



## Basics of Direct Service

*Fast Start Training for Direct Service Advisors*

### WELCOME ABOARD!

This orientation introduces you, a new [Direct Service Advisor](#) to the knowledge you will need to get started - - which means making your first Troop visit, together with your Area Direct Service Chairman, Point Man or another experienced DSA. You will learn about:

- Our Mission, Aims, and Methods
- Your Duties
- Counseling Skills
- The Flexible Structure of Trail Life USA

### ROLE OF DIRECT SERVICE ADVISORS

Direct Service Advisors (DSAs) are Area volunteers who help Troops succeed, through mentoring Troop Leaders and connecting them with resources of all kinds (human, online, and printed).

### MISSION AND AIMS OF TRAIL LIFE USA

Trail Life's **mission** is to guide generations of courageous young men to honor God, lead with integrity, serve others, and experience outdoor adventure. Troops accomplish this in direct contact with youth. You accomplish it by empowering men to lead well.

Our **aims** include character, leadership and adventure - - all designed to lead a young man and the people he impacts into a deeper walk of faith in Jesus Christ. Trailmen need to be fit to face today's world - - physically, mentally, emotionally, and morally!

### METHODS WE USE

- **Patrols** – The Patrol is where each boy interacts with his peers in meaningful ways.
- **Leadership** – Leadership ability is developed as boys learn from adult mentors, and then mentor each other.
- **Advancement** – Recognizing growth, rewarding achievement, and promoting future success.
- **Adult Association** – Christian role models help great boys become great men.
- **Outdoors** – Creation is our “outdoor classroom” - - an environment blessed with God's design, challenges, and enduring relevance.

- **Uniforms** – The uniforms and Troop Standard (staff), develop unity, and tell our story to the community while reminding us to *Walk Worthy*.
- **Opportunity** – Boys learn important things in an exciting and challenging environment with many program options and summer adventures.
- **Beliefs** – The Oath, Motto, and Christian worldview throughout our program materials represent the ideals of a Trailman. The Bible, God’s word, is our guide.
- **Spiritual Development** – Developing a relationship with Christ, and protecting and enhancing our walk of faith.

## VISITING IN PERSON

The Troop is where *Trail Life happens*. A Direct Service Advisor is typically assigned up to 3 Troops that he is to assist. He should have monthly contact with each of these assigned Troops. Visit Troop meetings and Committee meetings to experience firsthand how well each Troop’s program is working, and look for ways that the other Area volunteers may be of assistance.

Practice good “visit etiquette”. Call ahead and ask the Troopmaster if it is OK to visit a Troop meeting, or the Committee Chair if visiting a Troop Committee meeting. Then show up on time in full Troop uniform and show professionalism and courtesy. Remember that visitation is a privilege, not a right, so be a good guest!

During visits, DSAs *diagnose* problems, they *help* Troops help themselves, and they engage people. They *counsel* leaders and *find* solutions. They make *referrals* and *observations* that can *strengthen* the Troop. Things to look for include the following:

- **Adequate Leadership** – Enough adult leadership should be present to provide guidance and supervision. Leadership by *youth* should be encouraged, to give each boy the opportunity to take charge as he grows in the program.
- **Advancement** – Trail Life does not put a heavy emphasis on the earning of ranks and awards, yet a properly run Troop should have its share of both.
- **Attendance** – Attendance will fluctuate throughout the year, but a continued decline should be addressed.
- **Troop Activity** – Adventure is not something you have, it’s something you do. The Troop needs activity to attract and retain boys, and to change lives. Are the boys getting outside, or sitting indoors?
- **Morale** – Unless the boys are having fun, the Troop is not a success. Unless the adults feel good about what they are doing, the Troop will not last long.
- **Health and Safety** – The welfare of the boys comes first. Address any safety issues immediately.
- **Use of our Mission, Aims, and Methods** – Trail Life USA is not a Bible Study class, a drum-and-bugle corps, a military exercise, or a hiking club. While Troops have individuality, they should all embrace our Mission, Aims, and Methods – the “essential” essences of Trail Life.

When you visit, introduce yourself as a “friend” or “resource” and be sure to let leaders know how to contact you. Avoid writing notes or paperwork during your visit, though it is advisable to write down contact information, questions needing research, or requests for service to be sure you remember them, and to demonstrate genuine interest and due diligence.

As soon as practically possible, arrange a follow-up visit, or set an informal meeting with the Troopmaster or Committee Chair. Establishing a trust relationship is more important than communicating potential improvements.

- Compliment the Leader of the Troop (or Committee) for specific things they are doing well.
- Tactfully discuss any area that could improve (feel free to involve Area Team members if you lack subject matter expertise).
- Ask how leaders feel they are doing.
- Ask leaders to pick one thing they would like to improve.
- Help leaders find ways to improve (again, consult other Area Team members and online resources in Trail Life Connect).
- Come prepared to discuss training opportunities. Getting leaders to 3 Peaks training is proven to increase understanding, effectiveness, and retention.

### **AREA NETWORKING (COOPERATION)**

Direct Service Advisors keep the lines of communication open between Troops and their Areas. They are cheerleaders for Area event attendance and organization.

Just as the Body of Christ is made up of many diverse parts working together for good, so is a well-run Area Team. Occasionally Troop parents (not active Troop leaders) will be selected (based on their availability, skills, and gifts) to fill Area positions. This promotes excellent relations between Troops and their Area.

The ideal Area Committee candidate is an adult engaged in ministry outreach or otherwise interested in promoting the Christian mission of Trail Life USA within the geographical region of the Area. An Area volunteer does not typically hold a specific Troop position, but rather focuses on assisting Troops as an Area volunteer. Due to their important mission and focus, Troopmasters, Committee Chairs, Rangers, and Advisors should stay committed to their primary role within their Troop. The one major exception to this rule is that Troop Ministry Liaisons *should* be engaged with their Area Committee to represent the mission of their Church and expand the mission outward.

