



LLD:Endeavor | Building & Maintaining Relationships

Session Length: 25 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the significance of healthy unit relationships
- Identify what defines a positive first impression
- Formulate strategies to maintain healthy communication with units

Required Materials: None

Outline of the Session:

Without overtly referencing the Message-Sender-Receiver model of communication, this session does look specifically at these three aspects. Beginning with the message, participants will learn about the interpersonal basis of the OA experience and the importance of healthy relationships with unit leaders. Next, participants will identify three key stakeholders and the different strategies lodge leaders can employ in communicate directly with these groups. Finally, participants will collaborate in sharing different tips and tricks for outreach to the three key stakeholder groups.

Trainer Preparation:

The trainer should have a strong understanding of the HPL metrics and their relation to your lodge's operations. While a background in unit elections is valuable, it is important to remember that the lodge's relationship with local units extends far beyond just elections. To prepare for this session, familiarize yourself with how your lodge conducts unit visitations and maintains contact with its membership. Better yet, come prepared to share best practices from other lodges to encourage attendees to start thinking about what they can be doing to improve unit relations. This knowledge will be valuable in answering audience questions.

Session Narrative:

Introduction: 3 minutes

Before your first role in lodge leadership, before your first event, before your induction, and even before your election, you had an impression of the OA. You may not have even realized it, but the behavior demonstrated by Arrowmen in your unit, presentations from unit visitation teams, and the culture of your unit all shaped how you understood the Order of the Arrow. If we can make a strong first impression and encourage unit leaders to support the OA program throughout the year, we're laying the groundwork for long-term success in our journey towards high performance. Today, we'll discuss the importance of making a first impression and identify strategies to say in contact with units year-round.

[Trainer introduction, emphasize any experience in unit relations]

To start things off, I want everyone to describe their first impression of the OA using just one word. When you were elected into the OA, what did you think of the program?

Trainer Tip: If in-person, call on participants to share their word; if virtual, use the Zoom chat or equivalent tool. Direct the conversation towards the different perceptions that could exist about your lodge. Is there a council event which the OA regularly supports and many people recognize? The purpose of this exercise is to show how important a first impression is and to identify possible obstacles in your lodge's messaging.

Finding a Foundation: 3 minutes

More often than not, we become friends with people share our interests or personality. Fortunately for us, we have an existing basis for our relationship with units and unit leaders: a passion for the Scouting program and excitement to support it! Just as a Scoutmaster, Crew Advisor, or Ship Skipper willingly dedicates countless hours each week to their unit, the Lodge focuses its energy on supporting Council programs to ensure that units have access to quality camping experiences. Whether or not they're an Arrowman, the unit leaders we work with share our care for Scouting. What does this tell us? We can't just market the OA to unit leaders as a recognition for the honor campers in their unit. Instead, we have to communicate the bigger picture of the OA, emphasizing how Arrowmen support Council activities and are better equipped to lead in their unit. Let us never forget that an Arrowman's first responsibility is to their unit: this is the foundation of the lodge's relationship with the units in its council.



Making a First Impression: 10 minutes

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make it effective. But more important than what we say is how we say it and who we're saying it to.

Understand your Audiences

Let's begin by identifying the different key stakeholders we appeal to when building unit relations. The first group will be unit leaders. Whether planning a visitation or promoting an upcoming event, we communicate most directly and frequently with unit leaders. And while many unit leaders are already Arrowmen, it is important to remember that their key focus will be placed on ensuring the health of their unit. There are two communication priorities with unit leaders: demonstrate how the OA builds leadership; and reinforce the importance of recognizing honor campers. Units that are active in their lodge are sure to see more eager and experienced youth leaders. The second key group to court is the parents and adult volunteers in a unit. Parents typically think in a longer-term perspective than youth members. To parents, we need to emphasize the spirit of cheerful service that characterizes Arrowmen and discuss lifelong skills built through servant leadership. Finally, when communicating with youth, we need to focus on the many unique opportunities that set the OA apart from every other program, both within and beyond Scouting. Furthermore, connect on a personal level from one youth to another by sharing your story and discussing how the OA has shaped your Scouting journey. Now, let's take a moment to look at each of these three areas specifically.

Communicating with Unit Leadership

When communicating with unit leadership, it's important to keep in mind the unit calendar is constantly being filled-in. Campouts, courts of honor, and countless other events can easily crowd out election, induction, and activation opportunities. By communicating early, we can get essential information down on paper and influence the process of planning the unit's annual calendar. And this doesn't just apply to unit elections. Encourage units to keep weekends clear when an induction or key activation event has been scheduled by your lodge. It is important that Scouts have the opportunity to fully participate in both lodge and unit-level programs. Be sure to follow-up and communicate regularly to keep unit leaders up-to-date on the latest information from the lodge. As Seth Godin said, "The thing about information is that it is more valuable when people know it." Unit leaders who believe in the OA program will sell it to their unit membership, but this can't happen if they aren't in the loop!



