

A Leader's Guide to Building Troop Family Support



**While Preventing Burn Out & Making
Life Easier**

(With permission from Girl Scouts of North Texas)

Section 1: Who benefits?

Going For The Win / Win / Win



You got into this for all the right reasons. You love your Girl Scout and want to provide her with as much opportunity as possible to gain confidence, strength, and character from her Girl Scout experience. You want the same for her friends.

You're excited; you're full of optimism and hope. You want to be a *great* GS Troop leader. You want to deliver on the promise of transforming the girl of today into the leader of tomorrow --not just for her, but also for yourself -- because inside -- you are also that girl. **You got into this for all the right reasons.**

We love you for that.

Let's face it though; managing a Girl Scout troop *can be* a lot of work for the leader. Organizing materials and running meetings, providing activity information for parents, and distributing resources takes time and effort. You're human, you've got a life, and you can't do it all.

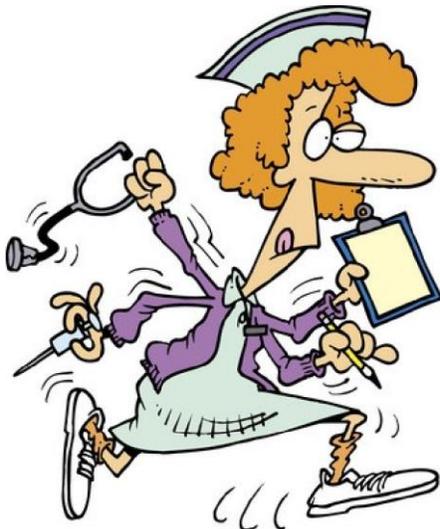
Of course, we all want our Girl Scouts to have a "good" leader, especially when that leader is US. No matter how dedicated and hardworking a leader is, she **MUST HAVE PARENT SUPPORT** in order to be successful. A GS Troop Leader cannot and should not have to stand alone.

In most cases, parents understand the value that Girl Scouting provides and they want to help in a limited way, but they are super busy and they don't know how they fit in. Often times neither do we know how nor when to use them, so we don't ask. **That's a lose / lose and it leads to burn out.**



Leaders have reported lack of parent support as the number one reason for quitting. They have spouses, as well as other children that are involved in soccer, gymnastics, dance, etc. They attend and volunteer at church and at school. Some are students, some are single parents, and some have full-time jobs - in other words, they are busy people just like you. They enjoyed working with and being with the girls; but they simply needed more support and burned out. However, in the beginning *they* tried to find time in their busy schedule to provide a fun, educational experience for their daughter – just like you.

We love you for that, but we're worried for your health. We'd like you to be around for a while.



Before you flat line, we want to share some aspects of building a strong troop family support network that will keep you in tip top shape. In fact, the secret to building strong family support lies in following the model of **CPR**.

C stands for Communicate

P stands for the Provide
Options to Participate.

(It also stands for Promise!)

R stands for Recognize

C- You are going to **communicate** information to your families on a regular basis. We are going to show and tell some options that you can use.
See section 2.

P- You are going to invite families to **participate** by **providing** them with a wide variety of **options** and tasks to choose from, all of which are clear and time specific. You are going to ask them to **promise 4 hours per family per year**.
See Section 3.

R- You are going to publicly **recognize** the girl and her family when they fulfill that promise.

See Section 4.

Use these talking points when communicating with families about the value of supporting the troop... It's the "What's in it for Me" for parents through the "What's in it for Her" for girls.

By HELPING YOU, they will witness their daughter benefit through leadership opportunities and skills developed in Girl Scouting. These skills will serve their daughter well in all current extracurricular activities and relationships, as well as many future aspects of her life. In a strongly supported and well-run troop she will learn skills such as:

- Coordinating, motivating and delegating tasks among project teams
- Promoting cooperation and resolving conflicts
- Becoming resourceful problem-solvers
- Expanding creativity and developing positive ways in which to express herself
- Gaining practical and healthy life skills
- Setting goals and learning to plan for the future

The result of a strong troop support structure is that she will:

- Be mentored by positive adult role models
- Enjoy a sense of independence
- Learn to appreciate diversity in a multicultural world
- Feel connected to her communities – locally, regionally, nationally, and globally
- Develop a strong sense of self
- Be open to new experiences and ideas
- Have an exceptional extracurricular activity on her college and scholarship applications

Section 2: How do we get there?

