

LA440 - Working with Youth, Near Youth, and Adults

National OA Adviser Training

Session Length: 25 Minutes

Detailed Outline of the Session:

This session will provide Lodge Advisers in the Order of the Arrow with strategies for recruiting, engaging, leading, and mentoring lodge members to become active leaders within the Lodge organizational structure. Lodge members are often grouped in three convenient age classes: youth, near-youth, and adults. Each of these demographics has different needs, including the level of training and instruction needed to perform well at their position, their preferred method of communication, and their expected level of commitment. By becoming aware of each groups' distinct and common needs, a Lodge Adviser can more effectively recruit and engage the best individuals for the positions he needs filled.

Introduction: Working with Lodge Members

Working with Lodge members to achieve the goals of the Lodge is a challenging, but rewarding opportunity for a Lodge Adviser. Mentoring youth into developed leaders, near-youth into contributing adults, and encouraging adults to continue in their training and improve their mentoring capabilities is a continual process that is both non-linear and individualized. By understanding the needs of each demographic group, you will become a more effective manager and Lodge Adviser, and the Lodge will more readily achieve its goals of inductions, recognition, council support, fellowship, and leadership development.

Slide 2 – Session Overview

As a Lodge Adviser, you will need to work with all members of the Lodge, including youth, near youth, and adults. Each of these groups has unique dynamics that you should be aware of and incorporate into your leadership approach.

Recruiting the right person for a job, and retaining that person, is critical to your success as Lodge adviser and your Lodge in general. Understanding the needs and strengths of your Lodge demographics can help you make the right choices. Working with Lodge members of all ages will require different recruitment and communication strategies, as well as different conflict resolution approaches.

Slide 3 – Learning Objectives

The objectives for this session are aimed at helping you become a better Lodge Adviser, and manager of the youth and adult leadership in your Lodge. To this end, the session should help you:

- Learn the definitions of youth, near-youth, and adult members of the Lodge, and the unique characteristics of each of these groups.
- Understand that communication with individuals is the key to success, and that each of these groups has different methods of preferred communication and habits.
- Learn strategies for effective recruitment, communication, and how to manage conflicts and differences of opinion within and between each age group.

Slide 4 – Who are your Members?

This slide provides definitions of each of the key demographics of your Lodge membership. Each group has their own strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. These qualities are vital for a Lodge Adviser to be aware of, and will lead to more effective Lodge leadership, management, and success. The three key demographics of your Lodge are:

- **Youth Members:** Commonly 12-20, all at least First Class Scouts elected by their peers. Varying levels of experience in the OA, and from different Scouting backgrounds due to variations in their home Troops.
- **Near-Youth Members:** Ages 21-27, and often college/technical school students or working full-time. These members sometimes have substantial experience planning and executing OA events, but through the lens of a youth.
- **Adults:** While technically anyone 21 or over, adults are typically individuals who are of the age to have children in Scouting and are above (35+). Membership arcs in the OA typically include youth who stay active as near-youth, then fade away due to moving or new work/family obligations, and members who are re-engaging because they have youth in the program. The latter may have been involved as youth members some time ago, or may be new to Scouting.

As you can see, the line between youth and near-youth is quite clear, while the distinction between a near-youth and adult may not always be sharply resolved. It is important for you, as Lodge Adviser, to get to know all members of your Lodge that you recruit into leadership positions, and determine how to best address their needs.

Slide 5 – Youth Members

Youth members are age 11-20, and are the focus of leadership development and program within the Lodge. As Lodge Adviser, you will most likely work with slightly older Scouts, from age 13-20. These are your most important members to engage and mentor into leadership positions, as they are the ones who will plan, execute, and ultimately judge the program.

Strengths: Ambition, and often full of new ideas and creativity for program ideas.

Weaknesses: Transportation and communication may be out of their control, depending on their age and family situation. As they may be new to the program, they will need considerable training and mentoring to understand the details of planning events. They can be easily influenced by near-youth and adults. They may be typically unorganized, with short-term memory lapses for their items of responsibility; therefore, frequent communication is key.