Reaching out to Parents and Adult Volunteers

The importance of appealing to parents and adult volunteers cannot be overstated. Who drives candidates to their ordeal? Who helps pay for lodge dues and event fees? More importantly, who continues to encourage Scouts to participate, to take the next step on their membership journey, to take on new leadership responsibilities? Parents and adult volunteers. Parents think in the long-term, and want to see that the OA offers something different from every other part of the Scouting experience. They're also typically more willing to research an opportunity, so providing a concise and effective presentation during a unit visitation along with an explanation of where to find more information allows parents to look into specific facets of the program. To help bridge the communications gap with parents, many thriving lodges and chapters have begun hosting an OA Welcome Session, where parents and candidates are invited to a central location (or videoconference) to further discuss the OA and answer any questions they may have formulated since the unit visitation. The Welcome Session provides a chance to clear up any misconceptions surrounding the OA and to ensure that parents are fully able to coordinate transportation to the ordeal. Furthermore, parents want to see what the OA offers, so be sure to invite youth Arrowmen to share their experiences and detail the ways that the OA has shaped their Scouting experiences.

Sharing your Message with Youth Members

Perhaps most importantly, we need to focus on appealing to the youth members who define every part of the Scouting program. Always remember that every interaction with a Scout, whether or not they're an Arrowman, is a chance to grow their interest in the OA. Share stories of what makes the OA experience one-of-a-kind. From OA High Adventure to the National Leadership Seminar, there's something for everyone. In fact, we can begin sharing the OA experience in our very first interaction with potential members. At unit visitations, be sure to provide a meaningful experience that sticks with participants. As Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Make them feel what it means to be an Arrowman. Furthermore, I'd encourage you to not give up. Focus on building meaningful relationships and connecting on a personal level. Mentor younger Scouts and cultivate friendships. Model what it means to be an Arrowman and use this position to encourage new members to become active in the lodge.

Staying in Contact: 7 minutes

Now that we understand the message we're communicating and our audience, let's take a look at the ways we build relationships with units.

Commit to a Timetable

First, all communication needs to be planned. Random, sporadic, last-minute communication doesn't help anyone. It's ineffective and doesn't help unit leaders, and reflects poorly on lodge/chapter leadership. Well-planned, organized communication is absolutely essential. As a lodge or chapter, develop an understanding of when you conduct unit visitations and major lodge events, and plan around this timeline. In a general sense, earlier is better. Get essential information to unit leadership early, but also remember to promote events in the few weeks leading up.

Know your Channels

The single most important factor in cultivating unit relationships is understanding the different channels you have to communicate with unit leadership, parents, and Scouts. Use the OA Unit Representative position not only to communicate detailed information, but also to focus on appealing to youth members. Existing lodge and chapter communication structures can be valuable in reaching out to existing Arrowmen, especially adults, and activating them in a supportive role, helping to cultivate the OA program in their unit. Finally, take advantage of council and district communication structures. District roundtables and unit commissioners can directly appeal to unit leaders and adult volunteers and are often able to provide consistent, thorough messaging. By building a strong working relationship with district and council leadership, lodges and chapters are better able to support unit outreach.

Idea Sharing

Now, I'd like to hear from you. What channels have you used to communicate with each of the three key stakeholder groups?

Trainer Tip: This is a chance to hear from experienced lodge members who have firsthand experience building and maintaining relationships with units. Hear some responses and focus on the three steps in the communication process: who is your intended audience, what is your message, and how is it being communicated? Make the most of this time to focus on collaborative idea sharing. This is a good time to reference best practices from other lodges, if the trainer is prepared with any.



Closing: 2 minutes

Before wrapping up, I'd like to ask if anyone has any questions?

Today, we looked at how communication affects our ability to build and maintain relationships with units. These relationships have a profound effect on our election, induction, and activation rates, so ensuring healthy and productive communication is a necessary step in our path to high performance. Remember the different audiences we appeal to, and how that should shape the message we emphasize. Finally, I'd challenge you to evaluate the structures and systems of communication that currently exist and ensure that they operate on an effective timeline using strategic channels. Always remember that our core message is a personal one, and meaningful connections between individuals is the very basis of a healthy lodge program. This starts on a unit level.