

Why I Hire Eagle Scouts

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I hire Eagle Scouts. Let me tell you why. Eagle Scouts are leaders with a built-in set of core values, a trained sense how to achieve objectives with the resilience to persevere to overcome obstacles and roll with the punches.

How does a Scout become an Eagle Scout?

It is well known that the rank of Eagle Scout is the highest rank that a youth can achieve in Scouts BSA. After years of work, a person achieving Eagle Scout has earned many merit badges², mastering subjects such as:

- Citizenship (in the Community, Nation and World)
- Sciences (such as Chemistry, Digital Technology, Electronics, Environmental Science, Energy, Engineering and Plant Science)
- Emergency aid (such as Fire Safety, First Aid, Lifesaving, Safety, Search & Rescue and Traffic Safety)
- Physical fitness (such as Cycling, Golf, Personal Fitness, Sports and Swimming)
- The Outdoors (Camping, Canoeing, Climbing, Geocaching and Pioneering)
- Many other topics (as varied as Art, Plumbing, Snow Sports and Welding)

A Scout who achieves Eagle Scout has camped in the outdoors many nights (if not weeks), is required to have served in multiple leadership positions within the Scout's troop or other unit and has participated in many hours of service projects for the community, culminating in a project that the Scout designed and led for the Scout's Eagle Project. An Eagle Scout has also mastered requirements regarding citizenship and physical fitness. All of this must be completed by the time a person reaches his or her 18th birthday. These experiences are all now open to both sexes, as both boys and girls can join Scouts BSA and achieve the Eagle Scout rank.

Eagle Scouts Are Resilient

Much has been said in broad generalizations about upcoming generations. Concerns are often raised about helicopter parenting, "snowflake" qualities and the ability of upcoming generations to persevere in the face of hardships. While I am not one to adopt these broad generalizations, I will note that I have not heard these things said about Eagle Scouts.

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² See <https://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges/> for a full list.

For a number of years, my wife and I were members of the Texas Christian University Parents' Council. During one of many meetings, we learned the university was increasingly interested in promoting study abroad programs. While cultural exposure and learning opportunities were important aspects of these programs, a primary objective of the university was to teach resilience. It seems that many students entered college for the first time with little or no experience how to live on their own and navigate the world. These students had difficulty in overcoming adversity, whether dealing with a poor grade on a test or in a class, determining on what major to focus their energies or how to interact with a new roommate for the first time. TCU learned that study abroad programs forced students to cope with life's difficulties in a foreign land without an overgrown support network to catch them when they fell. (Of course, support was there for serious matters.)

Scouts learn how to be resilient early on. These lessons are learned in middle and high school, long before any study abroad program. After a first campout in a thunderstorm, a Scout learns about leaky tents, muddy campgrounds, lack of sleep from the thunder and wet sleeping bags – not a pleasant experience, at first. But the next morning, the sun comes up, the sleeping bag and gear dries out, and a Scout can brag, "I survived!" Later this experience becomes a story of perseverance and resilience upon which the Scout can lean on as life throws other curves at him.

These lessons of resilience are learned again and again, whether backpacking 50 miles across the mountains at Philmont Scout Ranch, portaging a heavy canoe in the boundary waters of Minnesota and Canada or having to work hard to complete the merit badge requirement the Scout didn't quite pass the first time. Eagle Scouts overcome hardships and learn to enjoy the struggle rather than shrink from the challenge.

Resilience is a quality that I want in my employees. I want employees who overcome obstacles to achieve the company's objectives rather than those employees who throw up barriers to derail things. I want employees who "Do Your Best" (the Scout motto), learn from failures, pick their selves up and go back to work again. Resilience allows employees to recover from disappointments of not getting assignments, promotions or raises they want, refocus on their strengths and careers and get back on the rails for their own selves as well as the companies for whom they work.

