



Teaching Leadership

Scout's Honor

Matthew Kirdahy, 09.04.07, 6:00 PM ET

All too often it's those without integrity who make the headline news. When corporate scandals break, no one really ever hears much about the "boy scouts" of business, or those who play by the rules.

Maybe it's time more people did. And from what better source than the new top Scout, Robert Mazzuca?

Labor Day weekend marked Mazzuca's first days as the Boy Scouts of America chief scout executive. The job is as demanding as any faced by a corporate CEO, requiring extensive knowledge of an organization 1.2 million volunteers strong. Replacing Roy Williams, who retired after seven years in the post, Mazzuca also will be responsible for 7,000 employees and 304 councils across the country.

In Pictures: Scouts In The Big Office

Mazzuca is a seasoned veteran, having spent 36 years as a professional in the Boy Scouts. He recalled how he got started in a camp in Northern California decades ago, long before MySpace replaced the campfire, before the Internet replaced the outdoors.

Those were simpler days, he says, when some of the most powerful men in the modern corporate world learned their unshakable values--values Mazzuca promised some of these Scouts are still swearing by today. He named a few: Rex Tillerson, chairman of Exxon Mobil, Drayton McClain, owner of Major League Baseball's Houston Astros; Secretary of Defense Bob Gates--who had to abdicate his role on the BSA Board to serve the country--and Jim Rohr, PNC Bank's chief executive and one of Mazzuca's closest friends.

"These are corporate giants who understand the value of a workforce that has integrity," Mazzuca said. "A workforce that has the capacity for leadership and a workforce that isn't going to steal the paperclips, for Pete's sake."

As chief scout, Mazzuca's focus is on the future and molding more Tillersons and Rohrs. In particular, he's eyeing the 100th anniversary celebration along with an updated approach to attracting fresh Scouts, who have extracurricular options like never before.

Mazzuca sees the job of chief scout as the "preserver, protector and enhancer of the brand."

Forbes.com: What's the transition into the top spot in the Boy Scouts of America been like after serving the organization for 36 years?

Robert Mazzuca: Roy Williams and I have a good relationship, and it allowed me to spend some time this summer traveling around and meeting with some stakeholders building some consensus around some ideas that I have going forward. While he minded the store, it was really very good and very pleasant, and I appreciate it. I thought going into it that I would not like it, but it worked out really, really well.

You seldom hear about the Boy Scouts of America "executives" or what goes on behind the scenes with guys in your position. When people think of the organization they think local. Why don't we hear about the chief scout executive?

Our goal is to make these volunteers successful and to get out of the way. Because when you think about the multiplying effect of staff people who recruit, train and then motivate the courage to support in volunteers; they, in turn, deliver the program. That is the magic of scouting.

As the newly appointed chief scout executive, what do you plan to do differently to draw more Scouts to the organization?

We have to become more effective in the use of technology and in the whole world of cyberspace. MySpace, YouTube--places like that where kids spend an inordinate amount of time engaging with each other and engaging with ideas. We have not been particularly effective in being creative in that arena and my goal short-term and intermediate term is the drive to understand that world to the point where we could actually participate in the dialogue that

happens there.

However, the magic of scouting begins outdoors. Challenging them both physically and mentally teaches them leadership skills. You can't do that in a virtual environment. But if where they are right now is in that virtual world, then the best chance of having them come with us on this adventure in the outdoors is to figure out how to deal in that world.

What are some of the challenges the organization faces in getting young men into the classic outdoor activities the Boy Scouts are known for, and then keep their interest?

We have an epidemic of childhood obesity in our country. And I think a large part of that has to do with the sedentary nature of our children's lives today. A lot of that has to do with them being in front of a keyboard or in front of some sort of electronic engagement.

The highly competitive, good athletes will always find a place to exercise that highly competitive skill. But in the real world most kids are not highly competitive, good athletes. They're just kids. They want to be kids. They need an opportunity to be kids and the opportunity to exercise. It's things like scouting that we're going to have to rely on if we're going to have healthy children.

Once we get them, they stay interested.

How do you keep the interest of young men when there are so many other extracurricular activities to choose from?

Our biggest problem frankly isn't so much an issue of getting kids involved, but we have to be able to articulate our message better to parents who make decisions about how they and their children are going to engage with their time. Our objective is to help parents make rational and intelligent decisions.

We're not a recreational organization. Our goal is not to teach kids how to build fires and pitch tents. That's the laboratory in which we do the things that we do, which have to do with character and leadership and all the things that scouting brings to a young kid's formation.

What's planned for the 100th anniversary of the organization in 2010?

This is the absolute quintessential opportunity to reintroduce scouting to the American people. I really believe that we're making a huge mistake as an organization if all we do is celebrate our past. If we don't use this as an opportunity to put a stake in the ground and proclaim our future, we've missed it completely.

We have mission-driven projects ramping up now, encouraging every community in America to celebrate in their own way, but around the same messages we're trying to accomplish.

I have this vision that I am secretly unleashing. We need to re-engage our alumni. There are millions and millions of people involved in scouting and who've had a wonderful experience in scouting. I have this vision of the largest gathering of Eagle Scouts in the history of mankind on The Mall in Washington, D.C., prior to the jamboree, where we invite every Eagle Scout to come and rededicate themselves to the principles of scouting in 2010.

To that end, we're launching a major Eagle Scout search. Say we want a few "bald eagles." We want to bring them home.

What's been the most exciting for you about a career in Scouts?

To me the whole adventure has been because of the lapel pin that you wear, not because of you personally, but because of what you represent, in every community that we've been and every town we visit. You show up in the middle of the night, unpack, and the next day you're there working for the Boy Scouts. You have access to the best and the brightest in town. Every place we've been we've been able to work with the finest.

I can sit in the office of the chairman of Exxon Mobil [Rex Tillerson] and talk about scouting. I mean how cool is that? You should hear him talk about how the principals of scouting are what guides his life.

Do you think being a Scout has had any impact on these powerful figures in corporate America as far as the way they do business?

These CEOs recognize not only the value to them personally of being involved, but these are corporate giants who understand the value of a workforce that has integrity, a workforce that has the capacity for leadership, a workforce that isn't going to steal the paperclips, for Pete's sake.

People who come through scouting know that the principles we work with are really valuable principles. If you want to be a good parent, just live by the scout oath and law. You want to be a good employee, live by the scout oath and law. You want to be a good CEO, live by the scout oath and law.

In Pictures: Scouts In The Big Office