

For 98 years, the Boy Scouts of America have been identified with leadership, and it was put to the test last month when a deadly tornado tore through a campsite in Iowa killing four Scouts. USA TODAY corporate management reporter **Del Jones** spoke to Chief Scout Executive **Robert Mazzuca**, 60, about the leadership lessons of Scouting from a business perspective. Following are excerpts, edited for clarity and space.

**Q: What leadership lessons can we learn from the way the Boy Scouts in Iowa responded to the tornado disaster?**

**CORPORATE PULSE:** [Executive Suite index](#)

A: They put the needs of others before their own. They applied skills and knowledge in a disciplined and organized manner. It was what true leadership looks like.

**Q: Sam Walton, Michael Bloomberg, Bill Marriott, Ross Perot and other CEOs were Eagle Scouts. Coincidence?**

A: Hardly. Scouting builds people who are equipped to make ethical and good choices. It's not unusual to see the leaders of communities come out of Scouting. Our goal is not to teach someone to rub two sticks together and make a fire. But when you rub two sticks together and make a fire side by side with an adult of good character, you're going to learn about who you are and go on to lead men.

**Q: When people of business discuss leadership, they use words such as vision, passion, charisma. Why do the Scouts use these 12 words: trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent?**

A: Charisma and other personality traits may determine how far up the ladder you go, but the 12 points of the Scout Law define your character. If you don't have integrity, you're not a good leader no matter how charismatic.

**Q: Which one of the 12 would you most recommend to a business executive?**

A: (Pause). I think brave. You can't do the right thing and be effective without some courage.

**Q: The Scouts are retooling as they head into their second 100 years. What changes are being made?**

A: We've been engaged with (management consultant) McKinsey folks for months. Over 100 years, you get a little arthritic and bureaucratic. We are steeped in tradition, which is a good thing, but we're not particularly good at innovation and renewal. We don't want to abandon tradition, but we want to be nimble. I'm writing a blog now. It's gotten more traction and excitement than anything I've done in my life. It's cool.

**Q: Is it possible the Boy Scouts are like the buggy whip, obsolete and irrelevant?**

A: That's two questions. Obsolete? Absolutely not. The day that trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent become obsolete, I'll turn out the lights.

They've never been more relevant. The delivery mechanisms need to be tweaked. We still use a compass to show kids how to get around, but we also teach them how to use GPS. We leave them for a week on a wilderness elk reserve and tell them to leave the place better than they found it. You can teach a kid about character and leadership using aerospace and computers. The secret is to get them side by side with adults of character.

We run the risk of becoming irrelevant if we don't adapt to things that attract kids today, but we run the risk of losing our way if we abandon the principles, which is the Scout Law.

**Q: The leadership blueprint never changes, not in 100 years?**

A: We recognize the evolving science of leadership. We've had CEOs on our board say they want to send their people to Wood Badge, our adult leader training program, because we use state-of-the-art techniques. But I don't care what fancy techniques you use, integrity is integrity. Loyalty is loyalty. Being trustworthy is a bedrock issue. You can put cosmetics on it, but either you are or you aren't.

**Q: How much of this retooling is public relations, to get the Scouts past God and gay controversies?**

A: It's time to reintroduce the American people to the Boy Scouts and quit letting other people define us. For a decade, we have abandoned the field of public relations and dialogue, and we have such a positive story to tell. Everybody has a good feeling about Scouting, and we have not been telling that story at all.

**Q: As a strategy, some companies avoid publicity. Has that worked for Scouts?**

A: For the first time in our history, we had adversaries. Back in the day when I started, it was motherhood, apple pie and Boy Scouts. We were thrust into a situation that we weren't equipped to deal with. The decisions at the time were probably correct for the time. Because of one issue, we abandoned all dialogue about Scouting. That doesn't make any sense. We can't be afraid.

**Q: Companies often wrestle with the same problem. They want to get positive news out, but doesn't that mean they also have to address controversies?**

A: Occasionally. If you're not proactive in defining yourself, somebody else will. We have become a pawn in political issues, because we've allowed ourselves to be co-opted.

**Q: Scouts require a belief in God. Many business leaders are religious, but they keep their faith to themselves so they won't offend customers and employees who have a diversity of beliefs.**

A: The Scouts have a duty to God, but we in no way have tried to define God. We have wonderful Jewish Scouts and Christian Scouts and Muslim Scouts.

We accept any faith, but they have to embrace some faith. In the middle of faith are the principles of good and the kinds of things that are good lessons for business. Most good business leaders are men of faith.

But you don't have to wear it on your sleeve. "If you're coming to work for my company by God, you're going to be a Christian," I think is not acceptable. But the idea that we live a life of faith and don't hide from a life of faith is an important part of who we are.

**Q: Companies are eager to boast of their diversity programs, and many have extended benefits to same-sex partners. The Boy Scouts prohibit homosexual adult leaders. Do you see a conflict?**

A: All of our research points to the fact that the vast majority of Americans believe that is the right decision for the Boy Scouts in terms of role modeling for young men. Diversity is important, but we've had a number of companies articulate that their continued support of Scouting is not contrary to their embracing of diversity within their organizations.

We have every faith, every color, every creed. On the one issue of role modeling, we feel strongly. Most businesses understand. There are some that will not continue to support Scouting. We agree to disagree and move on.

Most companies don't see their philanthropic policies as being the arbiters of social justice. They see the good that Scouting does. They can also see the good in gay and lesbian alliances, but they see greater harm coming to society if Scouting were not here. They have no problem doing that, and there are many, many of them.

**Q: What is the most important thing about leadership today that is not being taught to the nation's youth?**

A: Personal responsibility. Taking responsibility for your actions is a hallmark of a good leader.

**Q: Children are being raised differently. Does that mean a new brand of leadership is coming when they grow up and run things?**

A: Yes, and it's going to be less effective. It's going to be less bold, less courageous, less visionary. If we believe as a society that we should only be as good as the least of us we will be stifled. It's not going to take us to the moon and Mars and beyond and make this country great.

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