Eagle Scouts Are Learning Agile

Scouts learn a lot. They are thrown into new situations and figure things out. Scouts are taught to survive in the wilderness by learning to pitch tents, apply first aid to cuts, navigate the forest, cook meals and paddle a canoe. Middle and high schoolers, most of who are from cities and suburban communities, learn these skills without little or no previous exposure. Scouting through its merit badges exposes Scouts to new topics, some required and some chosen. Even so, many of these topics are completely new to the Scout. As a Scout camp counselor, I taught some Scouts to swim for the first time or how to start a fire without a match. Sink or swim – given this new situation, Scouts swim.

I want employees who are learning agile. One of my favorite books is *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* by Thomas Freidman. Written in 2005, Friedman describes, in many cases, with uncanny accuracy the impact of digitization and globalization on our world. He describes these impacts as "flattening the world". In a flat world, Friedman writes, one of the most important qualities

is learning to love to learn. This has what I have taught my children, and I want this quality in employees. As digitization and globalization change our world, jobs and functions that exist today may not exist ten or even five years from now. I want employees who can change, who want to learn and are agile at jumping into a new subject, a new process or a new computer system and learning how to do new things. Eagle Scouts have learned this through the Scouting program.

Scouts Know Core Values

Most companies have a set of core values. Each company argues that if employees exhibit the core values that are applicable to its business, the company will succeed.

Eagle Scouts know core values. In fact, I would argue that they have operated under what is one of the greatest set of core values every written: The Scout Law – a Scout is:

Trustworthy	Courteous	Thrifty
Loyal	Kind	Brave
Helpful	Obedient	Clean
Friendly	Cheerful	Reverent

I am willing to bet that if I looked at the core values of most companies, elements of the Scout Law are represented, albeit in different words, in most companies' core values.

Scouts Learn Leadership

Before a Scout earns his Eagle Scout rank, a Scout has served in a number of leadership positions. Patrol leader, senior patrol leader, quartermaster and scribe are just a few positions for which Scouts serve on their way to earning their Eagle rank.

I once heard Clay Williams, CEO of National Oilwell Varco, describe a Scout meeting as chaos, organized. If you were a fly on the wall, it would appear that the meeting was little but chaos. But as you dig deeper, you find that the Scouts are organized into groups trying to achieve a goal, communicating with each other, learning how to convince each other and contribute ideas towards achieving the goal, teaching each other, electing a leader, finally moving towards the goal, each Scout contributing their part towards achieving the objective. Teamwork and leadership is learned in this chaos. Adult scout leaders are there as safety rails, but the chaos is youth led. As Clay puts it, this is the "secret sauce" of Scouting.

Scouts learn span of control. They join troops that are subdivided into patrols. Each patrol is comprised of six to twelve Scouts. Working within a patrol unit teaches Scouts how take input from their mates, how to convince their mates of the Scout's ideas and how to lead a patrol to achieve an objective. When I was a Scout, my patrol had to find a dummy in the wilderness with search and rescue techniques then address the "injuries" penned to the dummy's shirt and carry the dummy using emergency techniques back to camp. We were competing against other patrols, and we learned how to organize and try to win the competition as a unit.

At Patrol Leader Training and Scout Camporees, we learned how to build a bonfire and light it with one match, how to rescue a stranded person on an "island" surrounded by "alligators" in a "moat" using only a long rope and how build a bridge using logs and ropes. These were all activities organized by patrols.

These activities required teamwork and could not be completed by a lone Scout. Leadership skills were learned in the interaction and doing.

Older Scouts teach younger scouts. Learning wilderness skills, first aid skills, merit badges and doing projects requires that the older Scouts pass on their knowledge to younger Scouts. In this process, a Scout is “Helpful” and learns to serve his fellow Scouts. Mentorship and servant leadership is ingrained in the Scouting movement. The best Scout Troops are Troops that allow the Scouts to run the Troops with coaching from adult leaders. Like any skill, Scouts fail and learn leadership techniques through the coaching of their Scoutmasters and their assistants.