Communication is Key

Communication is an *essential ingredient* in getting parental involvement. You can never communicate too much! The more information you provide about opportunities and experiences that encourage their Girl Scout's growth and personal development, the more invested parents will become.

Keep in mind that good communication has 3 important aspects: it's relevant, it's timely, and it's two way.

Initial steps to setting up good communication:



- Hold a parent / guardian meeting for that initial face to face contact. This sets up your relationship. Be prepared and make your first impression a good one.
- Collect email addresses and telephone contact numbers for BOTH parents *and* girls to put them into your email distribution and phone tree lists.
- Decide which troop communication method works best for you. We'll talk about options in a minute. Use a combination of any or all of them.

Communication methods can be low tech and take the form of a printed troop newsletter and the occasional phone call. *Or* they can be high tech using email, a troop web page, or social networking group site.

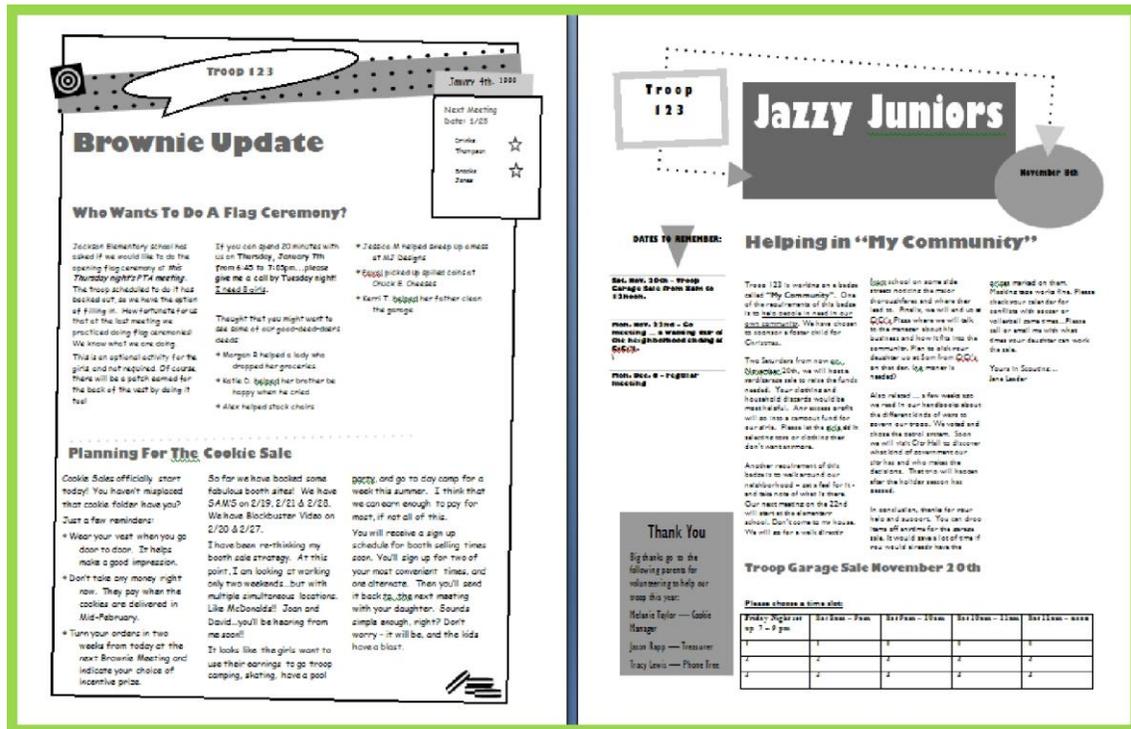
Here are some thoughts and ideas to consider:

Low tech: Printed Newsletter.

Using Microsoft Word or some other desktop publishing software, create a one-page template for a troop newsletter that includes details of activities, a monthly calendar of upcoming meetings, snack assignments, and events. Pre-designed templates are available for your use. Pick one you like.

Send the newsletter home with the girl after each meeting describing the purpose of the meeting you just had, and any information or instructions you'd like the parents to act upon for what's coming ahead. Reuse the template each time and change out just the information.

To take advantage of pre-made newsletter templates in Microsoft Word go to File → New.



Select Newsletter and choose a template. Columns and text boxes will already be set up for you to type in. With some practice you will learn how to customize your document. Microsoft Publisher does the same thing. If you prefer to create your own design, that is okay too. It doesn't have to be fancy... it just has to be a vehicle used to communicate on a regular basis.