Special Considerations: Youth members have several special considerations that you must account for when working with them:

- BSA Safe Scouting and Youth Protection rules all apply when working with youth under 18 in the OA in the same way that they do with youth in a traditional BSA Troop setting. You may not be one-on-one with a youth member under 18 at any time, including traveling to events such as Section Council of Chiefs, or other training that may have only a few members of your Lodge attending. It is also advisable that all email or electronic communication not be one-on-one. Make a habit of cc'ing Vice-Chiefs, or another adult on all communication with youth under 18.
- Youth members under 18 who are still living at home will have varied family situations. You will likely need to get parental buy-in from the Scout's parents to participate at the level required to hold a Lodge leadership position. This may be as simple as them being willing to buy a Scout a full uniform, and as complicated as the Scout being able to attend important events when there is a shared custody of the Scout when his parents/guardians do not live together. Please approach these situations with tact and humility. It is suggested that you try to meet with the parents of a new youth leader to explain the commitment the Scout is signing-up to, and to achieve this buy-in from the parents at the beginning of the youth's term.
- Youth members 18-20 are often attending college, and may have moved out of their home area to do so. This should not automatically preclude them from continuing leadership positions in the Lodge, but will need to counsel them about the level of commitment needed. Helping a Scout learn time management

techniques is an invaluable skill for you to instill in them, as is helping them recognize when to prioritize education with other activities.

Slide 6 – Near-Youth Members

Defining a precise age and experience group for near-youth members is not an exact science. In general, near-youth are Scouts that were active in your Lodge as youth members, but have stayed engaged after turning 21. They can be considered near-youth until enough time has passed that they are not connected with the current youth members. This will vary based on each Lodge and individual, but is often until the near-youth is between 25-30 years old.

Strengths: Near-youth are typically very active, and have a great understanding of how Lodge events are best run. They have been trained, and are very capable in many roles.

Weaknesses: Near-youth may have trouble stepping back to let the next generation of youth leaders take over running events. It is difficult for them to watch mistakes be made, when they know how to fix the problem themselves. These individuals may also have strong opinions about various topics, and may not have let go of the individual ambition in exchange for a mentality of mentorship.

Slide 7 – Adult Members

While any member 21 or over is technically an adult member of the Lodge, the term “Adult Member” is reserved in this training for individuals who are not connected to any youth in the Lodge from when they themselves were youth members. These are members typically 30+ who are old enough to have children of their own in the Lodge, and whom youth members would only have ever known as adults.

There are two typical backgrounds for these individuals: those who were involved in the program as a youth, and those who are new to Scouting and/or the OA. Both likely have similar needs in terms of training, due to program evolution since youth membership.

Strengths: The adults in your Lodge can offer much needed logistical support and continuity. Youth leadership positions tend to change annually, while adults tend to remain in positions for longer periods of time.

Weaknesses: Depending on an adult’s previous experience in the OA and Scouting, they may need more or less training to get up to speed with their position. Some adults with prior OA experience may have a tendency to want to follow previous practices, as opposed to the current program. Your job as Lodge Adviser is to train them on the current program and make sure they are working within it.

Slide 8 – Bonus Group: The Lifers

The Lifers: Lodge members, who joined as a youth, participated in Lodge leadership or were very active in service, and stayed active consistently throughout their lives. This is a relatively small group in the OA, and Scouting in general. These members can be key assets to your program and leadership team, but be careful not to let them overshadow the next generation of leadership.

Slide 9 – Communication

The single greatest key to effective interaction with your Lodge Members is how you communicate, and what you communicate.

How: Phones, email, social media

What: Directives, questions, background reasoning

As Lodge Adviser, you must establish communication logistics with recruited members immediately.

Each demographic in your Lodge is likely to have different preferred method of communication. This is often a generational phenomenon:

- Adults are often more likely to prefer communicating via phone calls, email, and text. Their expectation will be that emails are read carefully, digested, and responded to in a timely manner.
- Youth members are likely to communicate almost exclusively through social media and texting. Many members in this age range will only check their email occasionally, and are unlikely to read it very carefully.

Can you already spot the potential problem? If an adult adviser is trying to contact his youth chairmen by calling and writing emails, he may become frustrated by the lack of responsiveness. It is important for you, as Lodge Adviser, to make sure that each half of that chairman/adviser relationship understands how to best contact the other, so that communication breakdowns can be avoided.

For completeness, near-youth are likely to be open to many mediums of communication, naturally falling in between the adult and youth generations. At the time of writing this session, near-youth are likely to be fully immersed in email and texting communication.

Slide 10 – Can You Hear Me Now?

The usage of phones varies greatly between Lodge demographics. Older members will prefer to call, and perhaps text. Near-youth will be just a few years out of vogue, and likely text heavy with email on smartphones.

Youth members may not have their own phone, and if they do, may use it almost exclusively for texting and web based interaction. Check with your youth to make sure they understand the importance of answering calls and voicemail, and be sure to set clear expectations of how to communicate and the frequency of that communication.

