

PATHFINDERS
+ A Journey

The title is rendered in a bold, hand-drawn, black-and-white style. The word "PATHFINDERS" is in all caps and sits above a thick horizontal line. Below this line, the word "A Journey" is written in a mix of caps and lowercase letters. A large, hand-drawn cross is positioned to the left of "A Journey". A dashed line arches over "PATHFINDERS" and under "A Journey", framing the text.

By Isoroku Vernon

Pathfinders: A Journey

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FOREWORD

As a foreword, let me tell you how this book came about, and a bit about myself. I didn't realize it at the time, but many of my childhood and young adult experiences prepared me for later involvement in Pathfinders.

To start off with, I grew up camping and hiking. We were a very outdoorsy family. My parents were not KOA campers. They were the kind of people who would look at a map and say, "Pat's Hole and Echo Park? Never heard of it. Let's go there and camp." Just FYI, Echo Park is a campground in Pat's Hole, which is on the back side of Dinosaur National Monument. Most people get there by boat, but you can also reach it by a five-mile 4x4 road that becomes impassable if it rains for a few days. Our family did it in a 1970s station wagon.

If we were not hours away from any help and on a road we probably shouldn't have been on, it wasn't a Vernon family campout. And a Vernon family campout meant full-on roughing it—from going in the bush, to packing in food and water for a week or two. Each trip was packed full of learning. As we hiked, Mom would explain everything around us. If we found an edible plant, we would taste it. If the clouds changed, she would ask us what it meant. We learned about the rocks we walked on. We found things like Native American ruins and dinosaur bones. We learned how to find our way if we got lost. I honestly thought all kids who went camping had similar experiences.

This caused some problems when I started going on church-sponsored hikes. There, the point seemed to be to go for a walk and not lose anyone. I will admit that I found church hikes very tame and boring compared to the ones my family did—and I may not have been very cooperative with the leaders.

My teen years were quite a contradiction. I took up sleight of hand and the study of stage magic, as well as horse training. I also suffered a severe head injury. The injury took me out of school. The study of magic gave me something to do with my mind, while horse training helped me get my body back.

I spent most of my time outside. I worked on my horse training and got quite good at it. I would take a string of half a dozen horses at a time into the mountains and ride for days—sometimes even a week or two. I knew where to get water, which plants I could eat, and where to find shelter. By the time I was eighteen, I was well known as a local outdoorsman and had already started working in search and rescue. I was like a man out of time, and I loved every minute of it.

But things don't stay the same forever. In my mid-twenties, I became a full-time riding instructor, got married, restarted my church's old Pathfinder Club that had died years earlier, and settled down—for the most part.

As a Pathfinder leader, I loved bringing my years of outdoor experience into the club. This included the mindset that any and all moments are learning opportunities. When leaders have this mindset, they can do much more than deliver an inflexible, rote lesson on today's topic. They are empowered to create meaningful teaching moments when kids ask off-topic questions or when off-topic opportunities present themselves.

Now fast-forward a decade to one of our conference leadership conventions. I am no longer a club director. I am the new Club Ministries Director for the Nevada–Utah Conference and have been working as one of the area coordinators for most of the last half-decade. We have just started our conference TLT (Teen Leadership Training) program, and in one of the TLT workshops, this book begins its journey.

In this workshop, the TLTs were doing event planning and had chosen to plan a campout. As part of the planning, they listed all the honors they thought someone should be working on during a campout. When they reached about half a dozen honors, most of the group felt they had done quite well. Then one of the youth mentioned that he had once gone on a campout where he had earned—or worked on—many more honors than the ones on their list.

After he finished listing all the honors he remembered working on during that campout, the question arose: *How do you do so much in one campout?* Neither the TLTs nor the instructor were certain how you could plan all of those things into a single weekend. By the end of the workshop, both the TLTs and the presenter agreed on one thing—they all wanted to go on a campout with the leader who had managed to do so much in one weekend.

