

CRYSTALLIZING THE SCOUT HABIT OF HELPFULNESS INTO A LIFE PURPOSE OF CHEERFUL SERVICE TO OTHERS

-Randall K. Cline-

Each year in thousands of meetings all across America, a time-honored tradition takes place, as Boy Scouts recognize especially worthy members of their troops by electing them to membership in the Order of the Arrow. The Order, or OA as it is sometimes called, is Scouting's National Honor Society. Although the troop leader must certify the eligibility of all nominees standing for election, only youth members may vote. Scouts are instructed to cast their ballots for the troop's best Scouts, those who truly strive to live the Scout Oath and Scout Law each and every day.

No one can apply for membership in the Order of the Arrow. Selection is up to the Scouts in each troop conducting an election. While it isn't widely known or promoted, the *Order of the Arrow Handbook* has for years advised members that election into the Order is "indeed unique."

"There is no other organization in which members are elected by both members and non-members." These elections are not designed to be popularity contests. Care is taken with each one to ensure a valid result. Scouts that strive to live by the organization's ideals are fairly easy to spot in real life. Troop members are encouraged to vote only for the best ones: those Scouts who are friendly to all; who get along with everyone; and who happily pitch in willingly to help whenever there is a need. They are the boys who are kind and positive to others, even when it isn't easy.

Whether these Scouts realize it or not, they already stand out from the others by personifying one or more of the traditions of the Order of the Arrow: Brotherhood, Cheerfulness and Service. When a Scout is chosen for membership in the Order of the Arrow, it is a sure sign that he is already held in high regard by his peers in the troop. Membership in the OA is intended to be a distinct and special recognition. Scouts do not campaign for election or OA membership. Electioneering is easily spotted and turns off those casting ballots. The best way to get elected is by being the best Scout one can be and by living Scouting's values.

There is one more point here: It is also intended that other Scouts in the troop, upon seeing their friends being elected and recognized with OA membership, will be inspired to adjust their own behavior, to act similarly and more Scout-like themselves, in the hope that they might also be elected to OA membership in the future. This is a behavior change technique at work: A positive consequence of more Scout-like behavior; and a reminder of the incredible power of example; that each of us is constantly being observed, and can influence others for good or ill.

So, the OA's election/recognition efforts work in two distinctly different ways. The first is fairly obvious: positive reinforcement of the ideals of Scouting through the recognition of the best Scouts. The second is more covert and seeks to modify the behavior of those not yet elected.