

Introduction to the Commissioner Service

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Unit Commissioner

Candidate, Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree

Abstract

While the Commissioner Corps serves as a tremendous resource to the unit-based Scouting leadership, its role is often underappreciated and its resources underutilized by these leaders due to unfamiliarity with the program. The purpose of this project was to expand knowledge amongst unit-based scouters of the role and purpose of the Commissioner Corps through a course developed for the University of Scouting. Its core aims were to introduce the history and organization of the Commissioner and to introduce the role of the Unit Commissioner. This course was instructed previously at the 2018 University of Scouting with great success but in a less formal and comprehensive format. Thus, in partial fulfillment of my Commissioner College Doctorate and based on the recommendations of the Project Review Committee, I endeavored to expand the curriculum to outline the responsibilities and key points for engagement with Unit Commissioners, to give guidance on how to utilize the Unit Commissioner as well as the appropriate point of contact in various scenarios. Future goals for this course include its continued instruction at the University of Scouting and expanded utilization of Unit Commissioners by Middle Tennessee unit leadership.

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Project Description and Evaluation

Introduction

Growing up in scouting, the role of a commissioner was completely foreign. I recognized my Scoutmaster and other adult leaders, but the anonymous man in a cream-colored Mercedes who came to campouts and occasional meetings was simply a mysterious observer. Though someone eventually explained his title, I remained ignorant, knowing nothing of his function or role within scouting. Later, when I moved back to Cookeville after law school, I was approached by a scouting mentor who encouraged me to consider becoming a commissioner. What I discovered in researching and then assuming the role was that the commissioner is one of the most undervalued components of the program. This network of volunteers is active at the unit level and beyond and wear many hats, including those bestowed upon the Commissioner – representative, coach, teacher, paramedic, and friend. Collectively, they offer an incredible quality improvement resource to units and I truly believe that the commissioner college is what separates Scouts BSA from other youth programs.

In speaking with multiple unit level volunteers throughout the years, I have found that I was not alone in my ignorance of the commissioner program, as frequently even these experienced leaders are unfamiliar with what a commissioner is and who represents their unit. I believe this was a failure of our training of these unit level volunteers.

As I embarked upon my commissioner journey, I started attending the annual commissioner's college. This training is one of the best coordinated programs I've attended and allowed me to progress through a unified curriculum about what being a commissioner means and how to address specific issues. Several years later, I attended the University of Scouting and noticed that the unit-focused training about Commissioner Service was less well-organized and not unified, lacking any real focus on the role and purpose of commissioner.

Project Purpose and Development

In considering the Doctorate of Commissioner Service and attending my first pre-doctorate classes, I felt called to establish a curriculum specifically for the University of Scouting which would increase exposure to and utilization of the commissioner corps. After working to prepare a comprehensive outline and research regarding the Commissioner Corps, I received approval and worked in the direction of getting this project completed. The outline and approval are attached as Exhibit 1.

My goals for the project were several fold; I aspired to give background and context to the program, outline the responsibilities and key points for engagement with Unit Commissioners, to give guidance on how to utilize the Unit Commissioner as well as the appropriate point of contact in various scenarios.

As I worked on finding the appropriate material to include in this project, I looked at numerous pieces of scouting literature. First, I looked at commissioner college courses to see how those defined commissioners and their role. These included BCS 101—core concepts of commissioner service, BCS 103—Linking District Resources, as well as archived courses BCS 101—the commissioner concept, BCS 103—commissioner and the district, BCS 105—practical solutions to common unit needs, BCS 110—commissioner style, BCS 112—what would you do, BCS 121—introduction to venturing commissioner science; and MCS 303 and 304—commissioner lifesaving I and II.

Secondly, I surveyed the unit leader training materials to see the information that it conveyed as the base level training for those volunteers. The specific volume I referenced was the Scoutmaster Position-Specific Training book. I was very disappointed to see the very slim amount of information it offered. After the review, I knew why so many unit leaders did not know their commissioner: as I had experienced before, they had simply not been exposed to their role and their resource.

As the first portion of the course, I wanted to highlight the history of the Commissioner Corps. While I felt that this background and a review of the commissioner structure was important to the curriculum, I wanted to avoid the course turning it into a “Commissioner 101” course, and rather focused more on other components of the course after a brief overview.

Next, I wanted to define what a commissioner, and specifically unit commissioner is and to focus on the five roles of a commissioner. The goal of this portion was to introduce the many parts of the commissioner's job and to highlight that the job is not broad or singularly-focused but rather multilayered and specific. Admittedly, the first draft was very basic and I was given many suggestions to make it a better piece of work.

Evaluation

The second draft was prepared with the focus of teaching the inaugural course at the 2018 University of Scouting and fleshing out more of the components of the project. Extensive edits were made based on the suggestions from the committee.

At this phase, I taught the course at the November 2018 University of Scouting. The participants evaluated all courses and those results are listed in the appendix (Exhibit 2). To summarize, The Net Promoter Score survey was used to score the various questions on the survey, with a score of 70-100 being excellent. Questions were asked regarding the usefulness of the topic, likeliness to recommend to colleagues, effective use of class time, and likeliness to recommend the instructor. Scores for all questions were 83.3% except for the second question regarding the likelihood of recommending this course to others, wherein the course received 100%. Notably, average scores for the general college were 64%, 70.7%, 79.27%, and 79.3%, respectively, meaning that the course received excellent and above-average ratings across the board. Most important was that while it was collectively perceived as useful and my quality as an

instructor was good, all participants would recommend the course to others, which was ultimately the goal.

Revision

After teaching the course and receiving feedback, I again submitted the course to the committee for their review and approval. The committee provided very productive feedback. At this point, using their guidance and my perceptions from the course itself, I endeavored to take the bones of the presentation I had previously used and to expand on areas that the committee was interested in seeing. The final draft of the course is attached as Exhibit 3.

Ultimately, I have expanded the talk substantially. I have broadened the review of the commissioner role to include slides about the jobs and roles of the unit commissioner, with one slide dedicated to elaborating on each of the five core roles – representative, teacher, paramedic, coach, and friend. I specifically gave practical examples of the strengths and possible supports from a unit commissioner in these slides. To highlight how a commissioner can be involved and times in which they may help with charter renewal, old slides were elaborated upon and new, interactive slides were created.

Given that much of the course at the University of Scouting was open discussion after the lecture where leaders asked for specific guidance on how a commissioner could help in various scenarios, the next step was to transform the lecture to be more interactive and mimic this discussion in a more structured way. Reinforcing the five roles

of the commissioner, I created interactive slides highlighting the ways a commissioner could help with an issue by using all of the “hats” they were.

Finally, given that the Commissioner service is a relatively new concept and often unfamiliar role, confusion may exist for learners regarding who to call when and for what. Therefore, in addition to defining the Commissioner hierarchy of leadership, I also created a component of “who to call” using various scenarios. Ultimately, this will highlight that the commissioner is a gateway to many other resources and leaders, but will also define how it is useful in various scenarios.

Conclusions

I believe strongly that the commissioner corps is one of the reasons for scouting's long-term success. Its strengths lie in ensuring adherence to programming, identifying and intervening early in unit-based problems and challenges, and for allowing veteran scouters to remain involved while sharing best practices for scouting. Its use has been limited by a general lack of knowledge of what commissioners are, what they do, and how they can be helpful, and this simple intervention provides a potential avenue for expansion and improvement. My future goal for this course is that it will be perpetually included in the course offerings of the University of Scouting and its expanded utilization of Unit Commissioners by Middle Tennessee unit leadership, and I am excited to see where it goes!

Appendix

Exhibit 1: Commissioner College Doctorate Project Proposal

Exhibit 2: Summary of University of Scouting Survey Feedback of Classes & Instructors

Exhibit 3: Final Course Powerpoint

Exhibit 1

Project Proposal from 6/23/17

Jason F. Hicks
Unit Commissioner

Standardizing Commissioner Courses to University of Scouting Program

Until I went to the University of Scouting program in March I had no idea there was a need for this project. As I sat in a University of Scouting class, I noticed there was no consistency as I moved from room to room. Having gone to commissioner college four times and teaching twice I was very familiar with its materials and its standardization.

After emailing with Tim Acree and Joel Eacker and discussing the idea it has been refined to developing standardized classes on commissioners for the University of Scouting.

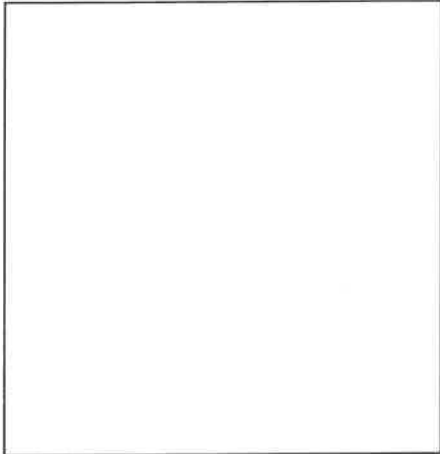
My plan is to develop three classes: The Cub Scout Commissioner, The Boy Scout Commissioner and the Venturing Commissioner. The content of each will largely be the same but it will allow one class on commissioners to be in each track. I will include materials from the BSA publication "Commissioner—Helps for Packs, Troops, and Crews."

Each course will cover the role of the commissioner, their problem-solving capacities, their role from the district to the unit, how to use them as a resources for the unit and especially the unit leaders and the commissioner role in recharter and unit assessment.

As I develop each course they will be put into folders that can be zipped similar to the commissioner college course available online. They will contain the course contents, course outline, teaching notes, course materials list, power point presentation and the commissioner helps publication. If I find other resources to add they will be supplemented into the folders.