Low tech: Telephone Calls

While some information is too detailed and time consuming to pass along to each family individually over the phone, don't rule this out as a method to encourage deeper parental involvement in your troop. Call parents for *good* reasons too-- just to tell them their Girl Scout did something well, that they have a polite and considerate child, or that she is improving in some way. Some parents will really appreciate the validation when you say "I'm just calling to say how great she is." Don't underestimate the value and returns of delivering positive feedback by phone.



Mid tech: Text Messaging

Most, if not all, parents have their cell phones with them at all times nowadays, so an excellent form of communication is text messaging. This allows you to be in constant contact with the families in your troop and helps parents feel engaged and up-to-date. Cell phone systems vary, but it is moderately simple to set up a contact group within your phone so that all the troop contacts are easy to access. This allows you to send one text to everyone in the group at once. This form of communication is best used for short, concise messages that have important details that families need to know.

Mid tech: Create an email list

Although certainly not all parents have access to an email account, email is the most common use of the Internet by adults today. If you and the parents are comfortable using email, the choice of sending announcements and reminders via e-mail is a viable one. All email providers provide instructions on how to make an email address distribution list in their help files. When using email, keep in mind that whatever you send is a permanent record so keep it short, positive, and well written.

Here is one idea for using email to make your communication two-way:

After your initial parent/guardian meeting, send an email stating how nice it was to meet them and thank parents for coming. Provide your email and phone contact numbers again should they wish to reach you. In the next paragraph, invite parents to help you know the personality of their girl better by completing a writing assignment: ***“In one million words or less, tell me about your child.”*** Hilarious, touching, informative, and crucial information might be shared that you might not know any other way. Perhaps consider sending each girl a similar email asking them to tell you about themselves in one million words or less, and compare their view of themselves with those of their parents. It definitely will give you a starting place for knowing and working with each girl on an individual basis.

High tech: Create a group page on a social networking site

Online groups at social networking sites such as Big Tent or Facebook are **free**, relatively easy to create, and can be set for **‘members only’** to ensure privacy. (These are only 2 options. There are others if you search for them.) Go to the individual sites to read the instructions and security settings very carefully. Social networking sites usually offer the ability to upload photos and have bulletin board discussions. Be sure to reference the GSMH website and social media guidelines prior to creating a page or building a troop website.

NOTE: The use of a page of this type is intended for communication with the Troop Adults, not the girls. Facebook and Big Tent do not allow membership for children under the age of 13. While Big Tent allows you to upload files for the parents to download, Facebook does not. Facebook offers a chat function while Big Tent does not. You decide which works best for your needs.

Introductory Instructions for creating a Group on Big Tent:

1. Go to www.bigtent.com
2. Click on “Create a Group”
3. Follow the instructions from there

bigtent where trusted groups connect online

Hi creative_ozma (sign out) | Go to My BigTent

Why BigTent? Features Sponsors Find Groups **Create a Group >**

>The Best Place to Organize Your Group

HandsOn Network, National
845+ members

FREE

Name your group **Create >**

Introductory Instructions for creating a Group on Facebook:

Go to www.facebook.com. You must already have a personal account.



Edit Friends
Account Settings
Privacy Settings
Application Settings
Credits Balance (15)
Help Center
Logout

Step 1:

Sign into your own account.

Under "Account" on the main navigation menu, select "Help Center".

Facebook Applications and Features

Photos
Video
Groups
Events
Like
Notes
Links
Credits
Gifts
Birthdays

Step 2:

Click on "Groups".

Groups

[Creating and running a group](#)
Posting content to a group
Viewing and joining a group
Groups privacy and abuse
Bugs and Known Issues
Have a suggestion?

Step 3:

Click on "Creating and running a group" for further instruction.

High tech: Create a troop website

Creating a website for the troop can cut the newsletter & form distribution work-load considerably because some of them give you the ability to have parents download permission forms. There are a variety of resources available online that provide *free* website templates and hosting for Scout troops. Do a Google search for “free scouting website” to find the one that works best for you.

The process is only moderately difficult. Things you’ll need:

- Computer with Internet access
- Email address
- Troop number

Here is the basic process:

Step 1: Go online and choose the website that has a free Girl Scout page template you like.

Step 2: Sign up or log in to the system. Have the Girl Scout troop number available to register the site officially. Other common information you will have to provide includes your name and email address.