Adult members may not have the latest smartphones, or use all of their features. Be cognizant of this fact, and work out a communication plan when recruited. Adults that “technology resistant” may need to have clear expectations set as well for how and when to communicate.

Lodge Adviser Action: It is critical that you understand how each member communicates when you recruit him or her, but also critical that you help them get on-board with how the Lodge Leadership is currently communicating.

Slide 11 – Digital Age

Your youth members will almost certainly communicate via several digital social media services, such as Facebook and Twitter. As Lodge Adviser, you will need to not only understand how your youth are communicating, but join their social media presence. It may not be possible to convince other adults to follow suit, so you will need to devise a plan to make sure this information is relayed to all Lodge leaders in a timely manner.

Special Considerations:

Email: When not calling, many adults and near-youth will use email. It is much more adopted with age, and your youth members under 18 may not be reliably checking email, or even have their own email account.

Social Media: Adult members may not have any electronic footprint other than an email address. If your youth rely on social media, such as Facebook or Twitter feeds to communicate information, you must find a way to also get the information to the adults in your leadership corps.

Slide 12 – Strategies for Effective Communication: Logistics

With the previous communication trends in mind for each age group, it is now clear that developing a strategy for effective communication is critical to working with each of these groups. The following points should serve as a starting point for you:

- For every member recruited to Lodge Leadership, discuss their preferred method of communication. Be sure to share this with their youth/adult counterpart.
- Set the tone: you and the Lodge Chief should decide how to communicate together, and implement a plan for the Lodge leadership to follow. Perhaps it requires that everyone have email address they agree to check frequently, and

that everyone know where to check the Facebook page. Agreement must be made that all information will be posted/sent to both.

- Accommodate individuals with particular needs, and get them setup with the chosen methods of communication.

Slide 13 – Strategies for Effective Communication: Methods

Aside from the logistical challenges of communicating, there must be a strategy for effective communication methods as well. This is particularly important for the youth of your Lodge – they must be kept in the loop on conversations and decisions important to the Lodge in order to maintain mutual respect and their buy-in to the program. The following points can help you get started:

- Keep everyone in the loop; private conversations when not needed create misinformation and a feeling of exclusion. This is especially important to remember for youth members, who are well aware that the program is youth-led and executed.
- Always keep your Lodge Chief in the loop.
- Implement and reinforce the “chain of command”. Adults with problems should come to you, and you to the Lodge Chief. As Lodge Adviser, you will need to work with all adults to come to you with concerns, rather than having a web of communication between them and youth members. This will help prevent misunderstandings.

Slide 14 - Recruiting and Engaging

Recruiting Lodge leadership can be challenging, and unique for each demographic in your Lodge. Members are hesitant to get involved for many reasons, some of which are:

- Youth members may feel unprepared, and be hesitant to get involved. It may seem like a huge leap to them. A good strategy is meet with them and another youth leader to have a conversation about how that leader got started.
- Adults may be hesitant to get involved because of other existing commitments in their life. You will need to work one on one with them to identify the commitment level needed for their position, and determine if they can work it. Adults with Scouts in the program are more likely to be able to attend events.

- Near-youth are often quite busy, and are often well suited for behind the scenes work that doesn't require a physical presence. New careers, education, and family responsibilities can be very demanding of young men in this age group.

Once you have recruited members into Lodge Leadership positions, it is important to keep them engaged. Periodically checking in with your Adult Advisers and Youth Chairmen reinforces that their work is appreciated, keeps them on track, and opens up a conversation to head off potential disruptions before they begin.

Slide 15 – Conflict resolution

Conflicts will arise when working with Lodge members – strategies for being able to work through them is critical to your success. The concepts of conflict resolution are much deeper than covered in this session, but some basic thoughts to get you started are provided. In general, you should aim to mediate any conflict by:

- **Identifying** the root disagreement to overcome.
- **Reviewing** BSA and OA policy and guidelines for this issue.
- **Making a recommendation** for a way forward based on those neutral guidelines, while being sensitive to each party's stance. This is essentially training for the individuals on this part of the program, which provides a neutral reference to settle the dispute.
- **Understanding** what communication (or lack of) has occurred to this point, and agree on a new communication pattern moving forward.
- **Creating** a list of action items to move forward and implement.