Exhibit 2

Summary of University of Scouting Survey Feedback of Classes and Instructors



GEN131 – Introduction to Commissioner Service

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	My NPS	All Courses
Useful topic?								1	2	3	6	83.3%	64%
How likely to recommend course?									3	3	6	100%	70.7%
Instructor used time effectively								1	2	3	6	83.3%	79.3%
How likely to recommend instructor?								1	1	4	6	83.3%	79.3%

Exhibit 3

Final Course Powerpoint
(incorporating all previous edits)



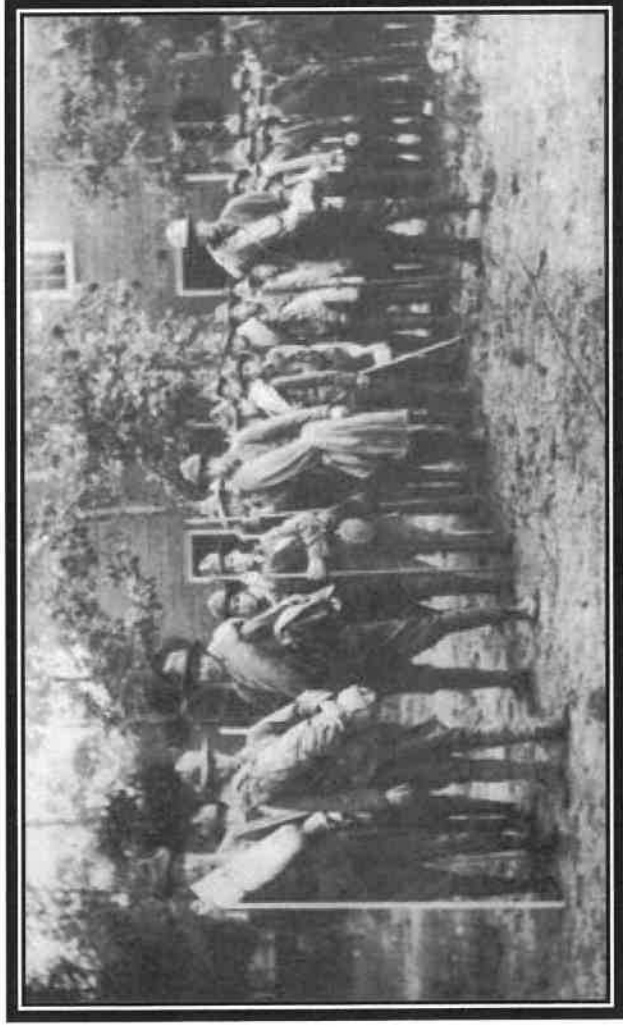
Introduction to Commissioner Service

GEN 131

Jason F. Hicks

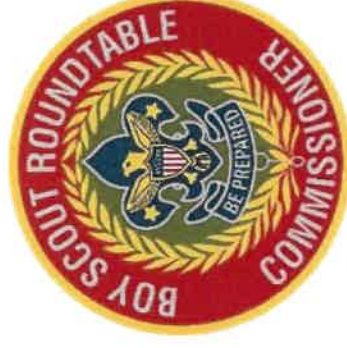
November 16, 2019

History of Commissioner Service



Early BSA pictures from circa 1916

Commissioner Structure

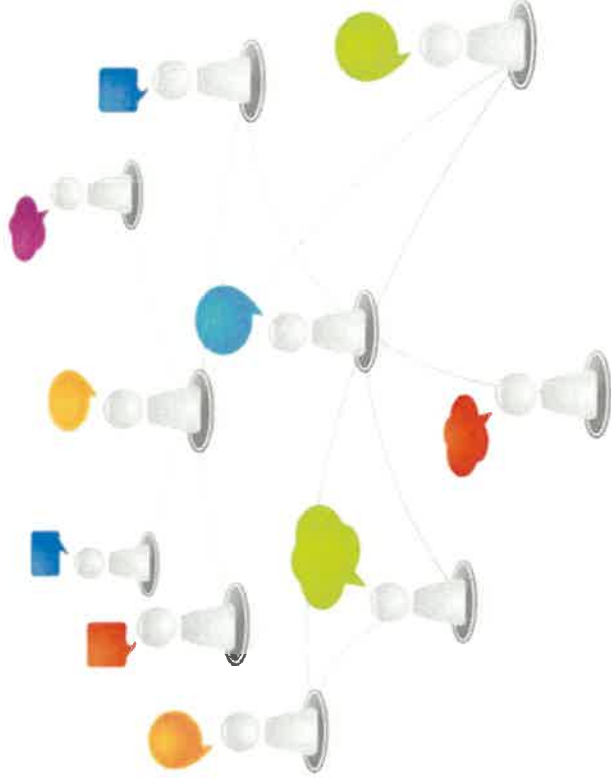


What is a commissioner?

- **Experienced Scouter**
- **Trained in unit support**
- **Resource**
- **Liaison to district and counsel**
- **Advocate**

What's a unit commissioner do?

- Create connections
- Assess strengths and needs
- Develop *Unit Service Plan*
- Supports progress in *Journey to Excellence*
- Facilitate charter renewal



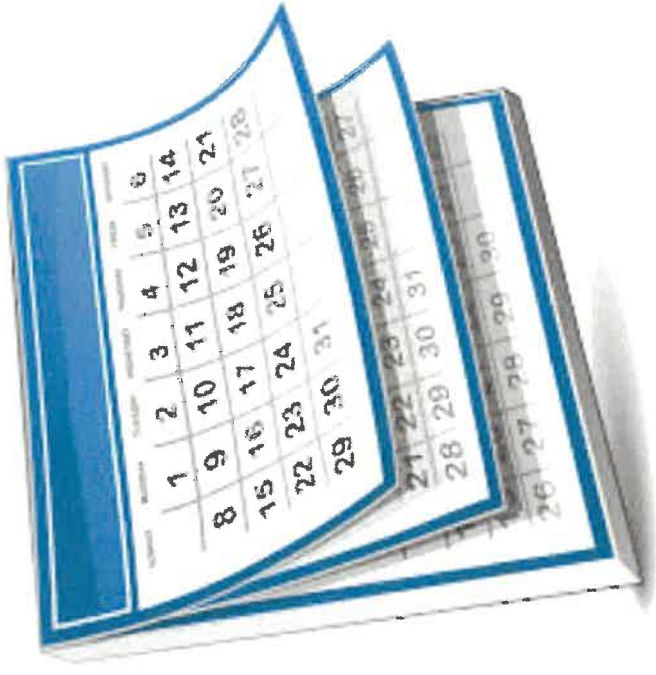
Unit Commissioner's Roles



- **Representative**
- **Teacher**
- **Coach**
- **Paramedic**
- **Friend**

Representative

- Educate on new programs
- Communicate BSA policy changes
- Promote upcoming activities



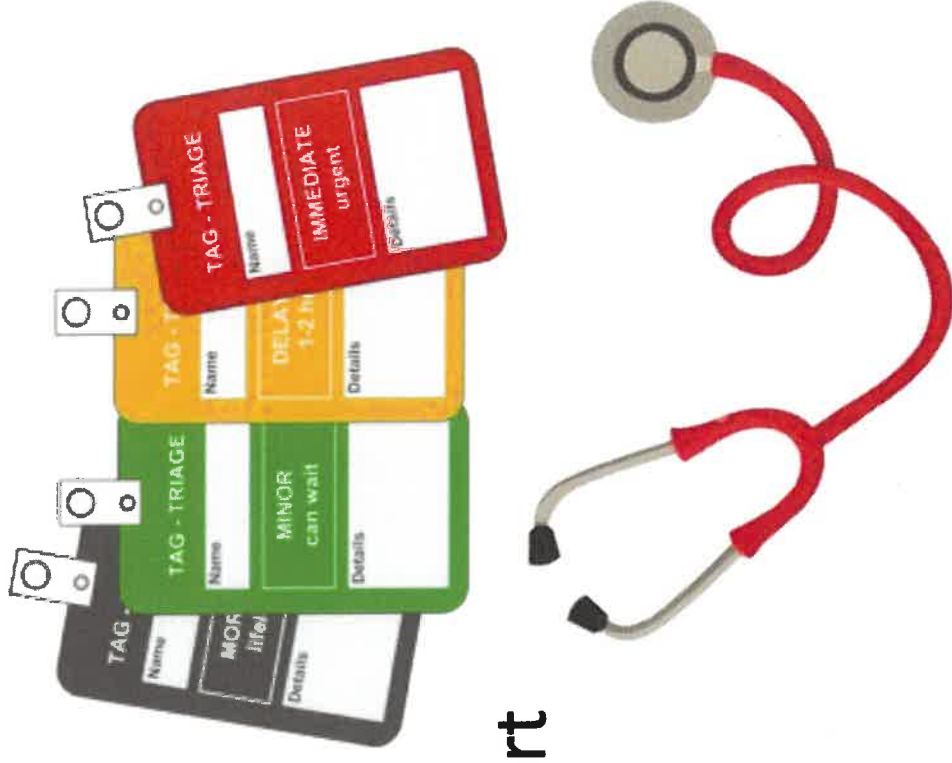
Teacher

- Educate the unit leadership
- Resource of past experience
- Supplement to formal training



Paramedic

- Triage areas of success and improvement
- Anticipate challenges
- Readily available
- Act quickly to assist
- Support in crisis
- Facilitate district/council support
- Follow up



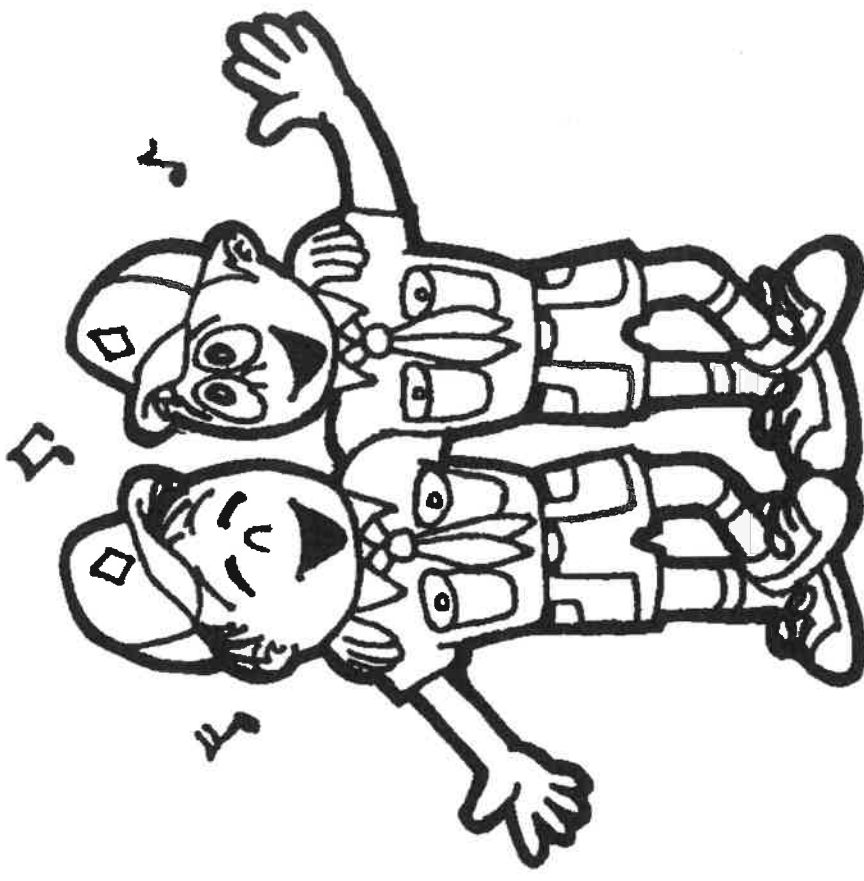
Coach

- **Veteran Leader**
- **Supporter**
- **Strategist**
- **Mediator**



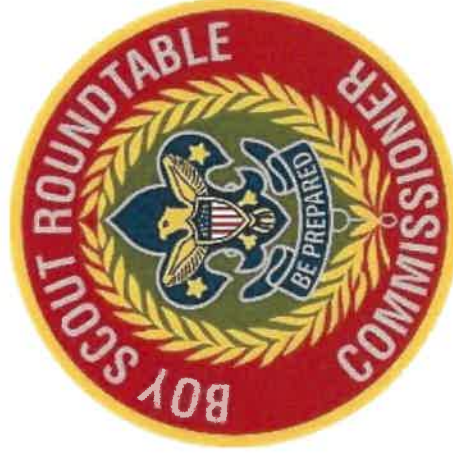
Friend

- Most important role
- Sounding board
- Confirm you're doing the right thing!
- Brainstorm solutions
- Advocate for necessary resources



