There are no kids in a Boy Scout Troop…

"Okay," I began, "How many kids are there in a troop of perfect size?" I paused. Then, "Okay, everybody have a number in mind? Good. Now, here's the answer to 'how many kids are in a perfect-sized troop'… are you ready? It's…Zero. That's right: Zero."

Puzzled looks abounded from the hundred and fifty or so veteran Scouters in the main room at this council-wide annual training seminar; among these, a few looks of another sort peppered this audience. I continued. "The answer's 'zero' because the young men in that troop are all Scouts. That's right: They're Scouts. They're not 'kids' or 'boys' or anything else; they're all Scouts."

While there were a few chuckles and a couple of sheepish grins, largely, the silence was so stony I figured we'd need a jackhammer to crack it. I'd guess only about one in ten weren't staring stony-faced at me. The grins signaling perhaps a new inkling of self-awareness were few. The vast majority sent a very clear message: They were mightily annoyed.

Now no one likes their nose rubbed in stuff. Not Fido, and certainly not ourselves. But the clear fact we can't sidestep is this: We're missing out on using a critical tool of our movement when we overlook the inherent value of the simple term, Scout.

To be a Scout is aspirational. It was The Scout who tamed the great wilderness of North America. It was The Scout who mapped this great country. It is The Scout who is the most valuable member of any brigade, because he knows the way ahead. It is BEING a Scout that we want our sons to aspire to.

Yet, in the main, what do we do? We call them kids, or sometimes boys, or—in the case of Venturing—sometimes boys and girls. But it's the rare one of us that calls these young people whom we serve Scouts.

Why is this? After all, we certainly refer to ourselves as Scouters. So why the reluctance to call those whom we serve Scouts? I'll confess: I don't know the answer. Perhaps it's based on every other aspect of these young people's lives: In school, sports, and religious pursuits too, they're always kids. So perhaps we just continue that habit, allowing it to pervade even this movement we've volunteered to serve.

When we're a bit on the formal side, we usually accent it this way: "BOY scout." But, actually, it's "boy SCOUT." In other words, we're not talking about boys who are Scouts; we're talking about Scouts who, through our youth movement, happen to be boys.

When Baden-Powell wrote his first book on this subject, he titled it "Aids to Scouting," and aimed it at men. When he discovered that young people by the hundreds, soon thousands, picked it up and followed its yarns and guidance, he wrote the book that

became the movement's seminal work: "Scouting for Boys"—Guidance for men cut down to boy-size, but with the intent of raising the boy to new heights—as Scouts.

My own first exposure to Boy Scouting was through the innocently titled American book titled "Handbook For Boys." But in its very first pages, this book began telling me how, in the deep woods, I'd be able to stalk the deer undetected by it, "BECAUSE YOU'RE A SCOUT." I'd know how to build a shelter from the elements for myself, "BECAUSE YOU'RE A SCOUT." I'd know how to build a fire and cook for myself in the wilderness, "BECAUSE YOU'RE A SCOUT." And then this wondrous book told me that I'd feel good about myself in new ways, "BECAUSE YOU'RE A SCOUT."

I can tell you without reservation: I was hooked from page one. Scouting "had me from hello." And one of the key reasons for this was that "I'D BE SOMETHING! I wouldn't be merely "doing" something, or "playing" at something, or "learning" something (although these were all components of what was about to happen to me). Instead, I was about to BE something: a SCOUT.

So think it over. What do you want for your own son and the sons of your friends? Do you want them to think they're just "kids in tan-and-khaki" or do you want them to believe—really believe—that they're something special: They're SCOUTS.

But we already know old habits die hard. Experts in behavior tell us that to break a habit, our best opportunity is to replace it with a new habit. So, what would happen if we made the conscious decision to say "Scout" every time we're tempted to say "kid"? We'd promise ourselves, and then work at it to never again say things like "The kids are going to Philmont this summer," or "Our kids are going on a hike this weekend," or "Three of our kids earned Life rank," but call them Scouts every single time.

I guarantee you this: If you start right now, today, calling these future American citizens Scouts, they'll rise to the aspiration in ways you've never seen before—and all for the good. No kidding.

Happy Scouting!

Andy