Step 3: Log in as the administrator to the site you created.

Step 4: Add pictures, calendar information and girl/parent resources, and place the information in the respective sections. In some cases, you will have the option of creating both a public and private page.

Step 5: Establish a user name and password to give to the scouts and parents. If there is a private site option, this can usually be done under "Account Settings."

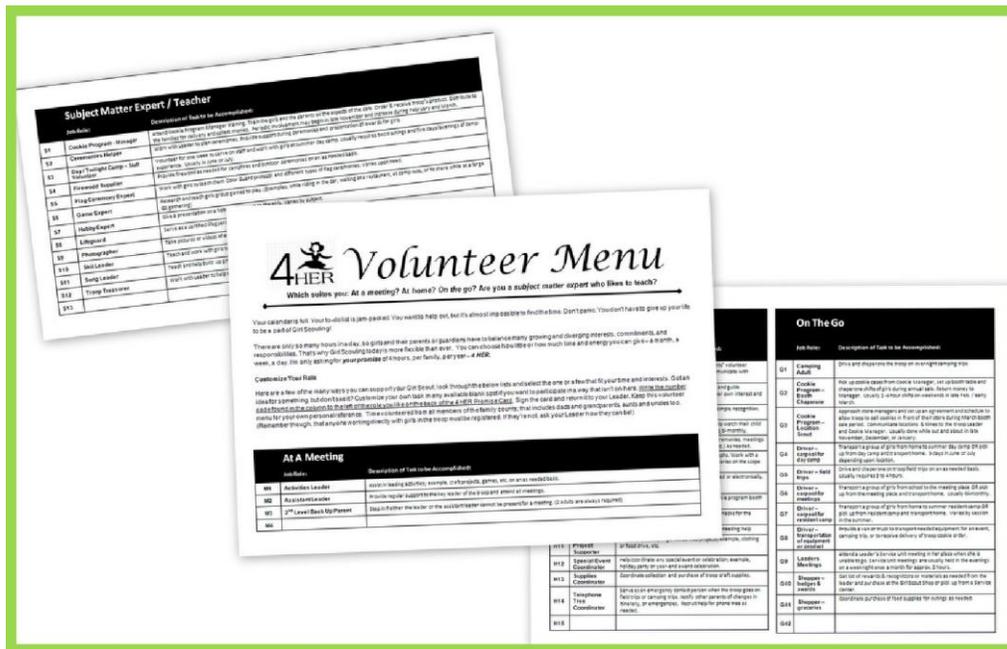
Step 6: Update the site as necessary.

Before you build a website, please read the Website and Social Media Guidelines in the GSMH Forms and Resources Library on our website and look at the activity safety checkpoint information on your Volunteer Resources CD.

Section 3: If you ask – in a clearly defined way - they will help.

GIVING PARENTS OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE AND CONTRIBUTE

National studies show that the more you clearly define the ways that parents can help, the more likely they are to step in. All you have to do is offer options and ask them to make the commitment – for her. They will select something that interests them, at the same time helping you. If done correctly, you will build a solid support base, strengthen the girl’s chances of longevity with your troop, and potentially even increase participation from your dads. Successfully building a family-wide troop support network has three key ingredients:



- Offer parents a variety of options with clearly defined responsibilities and time commitment factors. (Download the 4HER menu.)
- Ask parents to promise a minimum of 4 hours per family – for her.
- Publicly recognize a parent/family when they hit 4 hours of given time. (An established regular communication channel is great for this.)

It's that simple: Offer Options to Participate / Seek a Promise /Recognize

At your parents meeting, or soon thereafter through your newsletter, ask each one of your parents to sign a “4 Her” promise card – ***committing to give 4 hours per family a year minimum to support their daughter's Girl Scout troop.***

Give parents a list of volunteer tasks at the same time. The options to choose from may include leading activities done at a meeting, tasks that could be done from home, or things done ‘on the go’, such as driving for a field trip. Parents could even become a subject matter expert in something and teach the girls.*

<p>Today's girl needs today's Girl Scouts...and today's Girl Scouts needs you!</p>	<p>I promise to contribute to the success of my child's Girl Scout troop this school year by volunteering 4 hours of my time.</p>
	<p>Parent name: _____</p>
	<p>Girl's name: _____</p>
	<p>Phone #: _____</p>
	<p>Email: _____</p>
	

(For example: Color Guard calls and flag ceremony protocol, Girl Scout songs, etc.)

