

THE MISCONCEPTIONS

Number One

The first misconception is that some boys are not mature enough to be Eagles. In essence, this boy may be allowed to earn his wings someday, but not now. This limitation is a hard one for me to understand. During my entire adult scouting career I have argued unceasingly about the merits of young Eagles. I am not opposed to older Eagles. It will take some boys until their later teens to earn the badge, but I have seen leaders be told to scrap programs designed to stimulate advancement solely to postpone the achievement of the Eagle badge. That is wrong. It is attaching an applied limitation. Take the young man at the Court of Honor that received his Star rank on his twelfth birthday. What a wonderful day that was in that young man's life! What a birthday present! To restrict the young man from receiving that badge would be to fuel the fire of the Dark Horse. These young men will face enough natural obstacles to motivation; ***leaders should not make adverse judgments on young men that have completed the work.***

Since one of the purposes of scouting is to build mature, young leaders, scoutmasters should take advantage of every opportunity to help each young man mature into manhood. To quash motivation is ineffective. Every activity, merit badge, or scoutmasters conference is designed to build this maturity. ***If each task along the trail is completed, and each merit badge or skill is earned in the proper spirit, a young man simply cannot advance from Scout to Eagle without reaching the desired maturity level, regardless of his age.*** The truth then, is that every boy who earns the badge - if he actually does the proper work - develops the requisite maturity. Forget age. Some boys will earn the badge at 12 some at 17. Age is a non-issue. Proper, legitimate advancement through a program that allows and encourages the boys to progress is the issue.

Number Two

The second misconception is that the boys will leave the troop if they receive their Eagle too soon. The reality is that you will not lose boys through early advancement. On the contrary, you will keep them. I once participated in a meeting where BSA National reported that studies surrounding the adoption of the new advancement standards set forth in the late 1980's established that early, rapid advancement meant greater scout retention. ***Rapid advancement coupled with a high level of activity is usually a sign of a great program.*** Early Eagles simply mean one thing: the leader has the ability to advance the program to a higher level earlier in the process. A troop full of Eagles is a troop that can focus on advanced skills needed for manhood - skills beyond those of Eagle. It means the ability to concentrate on high adventure activities, the ability to collectively work on Eagle Palms, explore careers and seek specialty awards such as the Hornaday award.

The real danger leading to delayed advancement is poor retention and a stagnant program. The older a young man gets, the more difficult it is to keep him interested if he is working on basic Eagle skills. Moreover, experience demonstrated that it is the leaders, not the boys, that conclude that the program can relax because the "Eagles are over with." ***The second leadership truth is that early Eagles can be a benefit to the program if rather than relaxing leadership, the advancement is coupled with an intense focus on High Adventure and advanced skills.***

(reprinted from "On Tender Feet and Eagle's Wings" by Kevin R. Murray)

Watch next month for Misconception #3 & #4