

Tips From the Campfire

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Contact Reports. For many, these are the bane and lodestone of the Unit Commissioner. By and large, UCs enjoy making contacts with their units. Whether the contact is with the Key 3, the Committee, or the Unit, contacts are generally fun, educational, and enriching. For both the UC and the supported organization. Writing up Contact Reports? Well, that is another story. There is nothing fun about writing up reports. Any reports. Contact Reports may not be fun, but they can be educational and enriching. Used properly and diligently, Contact Reports can be an invaluable tool for the UC, the supported organization, the District and the Council. Most importantly, Contact Reports can help to promote Good Scouting. This is our ultimate goal.

There are two kinds of Contact Report: A Simple Assessment and a Detailed Assessment. I am going to ignore Detailed Assessments in this tip. This may seem strange since your District and Council Commissioners are harping about these all of the time. But the basic fact is that the vast majority of your Contact Reports will be of the Simple type. Simple Assessments are easy and straightforward. It is far better to have a collection of completed Simple Assessments than to have a Detailed Assessment that never gets done.

A Simple Assessment is fast and easy. Enter the Type or Contact (Unit Meeting, Committee Meeting, etc.), your name, the date of the Contact and the current unit health. Then hit the button for a Simple Assessment. In this screen, put in the overall, subjective score of where the unit is, then enter in some comments. That's it. It normally takes me about 10 minutes to write up a Simple Assessment. It is very important that the UC enter in meaningful comments, though. Things that I normally record include:

- How many participants were present? How many participants would have been present, had everyone showed up? This is important to get a record of actual activity. It doesn't matter if we are talking about Scouts, Cubs, or Committee members. Record participation.

- Did the meeting go as planned? Was it meaningful? How were the interactions between participants? (Friendly? Helpful? Tense? Productive? Wandering?)
- What did you see that was positive? What did you see that was negative?
- Any other key observations that you may want to record.

If the UC records the above, this is a good Simple Assessment. You really don't need much more.

A report, any report, is useless unless somebody reads it. It may look nice in the Great Statistics in the Sky if we have lots of Contact Reports being done, but that really doesn't mean much. The reports need to be read and acted on. Who should read and act on these reports? Here is a basic list:

- The UC him or herself. I review my Contact Reports. I have plenty of units that I support. I need to remind myself about a unit, its needs and its strengths prior to visiting them. I also review them throughout the year to see if progress is being made or if challenges are appearing. In this way, I can tailor my service to the needs of each particular unit.
- The District Committee. The District needs to keep an eye on how the units are doing. We tend to focus on units with issues. It is important to provide service to units with challenges. But the units that are doing well ought to be looked at as well. A well-functioning unit is a "Training Opportunity". These can be your very best presenters at Roundtables and District training events. It is a nasty and unfortunate tendency to only look at these things right around Recharter time. Don't fall into this trap. Units need service and recognition 12 months a year.
- The Council. Like the District, the Council needs to keep an eye on how the units are doing. The focus is slightly different, though. If there are units with needs or strengths, but the District does not have the resources to attend to these, Council needs to help the District.

The bottom line: Contact Reports are important and an invaluable tool. But only if they are being recorded, read and acted upon. Simply looking at the statistics of how many Contact Reports are being recorded will not do.