

“Listening is love,” Michael Rohd (2024).

I am an Eagle Scout. I spent most of my adolescent years in Scouts. I went to NYLT, the National Youth Leadership Training created by the BSA. I was a Patrol Leader for over two years, a Troop Guide for a few, and an Assistant Senior Patrol Leader (ASPL) — the second highest position in Scouting — for three. I wore a lot of hats that required strong leadership skills, and up until my last few years in the troop, I had them and knew how to use them.

My last year in the troop was a big year in my life. In Scouts, I was working towards earning Eagle and was once again an ASPL. In life, I was turning 18 in a year and had to get serious about planning out the next phase of my life. I was also a high school junior dealing with multiple AP and dual credit classes and looming college and scholarship applications, all while I put more time into theatre. I was pushing my limit, but I was still hanging on — for now.

My last Scout summer camp was at the beautiful Melita Island on Flathead Lake. I wasn't planning on going that year, but I made a promise to one of my friends that, when they went to summer camp, I would go, too. This was his last year to do it, so he paid for it himself, and I upheld my promise. It was a fun week, but I was starting to crack. Many of the younger Scouts did not care for me, nor did the new adult leadership. In addition, the interim Scoutmaster was extra watchful of me after he found out that I am, in fact, not straight, so any mistake I made could be ballooned out of proportion. No one could ignore or harm me though, as I was the oldest youth in the troop and one of two ASPLs.

It was Saturday, pack-up day, when all that pressure came to a head. One of the adults, who I did and still do have the utmost respect for, challenged the leadership of our SPL who I was filling in for as

**And then, it was over.**

he packed up his stuff, and I called him out on it. To the scouts and adults who hadn't known me for long, they thought I would become violent. Before the first scheduled meeting since camp even happened, I was asked to not return the troop by half of its member families.

This is not an event I enjoy talking about. I feel anger, resentment, disappointment, and guilt towards it and the people involved. I am still processing it, trying to understand how it reached such a critical point, and then it struck me: no one was listening. I was not listening to the younger Scouts or the newer adults in their needs or desires. I was not listening to their strengths and weaknesses. They were not listening to my concerns or reports of verbal harassment. They were not listening to the leadership of many of the youth leaders; and, without youth leadership, to be a Scout means nothing. They were not listening to the nearly-decade-long precedent of growth, acceptance, and uniqueness that defined our troop. They were not listening to the changing ways youth socialize, preventing them from understanding it.

By the end of my tenure in Troop 1, many of the existing and hard-fought bonds of Trust and Loyalty, the first two points of the Scout Law, these seemingly invincible bonds, had broken. There was no trust in each other, so any reason to listen had evaporated. The fortress the previous Scoutmaster had built, the largest troop in the state, suffered a devastating earthquake in his retirement. It almost fell to the ground. The troop almost folded. It would have been the second troop that year to do so.

As Michael Rohd asked us to explore the meaning of leadership through listening and collaboration, I found myself framing this individual and collective downfall through that lens. While I still believe it cannot explain its every component, I find it to be a compelling argument for part of it, especially when combined with the pressure of everything else going on. If we had just listened...

But we hadn't. No one was. And then, it was over.

**And then, it was over.**

### **References**

Rohd, M. (2024, February 27). *Listening and collaboration, session 1* [In-person]. GBLD 220: Models of Leadership.