Now just a note here. This was our first conference TLT weekend. There were as many directors and staff attending as there were TLTs. While we were focused on teaching the TLTs, the staff were learning just as much. Much of the material had never been taught in our conference before, and we even had to ask the club staff to let the TLTs ask their questions first. Staff members were asked to hold their questions until the end of each class.

After this workshop, several attendees expressed enthusiasm about learning how to run similar campouts. That led to many leaders looking for me, as I was the director who had led the campout mentioned earlier. This resulted in me spending much of my free time giving piecemeal explanations to anyone who asked how to do a campout with so many honors. After many discussions, leaders generally wanted one of two things: for me to come and lead their next campout, or for me to write down a set of instructions they could follow.

As word spread, I found myself talking to more and more leaders who wanted help enriching their campouts.

This, of course, led to me attending many campouts with many different clubs. I tried to help them, but I often failed to bring their campouts up to the level they were hoping for. That is not to say the campouts were not better than before. Adding instructors with additional skill sets in outdoorsmanship and working with youth will improve the quality of any campout. But simply bringing in one person to fill an assigned role is not enough to raise a campout to the level many clubs desire.

I learned that many clubs were struggling with more than just their campouts. Campout issues were often a symptom of deeper problems in club culture. This led me to have more conversations about the underlying, foundational structures of a club. After these discussions, leaders would often ask if there were books they could read to learn more. I would refer them to whatever titles I could recall off the top of my head. But there is not much out there, and none of it was written specifically for Pathfinders. Many leaders would thank me and say that maybe I should write a book.

One fall, after traveling to several conferences in a row and having many of the same conversations about campouts, leaders again suggested that I should write a book covering this material. The idea began to stick with me, but I was not convinced there was a real need for it. I wondered if it was simply a few leaders who had heard that I had some campout know-how and took the opportunity to pick my brain.

After a period of indecision, I found myself at a large gathering of leaders from multiple conferences and ran into my old friend Brad Forbes from AdventSource. I asked him if there was even a market for such a book and who might publish it. Brad said there was a great need for it and that he could help get it published. At that point, I felt stuck. I am not much of a writer, but it seemed clear that I needed to try.

The next question was where to start. Experience had already taught me that camping was only one part of the challenge facing many clubs. If I wrote only about camping, without addressing the larger picture, most clubs would

not be able to benefit fully. The broader issue of how club culture impacts everything we do is essential. Without a solid understanding of club culture, leaders would not be able to use this information to its fullest.

I have also learned that simply reading something does not automatically give a person full insight into a subject. One needs to study, ask questions, have ideas challenged, and challenge the ideas presented. Because of this, I decided not to write a textbook, but rather a workbook or study guide.

So my vision evolved—from a book about camping, to a book of advice on club leadership, and finally to a workbook on the very nature of Pathfinder Clubs.

As you work through this book, you will encounter things you already know and discover new ideas. You will find things you agree with and things you do not. When you find something you disagree with, I challenge you to write down your objections and analyze them. Ask yourself why you disagree. Try to avoid answers such as, “Because that’s not how we’ve always done it.” While how you have done things may be right for you, it is important to understand *why* it is right.

If you take nothing else from this book, I ask that you come to truly understand why you do Pathfinders the way you do. Doing so will make you a much better leader.

For some, this book will help put words to ideas they have struggled to explain. Others may read it and say, “We already knew this,” while some may finally find answers they have been seeking. I only ask that you read with an open mind and think carefully about the questions raised in these pages. And if we ever meet, feel free to share your insights—because as we share, we grow together. I may even need to rewrite this book every few years to keep it current. As we know, good leaders never stop learning, and in time we will all gain new and better insights into Club Ministries.

I will say this clearly at the beginning: it is not what we do most of the time that makes the difference. It is how and when we do it that makes the real difference.

One of my old mentors used to tell me, while we were working horses, that I “did all the right things at all the wrong times.”

I hope this book helps you do the right things at the right time.

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TO START WITH

Good leaders are always looking for the next thing to take their **Pathfinder Club** to the next level. All types of leaders are included: first-time leaders who have just picked up the manual and are trying to do everything in it; leaders who have read the manual front to back and can quote it line for line; leaders who have the year fully planned out on spreadsheets; and leaders who have been around for years, running a club that operates smoothly year after year. All of them are looking for ways to move their club forward.