Roundtable Commissioners

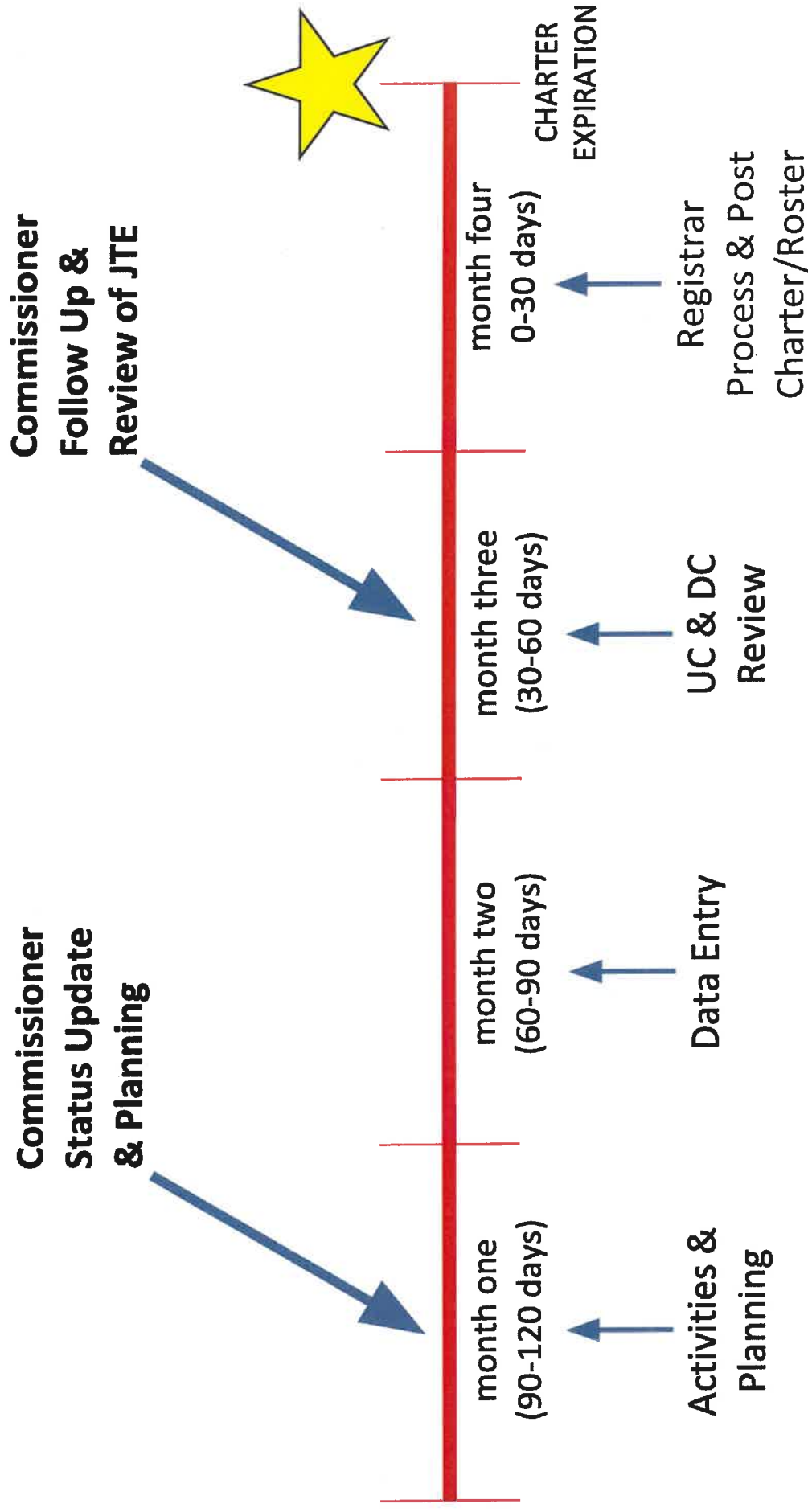
- Host Monthly Roundtable event
 - Supplemental training
 - Guidance on program topics & structure
 - Inspire and motivate leaders
 - All Unit Leaders (including Committee) should attend



How to Involve Your Commissioner

- Get their contact information
- Add them to the troop email list
- Invite them to Courts of Honor
- Expect to hear from and work with them around charter renewal
- Reach out when you have ANY questions!

Charter Renewal



Ok, but how's this work?

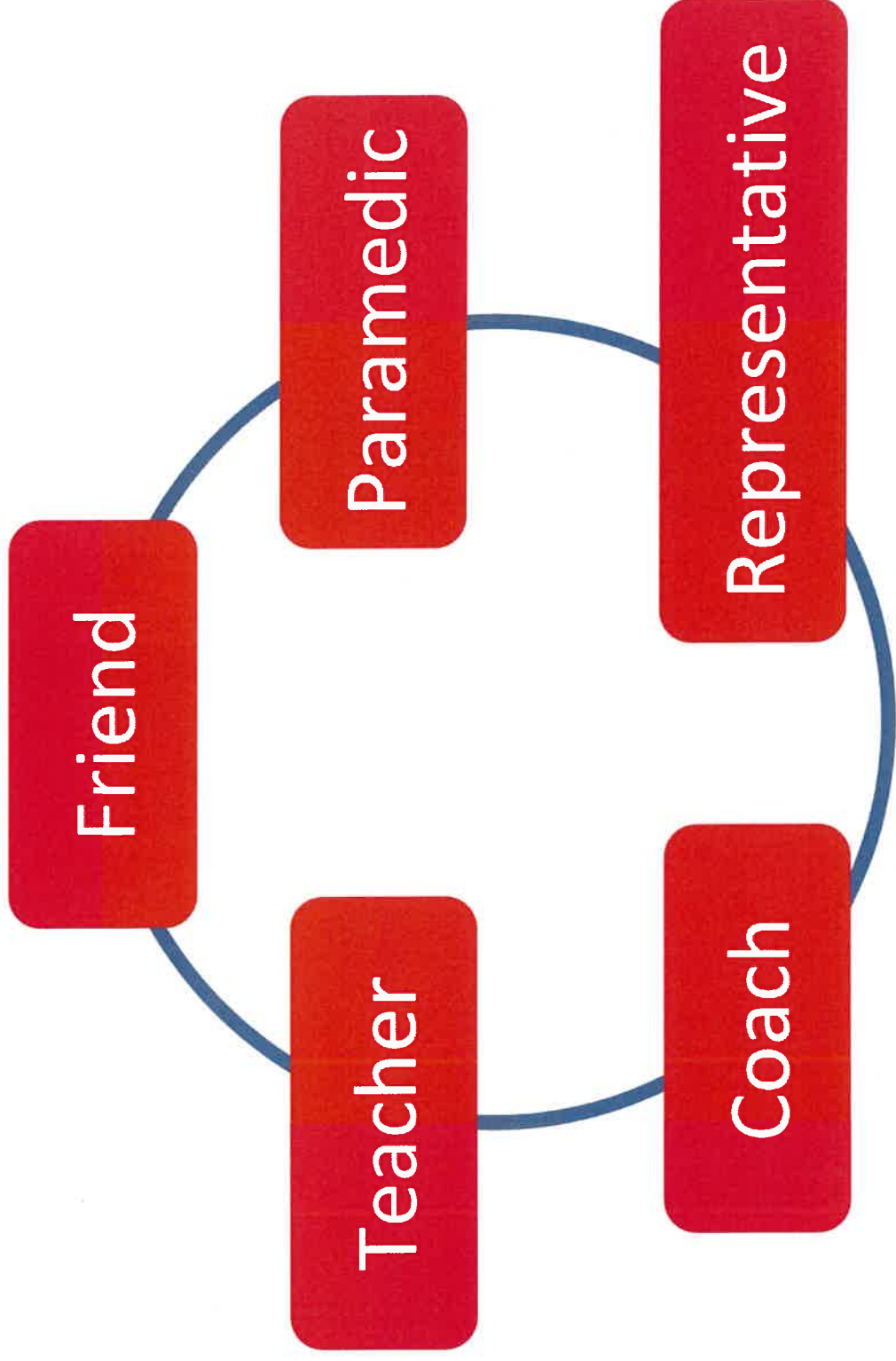
What kinds of questions are appropriate to ask of your Commissioner?