*Keep in mind that anyone who works directly with the girls will need to register as a member, fill out an application, and pass a background check.

Collect the responses and ask one parent to be a volunteer in charge of matching parents up with the opportunities and tracking their hours. This role can be done from home. 4 hours a year per family sounds reasonable in exchange for the value gained by their daughter; right?

Win/Win/Win

What can a 4-hour promise really do?

When parents sign a promise card to volunteer four hours, you just gave them a reason to ask to do things to support the troop.

- You *open the door* to participation for the first time for many parents and family members.
- Parents become more in tune to the needs of the troop.
- Male involvement increases. Four hours *per family* lends a new perception of “Getting involved,” therefore more dads, step dads, grandfathers, and big brothers can join in.
- Parents keep coming back to help beyond the 4 hours because they witness the positive effect their participation has on the troop and their daughter.
- Your volunteer pool becomes more organized; you’ll know how to better communicate your needs for assistance, calling upon new people to do specific tasks and matching assignments with parents’ availability.
- The leader’s load is lightened when more parents help. (Example: cutting out shapes, shopping for badges or supplies, teaching a skill, or attending a service unit meeting, etc.).
- Communication between leader and family significantly increases when leaders use the 4Her Promise and follow the CPR model.
- You build future volunteers as children witness firsthand, parent volunteerism. They will surely imitate the good example.

What counts?

This will probably be the most common question you are asked. What to count and should you count things done *just with their daughter* at home or only for the benefit of the whole troop? Well, here's what we think: Yes, count parent involvement just with their own child. Whether a parent is doing something for the whole troop or helping only their child earn a badge on her own, simply count it! Why only encourage volunteerism IN the troop? The kids will surely benefit and your troop likely will, also. The point of parent involvement is to help improve the Girl Scout experience of the child, while connecting the parent with the troop.

What is included in the 4 HER toolkit?

- The Volunteer Menu— with additional places for the leader to customize volunteer tasks and write in their own. (3 pages to print and copy.)
- 4 HER Promise cards—these should be printed on index paper and cut.
- An excel spreadsheet for tracking parents reported hours, if you choose to.
- An Appreciation Certificate to recognize families that have completed their promise.
- A 4 HER Logo .jpeg for use in your newsletter or website.
- A 4 HER logo to use in your publications when you recognize contributions.

National studies have shown that initiatives similar to this one have increased volunteer hours substantially – nearly doubling – the first year.

Added bonus:

Furthermore...by volunteering time to your troop, entire families have the ability to participate in **The President's Volunteer Service Award Program**. Both the Girl Scouts and the United States of America have long and proud traditions of volunteer service.

The President's Council on Service and Civic Participation created the President's Volunteer Service Award Program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to be of service to their own communities.

The President's Volunteer Service Award recognizes individuals, families and groups that have achieved a certain standard – measured by the number of hours served over a 12-month period or cumulative hours earned over the course of the lifetime. They – AND YOU - can register and **track their volunteer hours online** at **presidentalserviceawards.gov**. All types of service that strengthens the community qualify for this award, ***including being a Leader of a Girl Scout troop.***

Section 4: How to keep them coming back

CONNECTING WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS; APPLAUDING TOO!

The third ingredient of the CPR model is crucial; do not neglect it. **Recognize.** It is most important to connect with parent volunteers each time they help out or appear at your troop meeting. If they are working from home, give them a phone call or send an email to ask how it's going. If they have come to a meeting, before the parent is ready to leave for the day make certain to take time to talk with him or her:

- Ask about their satisfaction with the project or task and about how the girls behaved or engaged.
- Ask if they would like to volunteer again for the same type of project, or if they might prefer something different.
- Ask if they have any suggestions that might improve theirs or another volunteer's experience.
- Finally, have the entire troop clap and say "Thank you" as a way of showing respect for the parent volunteer.

As soon as a parent hits the 4 hour mark, **recognize them** (together with their daughter). **Building a 4 HER recognition/ thank you section into your newsletter or website is a viable option.** Presenting their family with a certificate of appreciation/completion is another option that also allows the family to be recognized for fulfilling their promise. Think for a moment how happy the girl will feel to see her parent publicly recognized in print. This positive moment can only reinforce the Girl Scouting ideal of service to others and lay the groundwork for her future volunteerism. If the type of service offered truly calls for it, you may consider sending a private thank you note also.

