

In early June of 2015, I rode with my dad up an unfamiliar winding mountain road to participate in a week-long camp he'd signed me up for. The camp was for the Scouting program NYLT—short for National Youth Leadership Training. Its intent is to teach scouts the skills required to be better leaders in their home units, communities, and all other areas of their lives. Admittedly, my week was rough. My patrol members continuously fought, we put out multiple camp stove grease fires and I struggled to digest all of information taught to me. However, I saw how much fun the staff was having and at the end of the week I handed in my staff application. That choice led to three years of work within the program holding multiple leadership roles. Each year and position taught me something new about what it means to be a leader.

The first two years on staff were like training; character-builders to say the least. I showed up a few minutes late to my first staff meeting, and thus my first lesson was that if you're on time, you're late. I started setting my watch five minutes early. We all had to give presentations, so experienced staffers taught us how to properly present and communicate: stand in the neutral position, project, make eye contact, etc. Everything was based around the EDGE method: explain, demonstrate, guide, and enable. In my first year as a Troop Guide, I used this to teach the patrol that I led. During my second year, while serving as Assistant Senior Patrol Leader of Troop Guides, I continued to use the same skills and methods in instructing not only the patrol I guided, but the other staffers I worked with as well.

In my third year I was honored to hold the position of Senior Patrol Leader. With the support of the adult staff, I was responsible for seeing that the course ran efficiently. I chose my staff, set up training dates, led and assigned presentations, and much more. I assumed at the beginning that I would be doing a lot of work, but I quickly figured out how to delegate, and if you take care of those around you, they'll take care of you. I used every bit of knowledge the previous years had taught me and passed it to my staff with the hope that they would share it with the participants, yet I learned from them as well.

On the last night as Senior Patrol Leader, after all the participants had left, the youth staff and I sat around our leaky canvas tents where we spent hours chatting, laughing, and reminiscing. I knew this was my final night of NYLT, a program that had been so important to me and who I had become. I proposed that we wake up early and bike three miles out to Scott's Pinnacle to watch the sunrise over Bee Creek Valley. After a slow start and a muddy ride through the dark, we arrived right as the red sun crept over the distant mountains. It was magnificent. I sat at the cliff's edge and reflected on the last four years; everything I learned, all the laughs I had, and how I'd grown. Looking at the group around me, I realized they were not only the most outstanding group of young leaders, but they had become the greatest friends I could ask for. I was completely at peace.

We sang songs and took pictures before getting back on our bikes and returning to camp. Rushing to rinse off the mud, we barely made it for breakfast. There wasn't a second of silence as we were all trying to get in our last discussions before heading home. We ate slowly and took our time to clean up camp, yet the inevitable time came. Hugs were exchanged, and tears were held back. I got in the car and proceeded to drive down that all too familiar winding mountain road, leaving behind a program and people who shaped my life. I still carry every lesson and memory with me along the way.

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