As a Scout gets older and achieves higher ranks on the way to Eagle, a Scout usually is nominated to the honor camping society of Scouting: the Order of the Arrow (OA). OA is a service organization of honor campers within Scouting who often provide untold hours of free service to (among other things) maintain Scout camp properties. It is based upon Indian lore and provides senior Scouts with even more leadership opportunities and a focus on service to others.

OA members join lodges and subdivisions of lodges called “chapters” in addition to their home troops or units. OA members have the opportunity to be on lodge or chapter committees to undertake tasks such as service projects, producing lodge newsletters, promoting camping within the Scouting community and other tasks. As chairs of committees, leadership lessons are again gained, this time more in the context of planning meetings. These meetings would look very familiar to corporate America as OA members learn how to function as a committee to achieve objectives. These meetings look very much like a corporate meeting or a board meeting, only staffed with teenagers.

I learned corporate governance for the first time in the Order of the Arrow as a teenager. I did not first learn this in college or in law school or even later, as a member of the National Association of Corporate Directors. I first learned governance in the Order. In fact, I drafted my first set of bylaws for my OA lodge under the mentorship of an adult advisor, who happened to have been a lawyer for what was then known as the Texas Water Commission.

In the Order of the Arrow, OA members can participate in the National Leadership Seminar (NLS). When I was a Scout at NLS, I learned of management by objectives, team motivational techniques, problem solving, group communications and servant leadership techniques. At NLS, the seven “Ps” were ingrained in me: Proper Prior Planning Prevents Pitifully Poor Performance, which is keeping with the Scout Motto, “Be Prepared”.

All these leadership experiences make Eagle Scouts leaders, perhaps not naturally, but certainly by the time a Scout earns Eagle, a Scout has become a leader.

I want to hire leaders like this, who have practiced leadership skills, who know how to work in teams and who have a servant leadership mindset.

Eagle Scouts Communicate

Finally, Eagle Scouts learn how to communicate. On the way to earning Eagle, Scouts learn to stand up in front of their patrols and their troops and make announcements and presentations. They learn to put on campfire skits or lead camp songs in front of groups. A confidence develops in this skill by these activities. Later in the Order of the Arrow, Scouts present at committee meetings or before a lodge of

200 or more Scouts. Scouts learn how to capture an audience's attention and how to make their point. Public speaking becomes more and more natural.

Scouts must present to adults to pass their requirements for merit badges and other activities and to pass a board of review to earn each rank. Scouts learn to write newsletters and lodge histories in the Order of the Arrow, and Scouts help communicate to their troops by creating websites and blogs. Communication is fundamental to a business, and Eagle Scouts have learned this skill.

Why I Hire Eagle Scouts

In my capacity as an HR and business executive, I hired many people, most of whom have learned their business and technical skill and leadership traits outside of the Scouting program. There is no doubt that Scouting is not an exclusive incubator of talent. For instance, Sam Walker recently wrote a terrific article on leadership skills that are learned by high school students playing football and other sports.³ Even so, I have observed that Eagle Scouts have a special edge in leadership skills. In the corporate world, Rex Tillerson (Exxon), Michael Bloomberg (Bloomberg), Randall Stephenson (AT&T), Clay Williams (National Oilwell Varco), Sam Walton (Walmart), Stephen Bechtel (Bechtel), Bill Gates (Microsoft), David Weekley (David Weekley Homes) and Bill Marriott (Marriott Resorts) are only a few examples of current and past CEOs who were Eagle Scouts.

Eagle Scouts are resilient and learning agile. They are servant leaders who demonstrate core values and communicate well. They provide terrific clay to mold into outstanding employees and leaders. That's why I hire Eagle Scouts.

³ See Walker, Sam, "The Leadership Case for Saving High-School Football", *Wall Street Journal* (December 21, 2019).