Scenario 1:

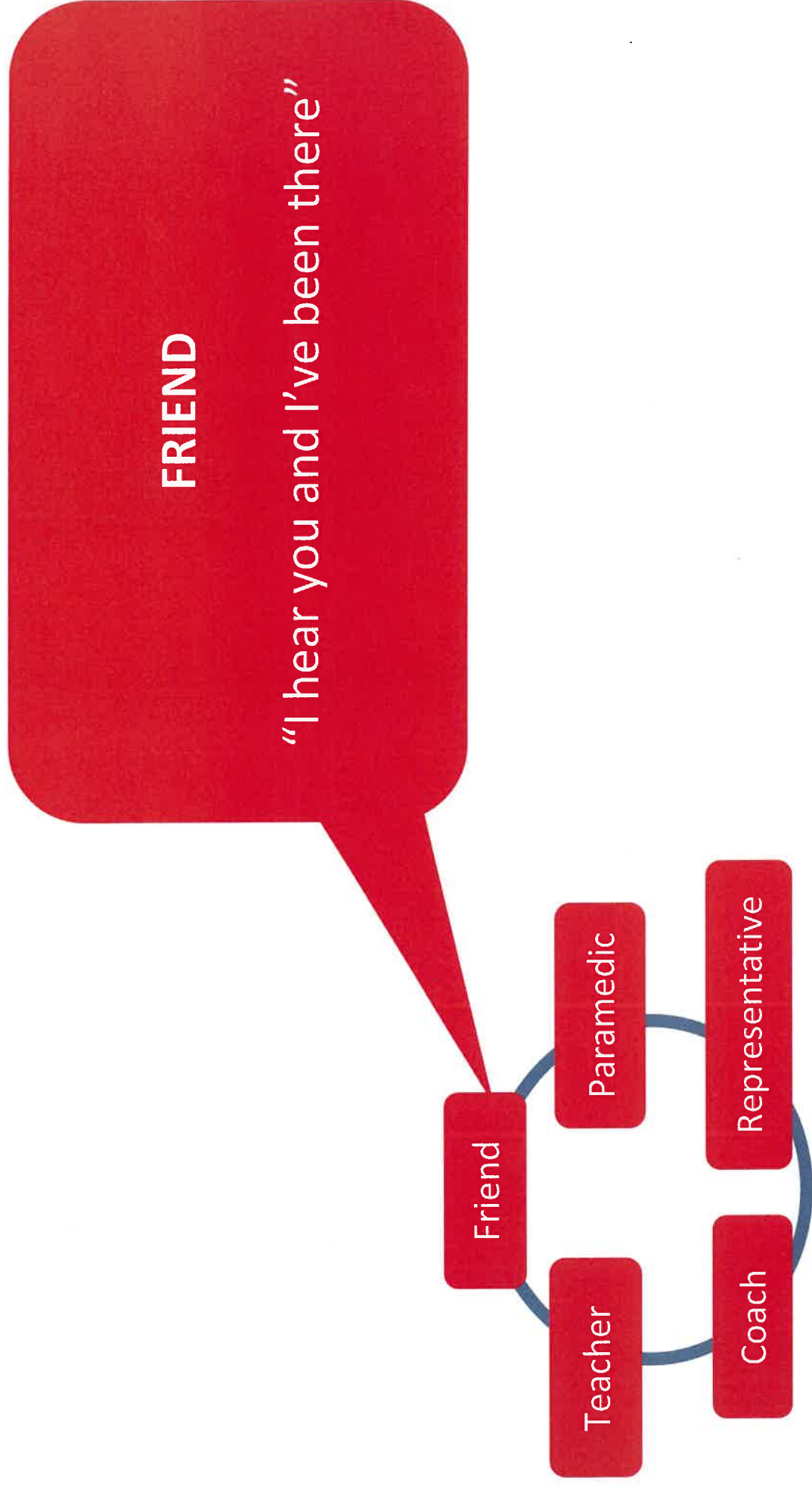
We are struggling to recruit!

- **We just aged out FIVE Eagle Scouts and lost a third of our active membership**
- **We've had Scouts visit, but they don't come back**
- **We're not getting new Cub Scouts**

CALL YOUR COMMISSIONER!



We are struggling to recruit!

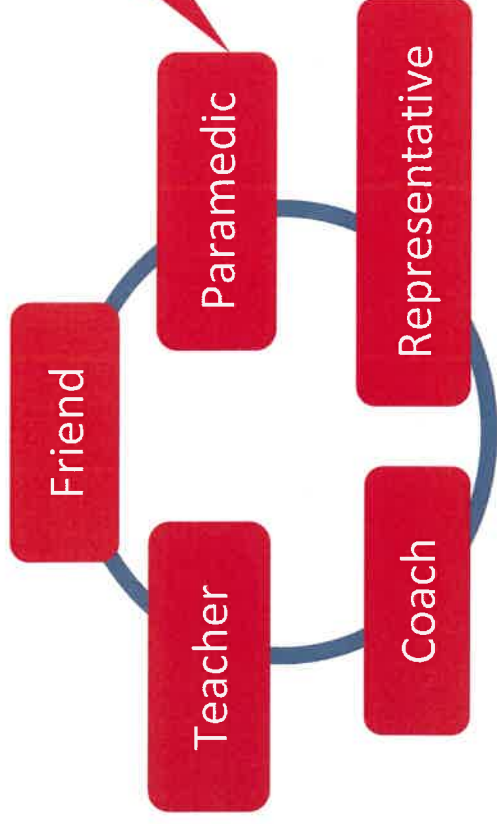


We are struggling to recruit!

PARAMEDIC

“Is there something in JTE progress and programming to improve?”

“Here are the issues and some possible fixes”

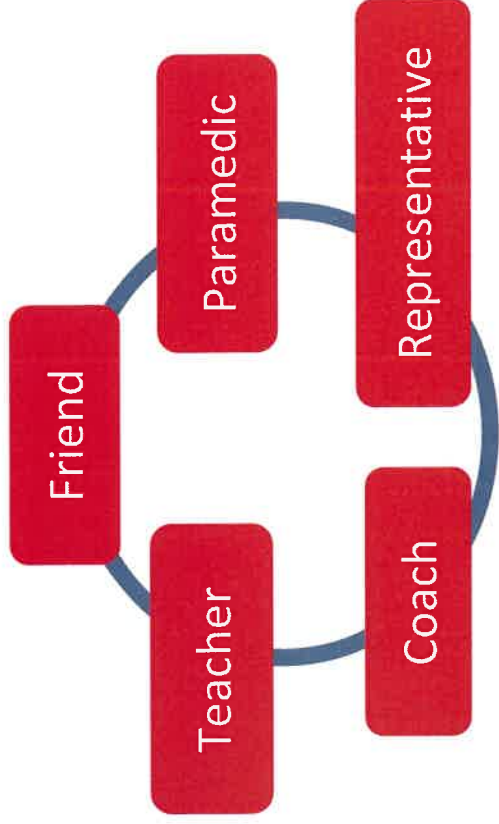


We are struggling to recruit!

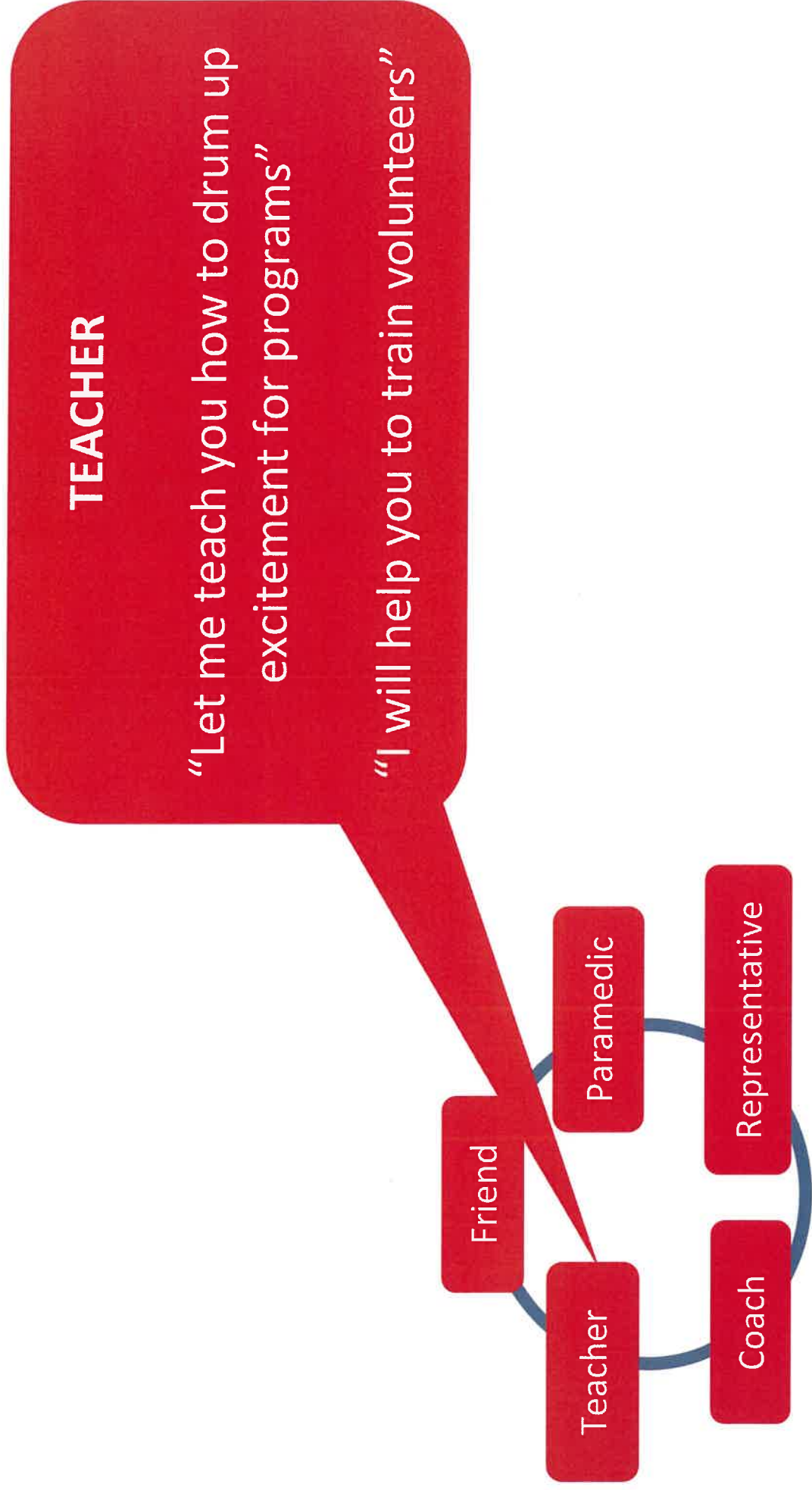
REPRESENTATIVE

“Let me involve the district to have a recruitment event”