New Troops may benefit from partnering with more established Troops on outings, and in “borrowing” certified personnel and subject matter experts for specializations such as rappelling, kayaking, and emergency response. Established Troops may provide more than their ordinary share of support and guidance to other Troops. New Troops will need to lean heavily on the Area for support. The Area Direct Service Chairman may assign an experienced DSA to serve as a “Start-up Advisor” to assist Troops during their first year. The pride and excitement of hosting a new Troop soon confront the real challenges of program planning, financial planning, and training requirements. It is vital during their first year that new Troops have guidance, oversight, and encouragement.

At some point, an Area should become “connected” to the point where Troops naturally and easily work together in a healthy give-and-take balance. Troops with different denominational backgrounds will associate together as Christian brothers from time to time with a common emphasis of providing exciting programming options for boys as they interact with other Troops. These connections will take place in regular cadence, such as monthly Area Trail Gatherings.

Additionally, Areas coordinate (and often host) events. Large events such as multi-Troop Camporees, Summer Adventures, 3 Peaks Training Courses, or a TRLC build excitement and morale. They offer unique opportunities for boys and networking among adults. Help ensure their success by encouraging all Troops in the Area to participate.

Even the best run Troop can run into a major obstacle. Cases needing immediate and effective intervention include the following:

- Troop is not meeting regularly
- Attendance/Membership dropping significantly
- Discipline/Planning/Financial troubles
- Lapsed Charter or trouble re-chartering
- Troop lacks leadership in some required adult positions (this is the most common issue)
- Relationship challenges between the Chartering Organization and its Troop & ministry leaders
- Poorly trained (or untrained) adult leaders
- Failure to operate according to the essential standards of Trail Life USA
- Legal, liability, safety, or youth protection concerns
- Potential shift of a Chartering Organization, or Troop's leadership, away from the core values of Trail Life USA as a ministry

## COACHING SKILLS

Coaching is simply a conversation that helps someone increase awareness, overcome a challenge, meet a goal, or feel valued. This is an important part of your job and you'll want to do it well. Here are seven great coaching skills that help Troops find success.

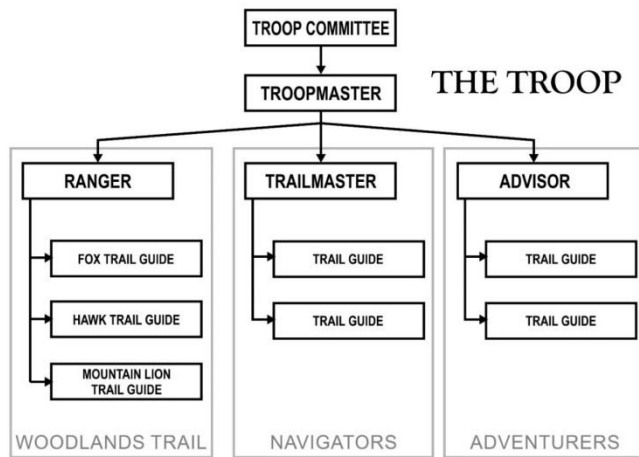
- **Listening** – Use body language and tone of voice to underscore that you are actively listening. It is helpful to repeat back what you think you are hearing in your own words.
- **Empathy** – Strive to grasp the other person's viewpoint and why they hold it. You do not have to fully agree, but you do need to clearly understand.
- **Sincerity** – If you don't know the answer, freely admit that you will have to do some research and get back to them. Then make sure you do!
- **Friendship** – You are fellow travelers along the Trail. Always assume that you are both working toward the same good end, even if you differ in your approach.
- **Interpretation** – If a number of statements all suggest a pattern, discuss it—and ask if the leader agrees with your insight.
- **Self-Discovery** – Some of the best conclusions are drawn by the interviewees themselves after a thoughtful discussion with open-ended questions.
- **Suggestions** – “Have you tried ‘X’?” is good, “Some people find ‘Y’ helpful” is better. Avoid saying, “Do it this way”, or “This is how we did it in my Troop”.

## The Troop

The Trail Life happens in a **Troop**, with Units of boys ranging from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Direct Contact leaders, and the Troop Committee. Troops are hosted by a Charter Organization (usually a church) that meets the chartering requirements and operates the Troop as a youth ministry. The Charter Organization owns its Troop ministry and oversees the Troop operations through its appointed representative, a volunteer known as the *Troop Ministry Liaison*, or TML.

Properly run, a Troop is an extended family within the ministry of the Charter Organization. As a DSA, seeing the Troops assigned to you grow and prosper will be a rewarding highpoint of your experience.

The TML appoints an adult called the Troopmaster to lead the weekly Troop meetings and outdoor activities. The Troopmaster relies on other adult Direct Contact Leaders who oversee three age-level programs: Woodlands Trail, Navigators, and Adventurers, as well as older youth in positions of responsibility.



The **Woodlands Trail Program** is for boys from Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Under the leadership of a *Ranger*, Trail Guides lead the following groups:

- **Fox** – Kindergarten to 1<sup>st</sup> grade
- **Hawk** – 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- **Mountain Lion** – 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade

The **Navigators Program** is for boys from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Under the overall leadership of a *Trailmaster*, Trail Guides prepare boys to be confident and comfortable in the wilderness.

The **Adventurers Program** is for young men from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Under the overall leadership of an *Advisor*, Trail Guides mentor older boys as they take ownership of their high-adventure program.

[Click here for more.](#)