Use the 4 Her logo whenever you need to communicate with the parents about help for the troop. They'll become conditioned to look for it. At the end of the year, you can always thank all of your volunteers with a certificate and copy a book full of thank-you notes and pictures from the children. It is just a small gesture, but is always appreciated.

MORE IDEAS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

If and when you ever feel like taking a *further step* in building interpersonal relationships to strengthen the support base for your troop, you can include *entire families* in events or badge completion celebrations. As a starting point, here are 5 ideas to get you thinking creatively about what will work best for your own Girl Scout families. Activities will vary depending upon the nature of your group, of course.

1) Welcome Wall

Celebrate your troop's diversity with a family collage display. Provide the poster board and invite all families to illustrate some aspect of their heritage. (The girls will have to ask the parents for assistance with a cultural recipe or pictures, etc.) Hang the posters for everyone to see when they come for their daughter's investiture or some other ceremony.

2) Game Night

Organize a round robin board game night for families to play in teams or as individuals. (Players rotate to different tables after a set time period) This can help your parents get to know each other in a fun low risk setting. Have your girls take turns serving light refreshments.

3) Career and Job Show & Tell

Introduce Girl Scouts to a variety of career and job paths. Ask a select group of parents to talk in detail about what they do. Foster small group discussions and show-and-tell by rotating round robin.

4) Family Sports Event

On a weekend, organize a game of softball, kickball, volleyball, or basketball, and perhaps have a potluck barbeque. Have parents, girls, and leaders compete against each other, or mix up the teams.

5) Saturday Success Academy

Ask if a parent is interested in offering a limited number of tutoring sessions in special interest areas such as study skills, math, science, language, art, or music for members of the troop who are interested and committed to getting ahead in school.

Section 5: Recap & Wrap Up

The Big Picture

The **CPR formula** to increase family support and prevent burn-out is:

C – Communicate

Establish some kind of regular communication channel.

P – **Promote and Provide** a wide variety of clearly defined **options to Participate**. The 4 HER approach is available for your use. Ask for a **Promise** of 4 hours of their time.

R – Recognize

Use that communication channel to give thanks and recognition when family members hit the 4 hour threshold. Both the adults and the girls will feel good and will probably continue to give more.

Tools We Are Providing:

- A **Volunteer Menu** to download with a wide variety of clearly defined, time specific options sorted by the ability to perform at a meeting, at home, on the go, or becoming a subject matter expert and teaching a skill.
- A **4 HER Promise Card** for the parents to sign and return with their selection of support tasks that interest them and fit their lifestyle. This template can be downloaded and printed on cardstock – 4 cards to a page to cut apart.
- A **4 HER hour tracking mechanism**. This is an excel spreadsheet that allows you to input volunteer names and tabulates the hours.
- **4 HER logo**. A graphic to use in your newsletter or other publications.
- **4 HER Appreciation Certificate**. This certificate can aid you in recognizing families that have completed their promise of 4 hours.

Benefit to the GS Troop Leader of building strong family support:

Your volunteer pool becomes more organized; you'll know how to better communicate your needs for assistance, calling upon new people to do specific tasks and matching assignments with parents' availability.

Benefit to the parent who participates:

When the Leader's work is well balanced, the chances of their daughter having a high quality Girl Scout experience significantly improves. Girls and parents come back.

They also witness, first hand, the benefit to the girl.

The benefit to the girl whose parent / guardian participates:

Through participation in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, girls will progressively:

- Become resourceful problem solvers and learn how to collaborate with others on a common goal.
- Gain practical and healthy life skills
- Learn how to set goals and plan for the future

Ultimately, that's what it's all about.

Win / Win / Win

Shared work means more time to spend working with girls...

Less time spent away from home, away from the family.

You become the GS Troop Leader you want to be.

You stay around for a while.

We love you for that. 😊

What are you waiting for? Decide on your communication methods, and then download these documents to get started:

- **Volunteer Menu**
- **4 HER Promise Card**
- **Hours Tracking Spreadsheet**
- **Logo**
- **Appreciation Certificate**



The world is ready for a *new* kind of leader.

She knows herself.

She values diversity, inclusion.

She respects friendship, collaboration.

She is committed to *taking action* to make her neighborhood, her community, her world a better place. Today, and every day.

The world is ready for the power of the girl.

One LEADERSHIP experience... opened by three KEYS:

DISCOVER a strong sense of self

CONNECT with others

TAKE ACTION to make the world a better place

Give her the keys and she will **LEAD**.