Some specific instances you are likely to encounter are:

- **Youth vs. Adult:** A common issue for Lodge Advisers is mediating a difference of opinion between a committee chairman and adviser. Many times it boils down to communication – not only how much is happening, but what is being said. Train the adult on how to provide background for decisions and limitations, and train the youth on BSA guidelines and the realities of your Lodge.
- **Youth vs. Youth:** Together with your Lodge Chief, sit down with both individuals to hash out the problem, and find a solution. Let your Lodge Chief lead and jump in only as needed.
- **Adult vs. Adult:** The key here is to counsel both adults about the purpose of the Order and their role. When perspective about what is best for the youth is brought into the equation, it can have a significant impact on resolving a disagreement.

Slide 16 – Case Study: My Youth Disappeared

Scenario: You receive an email from your Brotherhood conversion adviser stating that he has not heard from his chairman in over two months. The Scout has not been at Lodge meetings, and has not answered emails. His voicemail is not setup, and he does not answer calls. The adviser is concerned because the Ordeal is next month, and he wants to recruit another youth right away. What do you do?

Lodge Adviser Action:

- Ask how they are communicating. See if this is the way you know the youth typically communicates. If not, reach out to both and broker a new communication strategy.
- Reach out to your Lodge chief to contact the youth chairman and get his side of the story.
- Make a personal response to the individuals to enable better communication, and determine their plans going forward.

Slide 17 – Case Study: Past Chief

Scenario: Your past Lodge Chief is a great leader, and is well regarded within the Lodge. He has recently turned 21, and is still very active at Lodge events. You have recently noticed that he is starting to do more of the work, and that the current Lodge Chief is somewhat marginalized. You see adults and youth members going to the past Chief with questions during events. What do you do?

Lodge Adviser Action: In this scenario, you have to address the needs of each of your demographic groups within the Lodge. The actions below will help you consider how to address this situation and similar ones in the future.

- **Adult Members:** You must counsel the adult members of your Lodge, and in particular your committee Advisers and other Lodge leadership to come to you or the Lodge Chief with operational questions during an event.
- **Near-Youth Member:** As Lodge Adviser, you will need to counsel your near-youth past chief in this instance. Explain to him the role of an adviser, and ask him to back away from the action. Mentor him on how to direct questions, coming from youth and adult members, to the current leadership. Make sure to remind him of the importance of giving each generation their own opportunity to grow and develop leadership skills. Finally, try to find another job for this near-youth at events to keep him focused on his own tasks.

- **Youth Members:** You will need to work with your current Lodge Chief to integrate with his youth chairmen. They need to feel comfortable coming to him as their leader.

Slide 18 – Who is My Adviser?

Your Lodge Chief approaches you with news that one of his Chairmen doesn't know who his Adviser is and has never met him. He has tried emailing him but doesn't get a response, and is starting to think that his job in the Lodge is not important. How do you work with the youth and adult to get things back on track?

- Similar to the first scenario, as Lodge Adviser, you should work with both the youth and adult to determine communication preferences. Perhaps there is a mismatch. If the youth is trying to contact the adult via a method of communication the adult doesn't use, then his messages are likely going unheard.
- Reach out to this adult via a phone call and ask if they still have time for this commitment. If not, you may need to replace this person. This is a last resort option – it is usually better to keep someone interested engaged then involuntarily stepping them out of a role.
- In the interim, work directly with the affected chairman to keep him engaged – don't let him lose momentum for his task. As Lodge Adviser, you may need to pick up the role of the Adult Adviser for that committee on a temporary basis.

Slide 19 – Summary and Resources

This slide contains a summary of the key take-away points for this session, and additional resources for you to continue learning about how to improve your interactions and leadership of Lodge members.

The key points to take away from this session are:

- Your Lodge is composed of youth, near-youth, and adult members. Each group has their own unique set of strengths and weakness, and you should be aware of these as you recruit from all groups into Lodge leadership positions.
- Effective communication is the key to success in your Lodge. It is your job as Lodge Adviser to make sure that youth and adults are communicating over the same medium at the right frequency.
- Conflicts will happen, and when they do, be sure to identify the issue, review the BSA regulations, then make a plan for resolution. Make an action item list to prevent the issue for arising again.

The job of Lodge Adviser, which requires you to manage all Lodge Leadership positions, is dynamic and cyclical. Youth leadership will enter with little experience, develop, and then leave – starting the cycle again. By following the techniques in this session, it is

hoped that you will be able to see the reward in mentoring your youth leaders into quality near-youth, and eventually adult leaders, in all aspects of their life. This is big challenge, and you are not expected to do it without help. Additional resources for working with the members of your Lodge include:

- [The Lodge Advisers Handbook](#)
- [The Chapter Operations Guide](#)
- Previous NOAC Training Materials contained in the OA training web site:
<http://training.oa-bsa.org/>