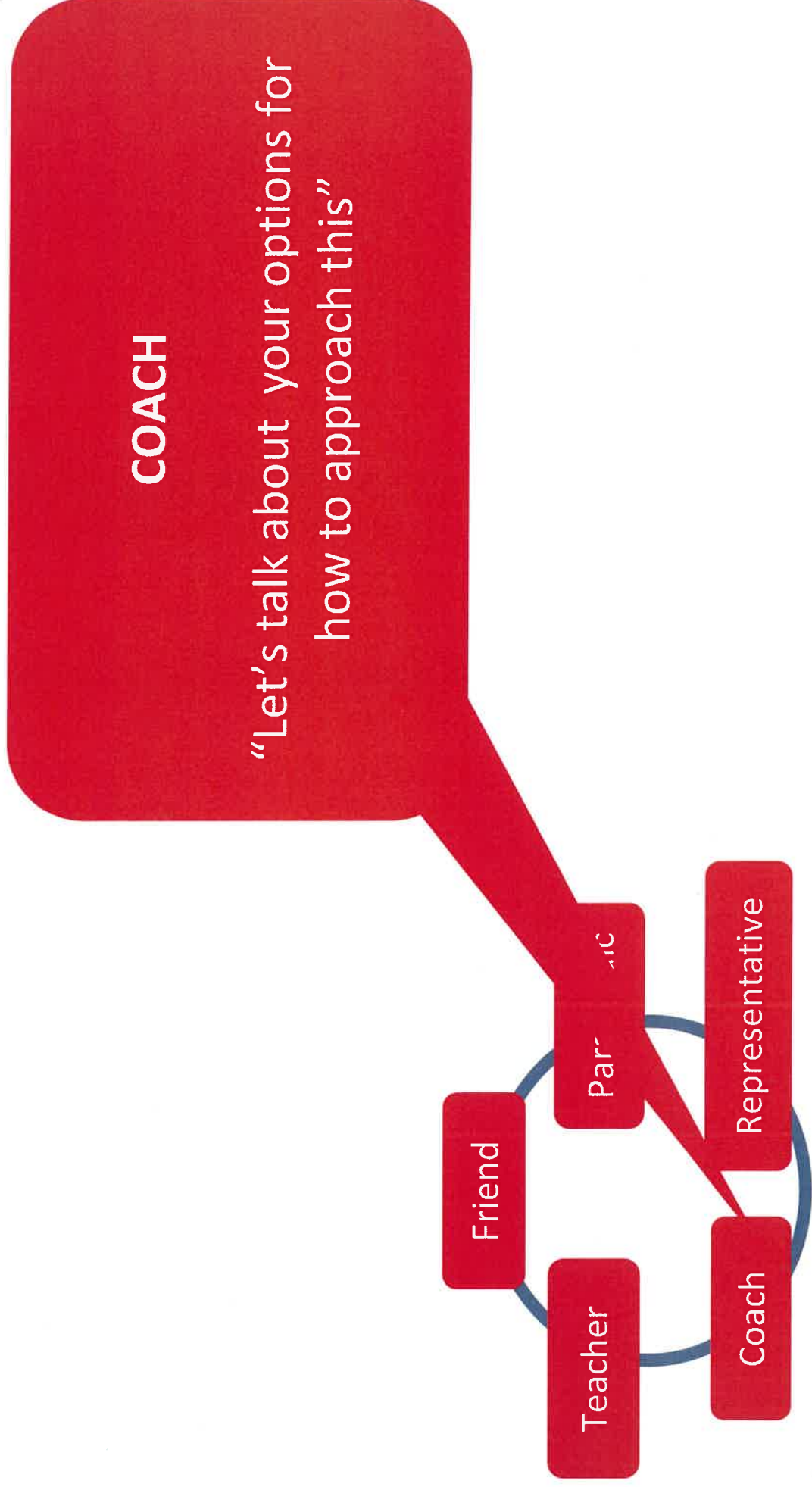
“I’m going to connect you with the local Cub Scout pack”



We are struggling to recruit!



We are struggling to recruit!

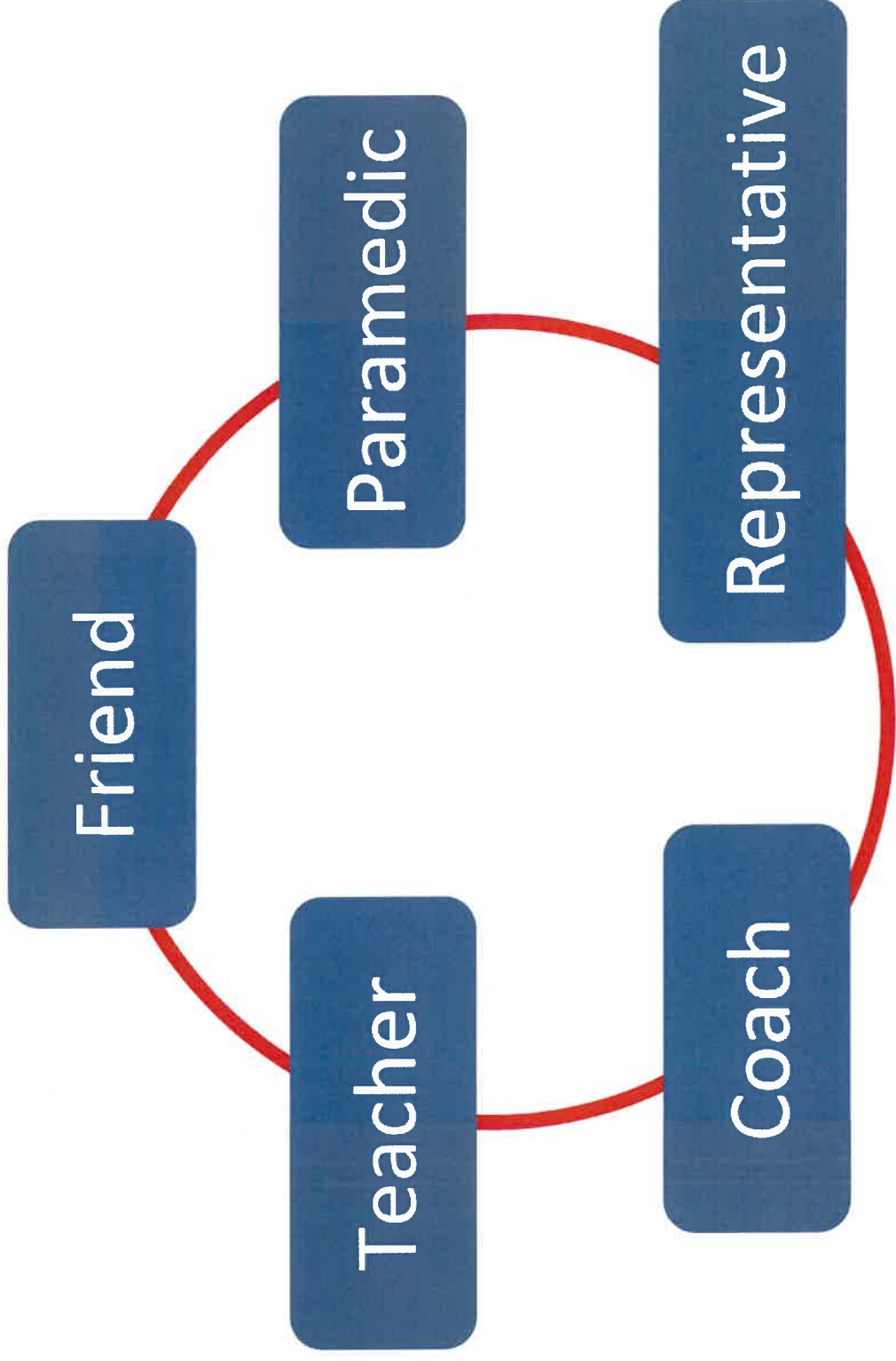


Scenario 2:

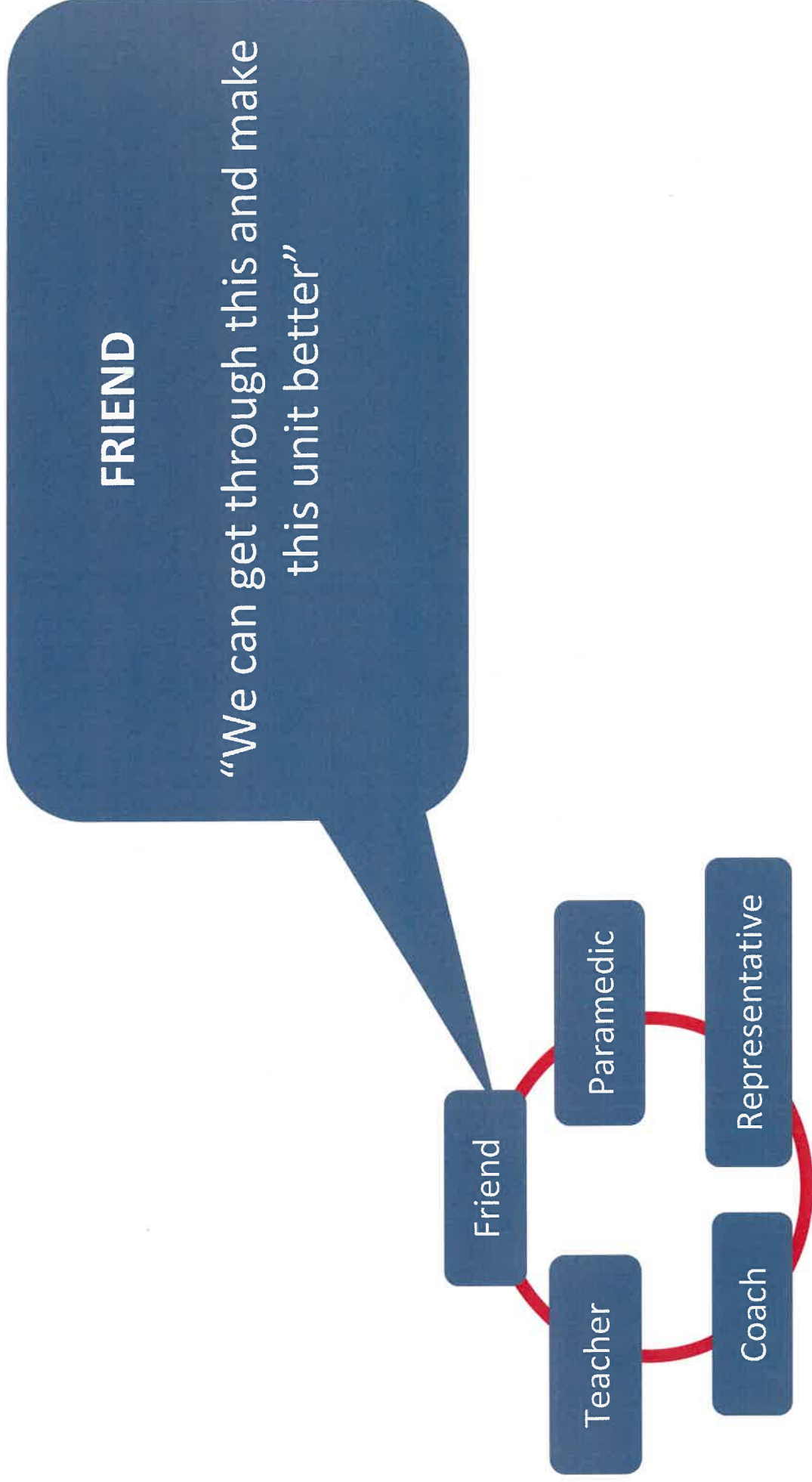
We're concerned about our leader

- Several parents have expressed concern about our Scoutmaster's leadership style**
- Our troop committee has reviewed the concerns and feel that the Scoutmaster is not acting in accordance with BSA's policies and procedures**

