

In 1989 the B.S.A. concluded that Scouts ought to earn First Class rank in the first year based on a statistical 'leading indicator', a connection between when Scouts become First Class and how long they stay in Scouting.

Statistics can be a little ham-handed, they only reflect phenomena leaving us to interpret what's really happening.

Accepting the premise that Scouts ought to earn First Class rank in the first year may drive a couple of different attitudes;

1. Establishing a plan to get Scouts to First Class as quickly as possible, stepping them through requirements and moving them along because, well, Scouts ought to do this because that's what we are told.
2. Rejecting the idea as a statistically driven mandate that has no real effective purpose.

I don't think either of these attitudes are particularly useful. It's not a good idea to push Scouts to advance by creating a plan that moves them along a timeline. It's equally shortsighted to think the B.S.A. just wants to drive numbers and they are asking us to do things to make the bottom line look better.

So why First Class in the First year? What does it matter?

If we unpack this 'leading indicator' we may begin to understand exactly what is being indicated and why it's important.

- To become First Class in the first year a Scout has to be a member of an active troop that goes camping regularly, that provides plenty of opportunities to learn and use Scouting skills, that effectively presents the full Scouting program touching on all the aims and methods. Scouts earning First Class in the first year are one sign of a healthy troop.
- Scouting promises a number of things to a Scout and they are all associated with requirements up to First Class rank. A Scout earning First Class in the first year is an indication these promises are being delivered.
- It also signifies that the scout is an active participant.

We can also contextualize the idea of a 'leading indicator' – it is just that; a reliable indication of what's happening. It is not, however not the only or necessarily the best indicator.

All that being said I think that Scouts earning First Class in the first year is an important aspiration and one that should be promoted. A healthy troop that is delivering the promises of Scouting will have Scouts earning First Class in the first year pretty

regularly not because it is something they specifically drive towards but as a natural result of the health of the program.

Admittedly, FCFY is about “providing opportunities” to enable FCFY to happen IF the youth chooses to partake in all of those opportunities (the program is not holding them back from having the opportunity to attain FCFY). Unfortunately, the FCFY mandate is often mistakenly interpreted and presented as the notion that boys “ought to” attain FCFY or else the troop is “doing it wrong“.

Obviously, boys who have a strong teaching program (troop guides, troop instructors, new scout patrols, etc.) will be highly engaged in learning about knives, axes, fires, cooking, orienteering, first aid, nature and swimming, etc. are more likely to want to stay engaged since they have a highly motivated team of mentors, a strong program, lots of outings and events (to fulfill various T-2-1 requirements), etc.

This ought to be the case without the need for FCFY promotion/discussion.

FCFY “implies” (perhaps mistakenly) that there’s a sense of urgency to getting through T-2-1 within 365 days, and my fear is that boys will contextualize that “urgency” or “pace” in their ongoing scouting commitment and feel the need to push through X number of MBs and ranks each year to “get” Eagle by a certain age (well short of their 18th birthday).

What’s left to us is to look at our troops and see if we are getting Scouts to this benchmark. If we aren’t what should we start doing, stop doing or continue doing to make it happen?

Should Scouts earn First class in the first year?

Yes.

Do we need a plan as a guideline?

Yes.

Should we come up with a specific, time driven plan that makes this happen because it ought to?

No, or at least maybe not.

What we ought to do is stop doing things that make this less likely and start doing things that make it more likely. The folks who developed FCFY meant well. I just think they tried to fix something that wasn’t broken, and for the wrong goal/reason (retention of youth). Maybe the time and energy spent on FCFY could be funneled into better round

table & PLC meetings on applying ALL scouting methods at the Patrol Level so that the needed (and appropriate) opportunities exist for advancement all year, every year.

To that end, it is important to make sure the boys are having fun, engaged in the process of deciding what to do, where to do it and how often. Camping once a month is important. Having the older boys play a significant role in teaching the newer scouts is also just as important for both groups; i.e. the patrol method. Attending summer camp is important. Participating in the new scout program the first year: maybe, maybe not. Depends on the scout. If he wants to do a different program, and understands the difference, that may be ok. Being in step with his peers may or may not be best for him. Being engaged in the process and progress is. Boys who are committed, involved and engaged will advance. Those who weren't to begin with and aren't having fun probably won't.