in the process. When someone makes an investment, they’re much more likely to feel involved. Like, think about this: Won’t you be much more likely to read a book if you buy it, as opposed to someone just giving it to you?

Another scenario, and I like this one, is about using woods tools to prepare tinder and kindling and then build and light a fire. As Scout leaders, before a Scout tries anything where safety enters the picture, we must make sure they have the necessary tools. In this case, the prerequisite tools are knowing how to safely use woods-tools, and knowing how to be careful with fire. So, here’s a Scout who we observe knows how to properly use a knife and axe, and he’s prepared all the tinder and kindling he needs to start and feed a cooking fire. He’s got everything he needs, a safe area, a proper surface, a fire bucket nearby, but, before he tries to light a fire, he mixes together all his tinder and kindling into the fire pit, and then, try as he will, each time he puts a match to this mess, it goes out. He finds he can’t light a fire. He wants to, right? But he’s come face to face with a stumbling block, and he recognizes this. He’s definitely ready to learn what needs to be done next. But, using guided discovery means we don’t show him how to do it, and we don’t hover over him providing guidance every step of the way either. He needs to get actively involved with learning how to do this, himself. Remember, with this approach, it’s all about the learning, not the teaching. Guided Discovery happens when we ask questions. Here, we might ask something like, “Why do you think this fire won’t stay lit?” Let him think about this. A follow up question might be, “Looking at all your tinder and kindling here, what will burn the easiest when you touch a match to it?” The Scout will naturally answer the light weight stuff—the tinder. Now, after getting him thinking about what needs to be done, he should be given the opportunity to explain what he’s going to do, and if his explanation is good, then let him do it.

How does a Scoutmaster know what his role is? In Scoutmaster Position Specific Training, after being introduced to Scouting’s Aims and Methods, right before looking at the Patrol Method, there’s a 20 minute session where the qualities of a Scoutmaster are discussed as well as basically what a Scoutmaster’s role is— what he must be, what he

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must know, and what he should and shouldn't do. Also, in the Troop Leader Guidebook Volume 1, Chapter 15, it's called "Adult Leader Roles and Responsibilities." It's very well spelled out.

Are there any resources available to assist Scoutmasters and Advisors on how to facilitate leadership? Beyond Scoutmaster Position Specific Training, Woodbadge goes more deeply into communication and leadership. But additionally, when it comes to assuring junior leaders are successful, I really feel Introduction to Leadership Skills for Troops serves as an invaluable resource. There are also some books out there that are all about Youth Leadership Training and Working the Patrol Method, and they're filled with really good stuff. And, here's one more good resource—Scout leaders who themselves have well run, successful troops. Most any Scoutmaster or Assistant Scoutmaster, who's passionate about what he does, loves to talk about his troop, especially when it comes to talking about what his Scouts do to run things well.

Additional Information Let's refer to the three basic roles of the Scoutmaster (1) of course, is to make sure the rules of the BSA and chartered partner are followed, (2) is the Scoutmaster should be a good mentor and positive role model, and the big (3) and this is where we're placing the emphasis, is to train and guide Scout leaders. The Guided Discovery Process does this, by asking the right kinds of questions, and then getting out of the way.

- 1) "Guided discovery provides the framework within which, Scouts can lead themselves to realize a vision they have."
 - 2) "Provide the Scouts the objective, equip them with the tools and the skills or the resources to learn how to use them, and turn them loose."
 - 3) "Scouts will learn to lead by practicing **leading** and experiencing the results of their hands-on leadership efforts."
 - 4) "Why" and "How" questions enhance the Scouts' ability to make decisions, which is one of the central goals of empowerment."
- Don't you love the word empowerment? When Scouts run their own troop, they've been empowered to do this. A troop run by motivated Scouts who have with the right skills, and techniques, is bound to have good membership and the highest retention rate.