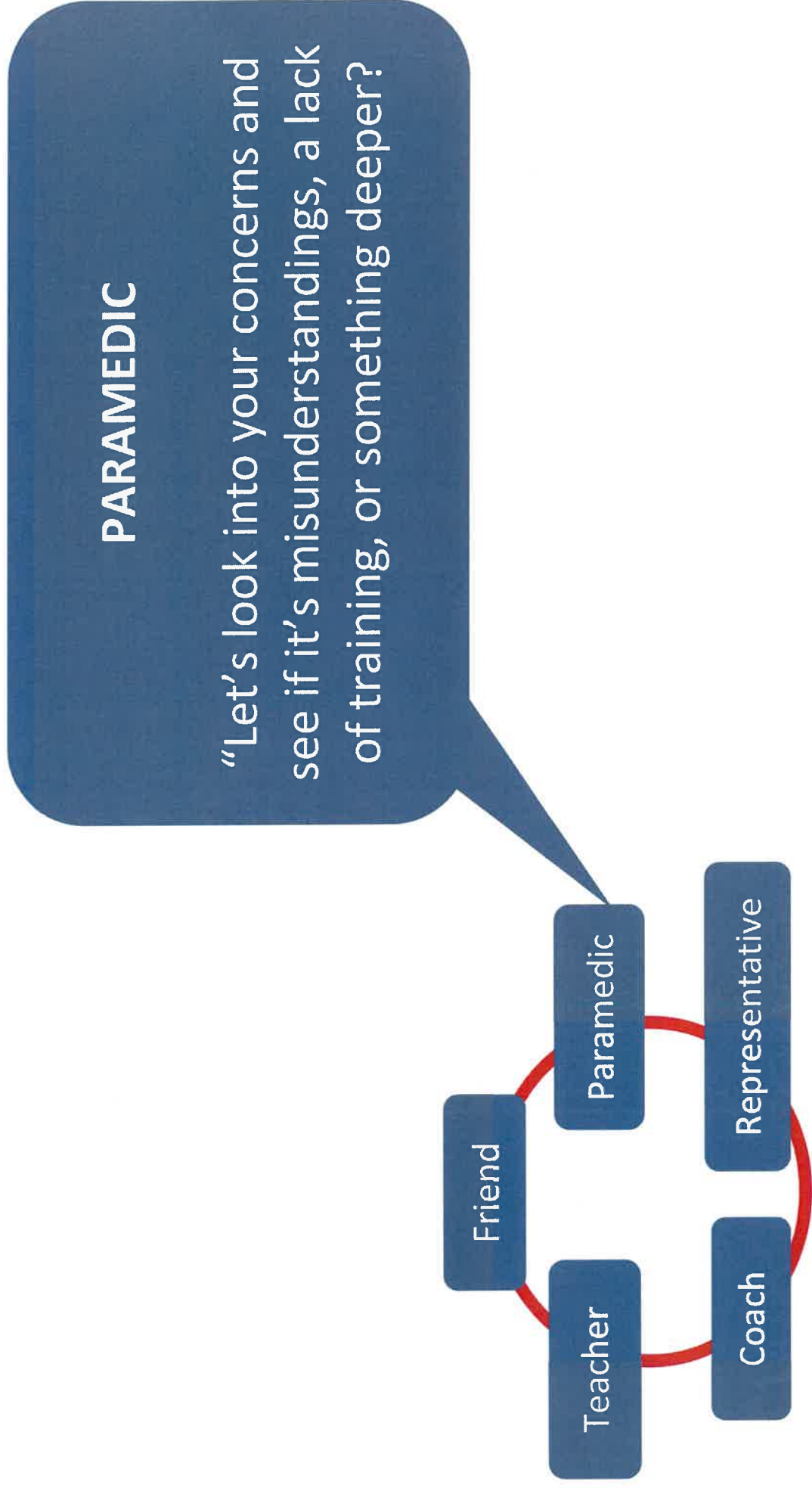
CALL YOUR COMMISSIONER!



