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## Wood Badge: A Game Changer or Merely Hype?

Attendees often use phrases like ‘inspirational’ and even ‘life-changing’ to describe their Wood Badge experience. But is the week-long leadership training experience all that it’s cracked up to be? Can a week of camping really have the impact proclaimed by its champions?

Wood Badge for the 21st Century is the modern iteration of an adult training course that has been evolving since Scouting’s first days. Early in the movement, Baden Powell saw the need to provide high quality training to adults, that need hasn’t changed.



The instruction is provided by a variety of classroom sessions, discussions, small group exercises, and learning games. Staff and instructors are typically well-prepared, and do a pretty good job of delivering the Nationally-developed content. The quality of the content is excellent, with lessons taken from leading management theorists such as Stephen Covey and Ken Blanchard. In fact some companies, including IBM, Motorola, and Intel, consider Wood Badge to be ‘management training’, partially subsidizing the cost, or not requiring employees to take vacation in order to attend.

However, the ‘formal’ learning opportunities are just one side of the Wood Badge coin. The informal learning done by participants as they live and work together for a week is substantial. . Attendees are organized into ‘patrols’ of about 5-8 people, and spend the week learning and serving as a group. They are supported by a dedicated staff member ‘Troop Guide’, who mentors them through the Wood Badge experience.

But does Wood Badge deliver on the promise of being ‘life-changing’? While I won’t go as far as to say that Wood Badge will be a life-changing experience for every attendee, I believe that it does have that potential for some people. Here are a few illustrations of that potential:

- The concepts and skills taught are applicable to many areas of your life, not just Scouting. My I love you so
- Wood Badge experience certainly made me a better father as I applied the ‘EDGE’ method to teaching new skills to my kids.

- The caliber of staff and attendees is very high. These are people willing to sacrifice a week of their time to learn their duty more fully. Just rubbing shoulders with men and women of this quality can be inspirational. I made several friendships that are still in place nine years after my Wood Badge experience. In addition, one of the participants in a patrol that I served as a Troop Guide almost five years ago is now one of my closest friends.
- The Wood Badge experience is more about changing hearts than it is changing minds. The knowledge gained through the formal instruction is certainly helpful, but the insights you gain into the value of Scouting may sink deep into your heart and be remembered long after the classroom knowledge is forgotten.
- The culmination of the Wood Badge experience is completing five projects (called 'tickets' in the WB nomenclature). These projects are defined by each individual attendee, with the assistance of their Troop Guide. Many of these tickets take the form of service projects that have a specific benefit to a group such as a Scouting unit, a ward, a family, or an individual. The opportunity to draw on your skills and talents to perform specific service certainly has the potential to change lives, an not just your own.

Overall, I do think that Wood Badge can seem overly hyped by passionate attendees. This might be the same way that our Young Men experience when discussing full-time missionary service with adult advisors. Our rallying cry of "just go" must seem hard to put into tangible terms by those who have not experienced a full-time mission. In the same way, Wood Badge has an indefinable quality that seems to surpass a simple explanation of the activities conducted there.

So, maybe when a respected friend suggests that you "just go" to Wood Badge, you can attend with the confidence that even though you can't predict or understand the blessings in advance, they will be there.

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