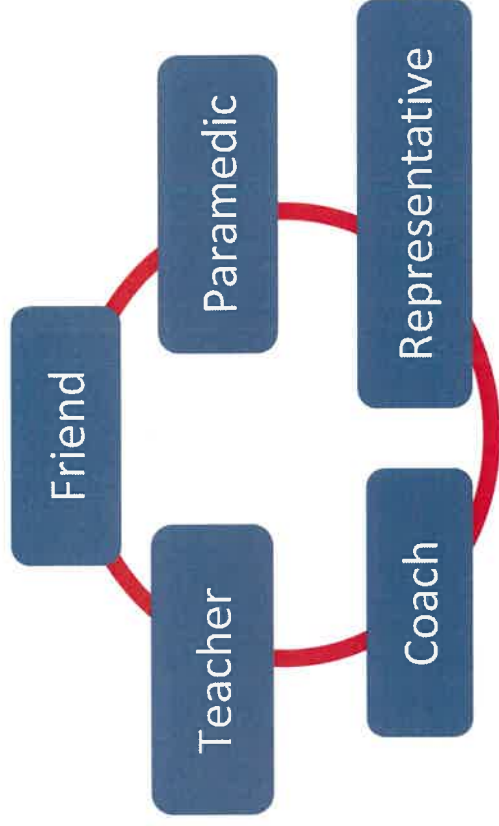
We're concerned about our leader



We're concerned about our leader



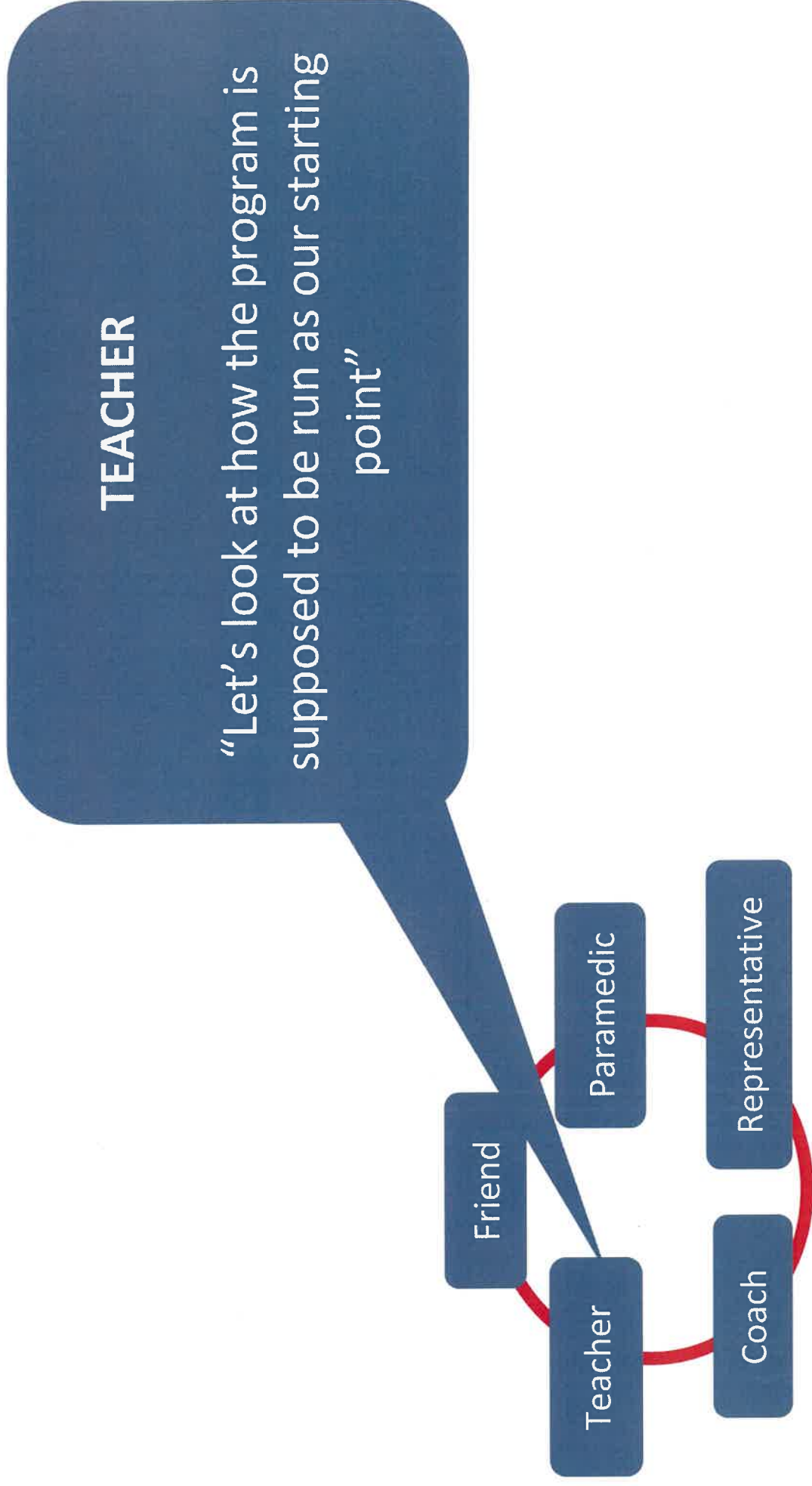
We're concerned about our leader



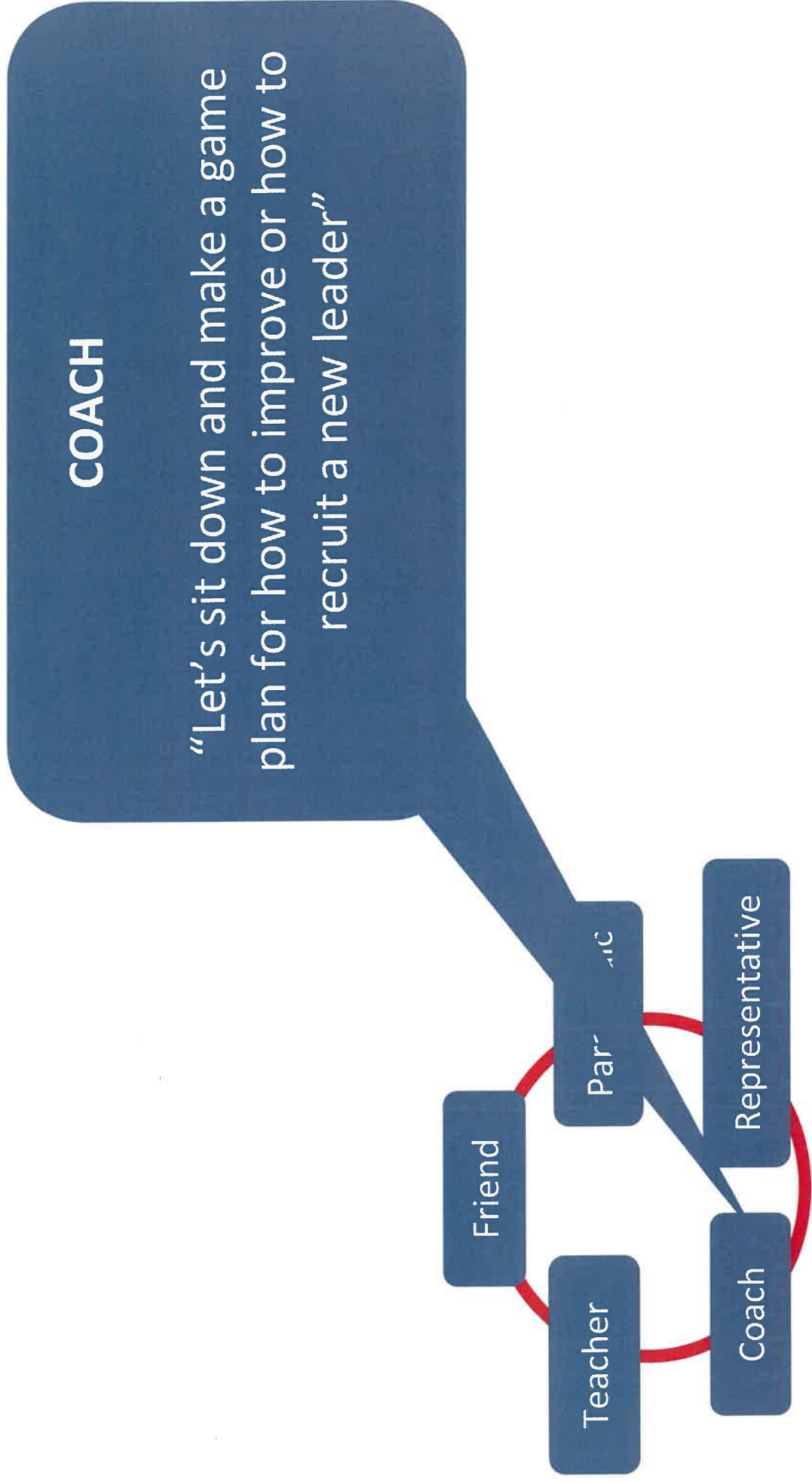
REPRESENTATIVE

“We need to get support from the district and council to move forward”

We're concerned about our leader



We're concerned about our leader

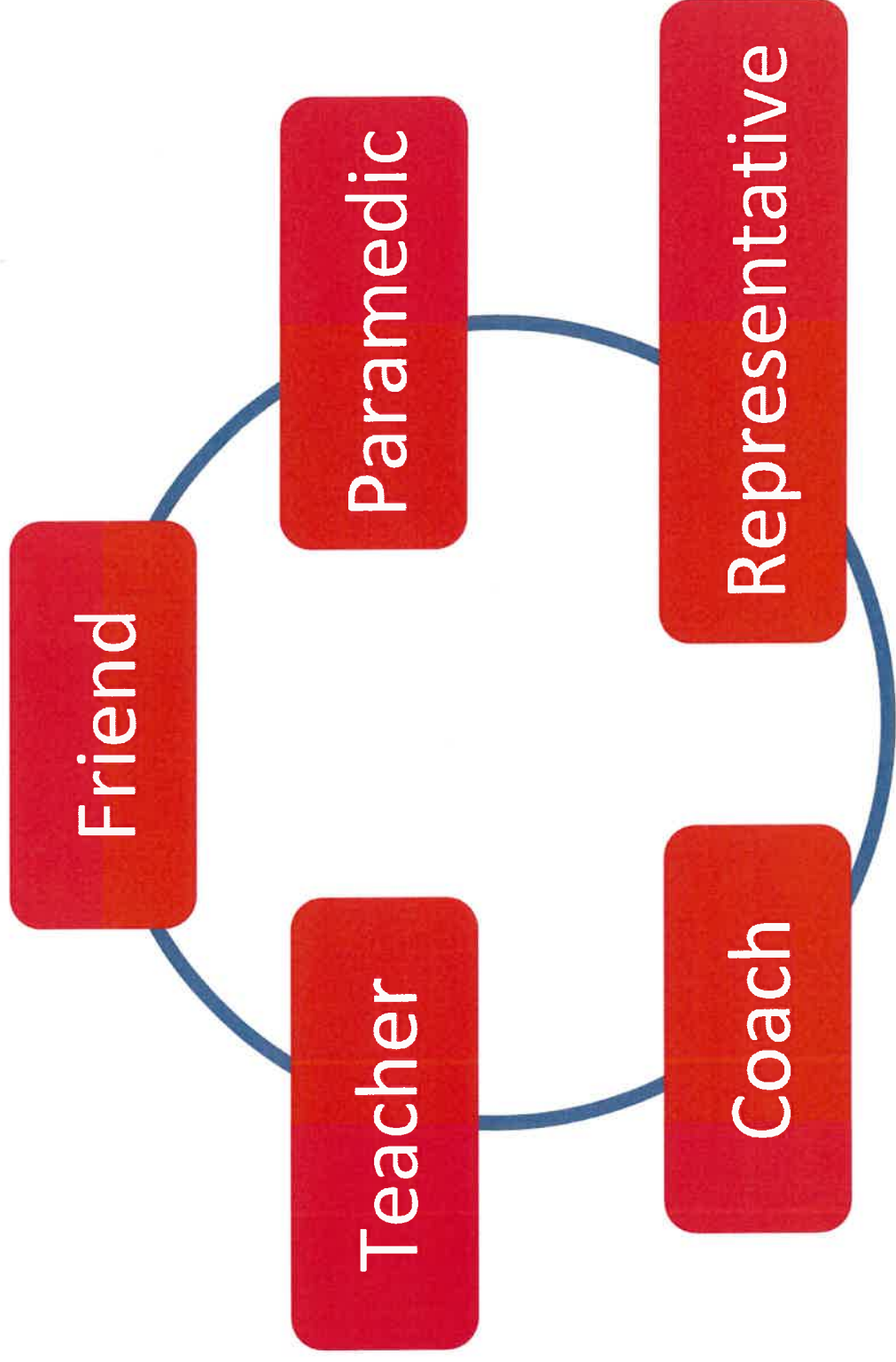


Scenario 3:

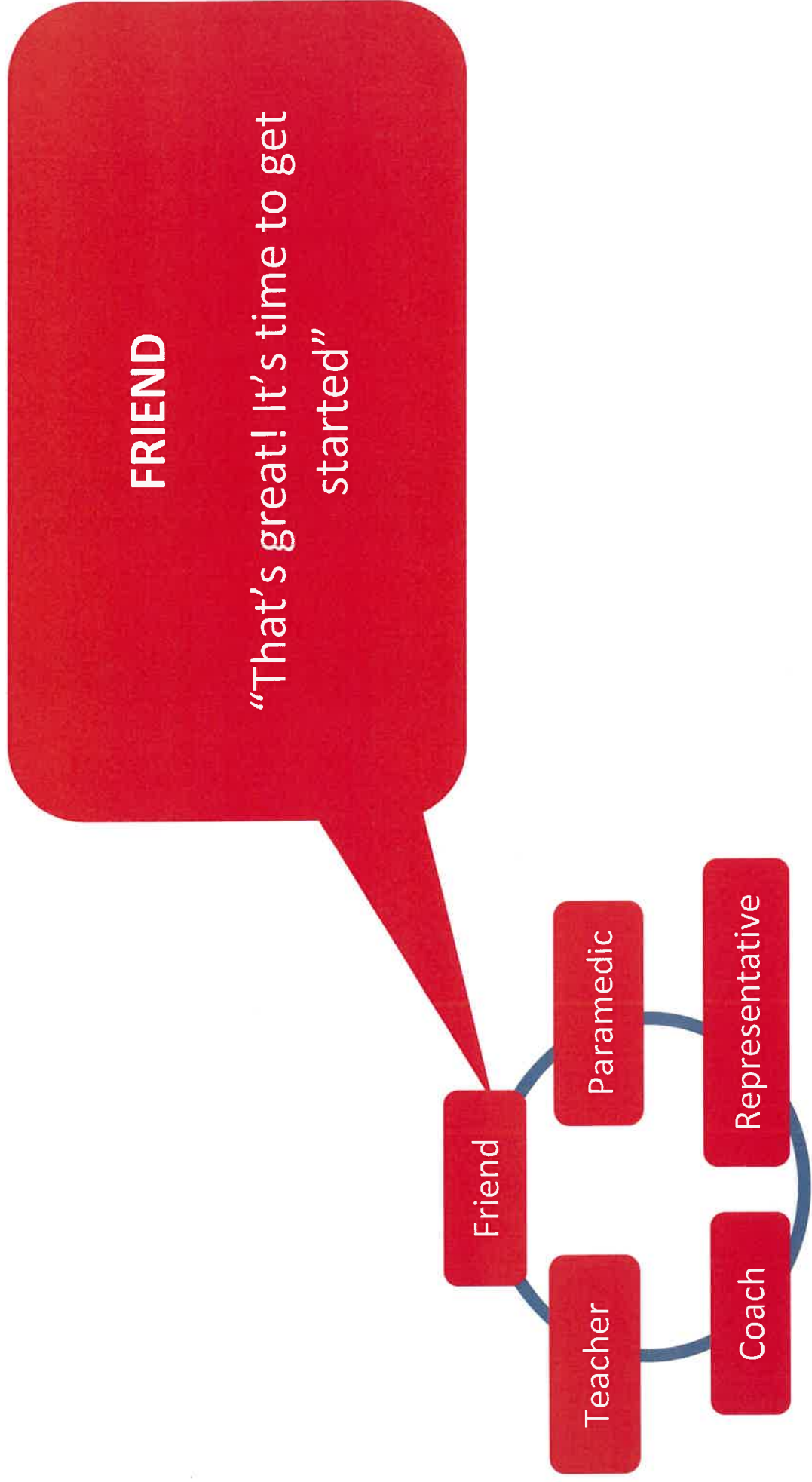
We have new, untrained leaders

- We just recruited 7 new Scouts and their parents want to help lead the troop...**
- Where do we start?**

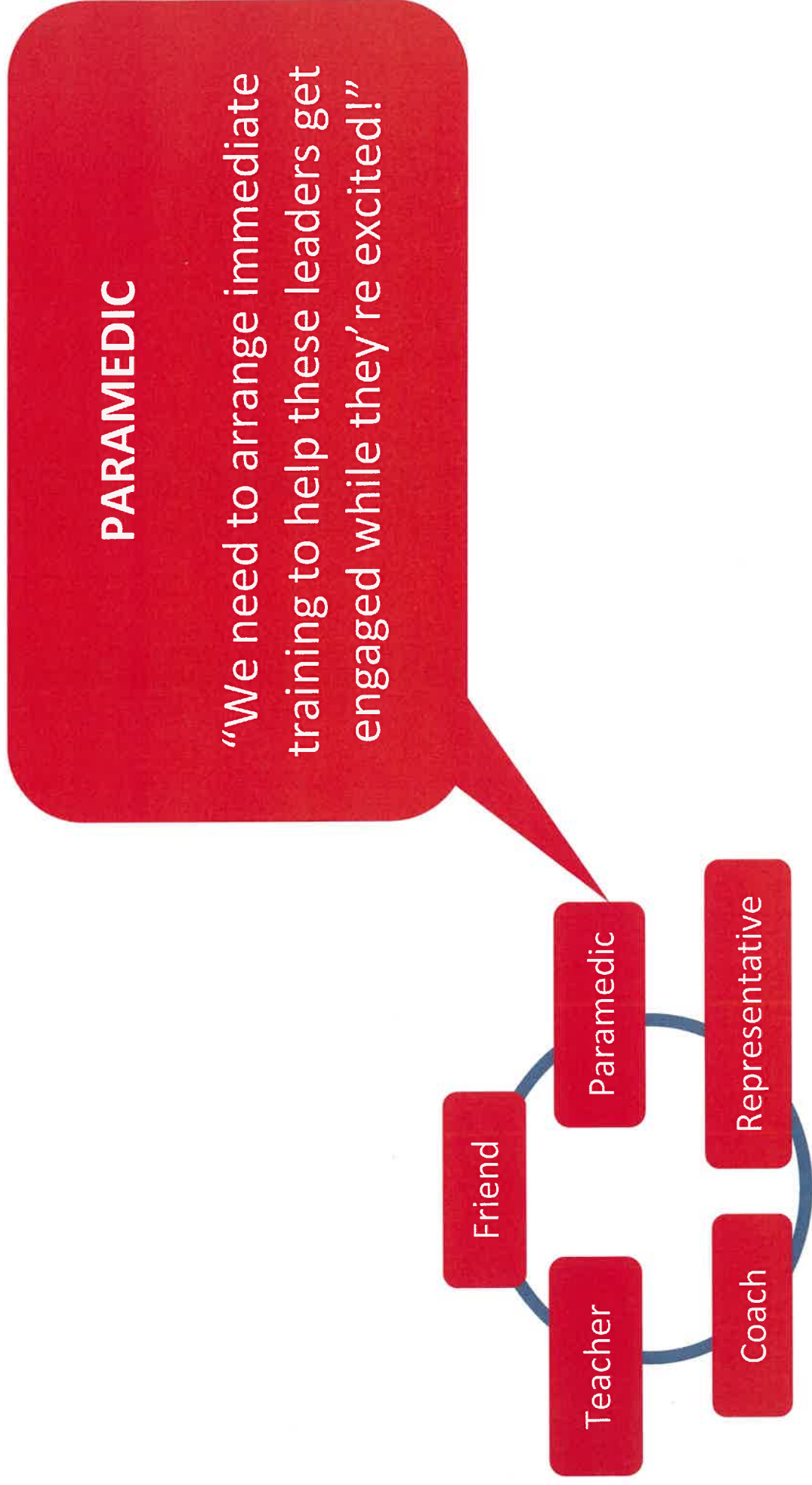
CALL YOUR COMMISSIONER!



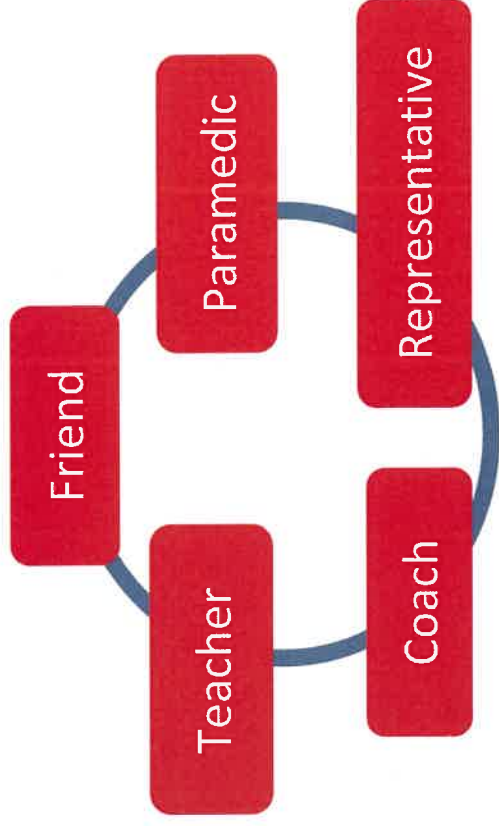
We have new, untrained leaders



We have new, untrained leaders



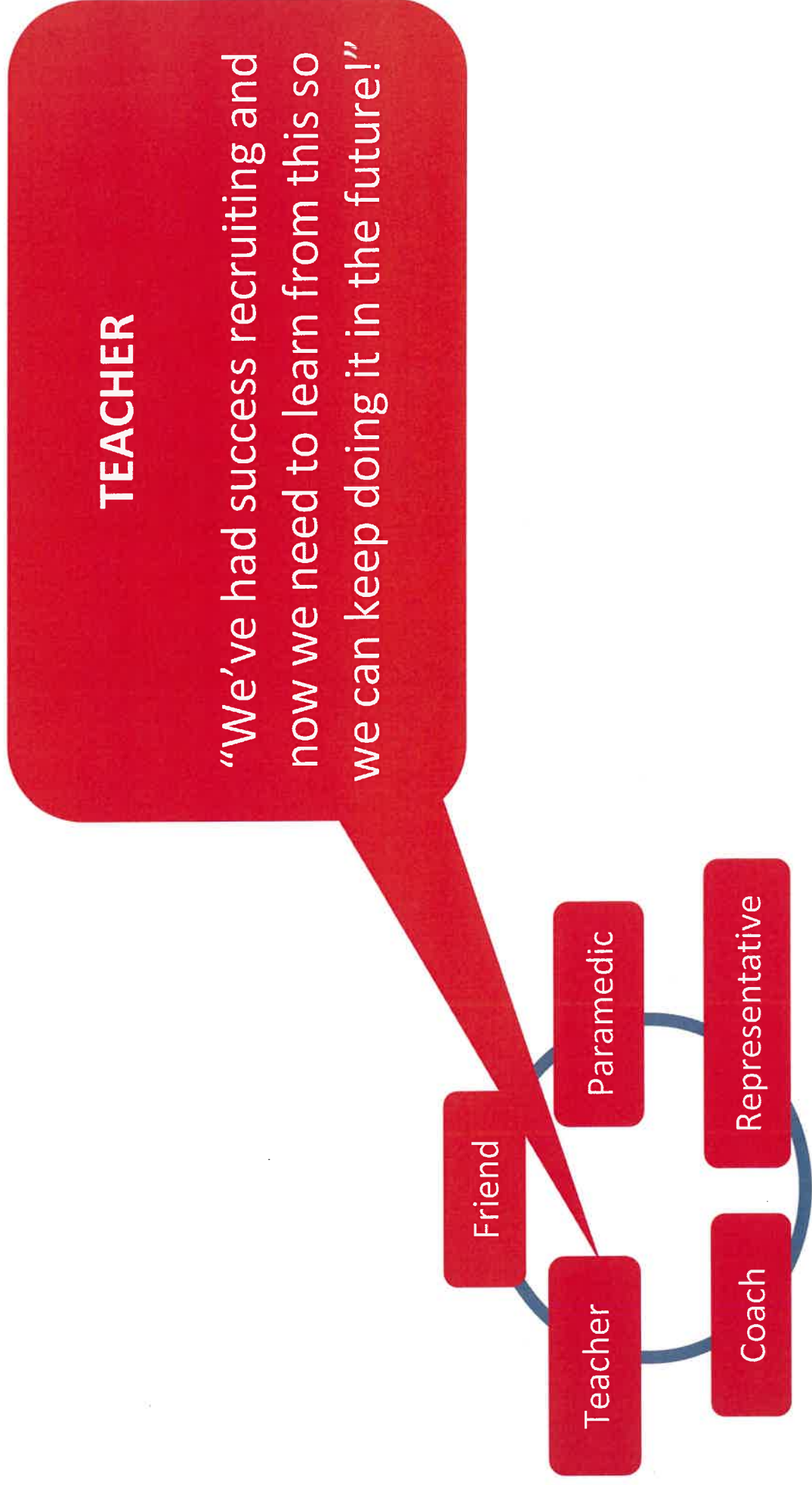
We have new, untrained leaders



REPRESENTATIVE

“Let’s speak with the district or council training chair to get on the same page”

We have new, untrained leaders



We have new, untrained leaders



Alphabet Soup

UC? DC? RC? CO? Training Chair?

Who is the right person to call in which situation?

- National Commissioner
- Regional Commissioner
- Area Commissioner
- Assistant Area Commissioner
- Council Commissioners
- Assistant Council Commissioners
- District Commissioners
- Assistant District Commissioner for Roundtable
- Roundtable Commissioners
- Assistant District Commissioners
- Unit Commissioners
- Unit Leadership



Who should you call?

- Who is my commissioner?
- My commissioner isn't very involved
- It's charter time and I haven't heard from my commissioner

Thank you for your
service to scouting.