To up their game, leaders read how-to books. They ask other leaders, “How did you do that?” They attend training weekends. Leaders are always searching for something that will make a difference in their club and in the lives of their Pathfinders.

It is good to strive to learn as much as possible about running a strong club. Being more organized will help you. Knowing more about outdoor survival will lead to better campouts. Learning how to call a drill will give your club a stronger drill team.

But there is a vital truth that most leaders never learn. You almost never see it in books, and you rarely hear people talk about it. Many leaders who possess this vital element do not even realize they have it. That is because it is not a skill—it is a mindset.

This mindset can be developed over time. Some are blessed to have it naturally. Most are born with it, but sadly, many lose it as they grow up. This precious ability is the ability to question everything and to ask yourself *why* something works—or why it does not. I am not talking about the annoying person who asks “why” about everything out loud. I am talking about someone who observes what is happening and quietly asks themselves why it is working. And if they cannot come up with an answer, they seek out more information until they can form an informed one.

That is a large part of what this book is about. In these pages, we are going to help you ask better questions and then work our way toward meaningful answers.

It is important to remember that just because we find a good answer today does not mean we will not discover a better one tomorrow. And just because something is the right answer for you does not mean it is the right answer for me. Some answers will change depending on perspective—and that is part of the process.

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A good example is the number 9. If I were looking at it from the other side, it would be a 6. In the context of this page, 9 would be correct. But if you step outside the confines of this page and come upon it lying all by itself in the desert, who is to say which it is? Your opinion would depend on many things: which way you saw it first, whether you prefer even or odd numbers, or even if it happens to be the age of your dog. All of those interpretations could be just as right—or just as wrong—and without more information, it would be pointless to argue about it.

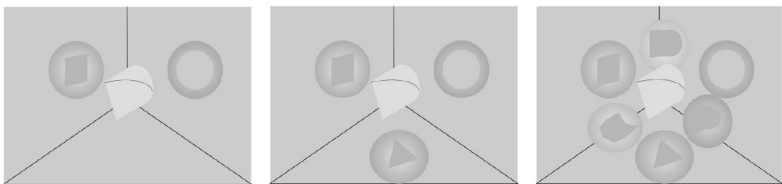
When we are learning how to look at things, it is important to always ask ourselves, “Is this right, or is it just my perspective?” When we gain new information on a topic, it is

equally important to see how that information fits with what we already know and to ask whether there is another side we may have missed.

I will also note that just because we have many facts that seem to prove we are right does not mean that we actually are—and it does not automatically mean the other side is wrong either.

Here is a simple illustration that shows this well. If you were standing on one end of an object and someone else was standing on the other, and you were both asked to describe the object to each other, you would likely wonder what the other person was looking at. No matter how carefully you explained what you saw, they would never see exactly what you see. It is only when you listen to and understand what they are describing—and then combine it with what you see—that you begin to understand there is a bigger picture. The reality is larger than either of you can see on your own.

If you then add a third person, the picture may change again. Anything that is three-dimensional will look different from different points of view. The challenge is that we often see things as two-dimensional at first, and only over time does our perspective deepen and mature. As leaders, one of the most valuable skills we can develop is learning to ask what others see and then use all of that information to form a clearer, more complete understanding.



I once heard an African wise man say, on the subject of choosing village elders, “Listen to everyone talk. Watch who

speaks first and who speaks last. The ones who speak first are usually foolish. The ones who speak last are the wise ones.”

Over the years, I have found much wisdom in what he said. I have also learned that as one gains more experience—and the longer one leads—it can become harder to listen first. Often this is because we think we know the answer before people have even finished explaining the problem. I will say this clearly: studying the art of listening will greatly help you on your leadership path. I will not cover the art of listening in depth here, as it would turn this small book into an entire library. Just know that improving your communication skills—of which listening is half—can change your work in Club Ministries beyond your expectations.

To bring us back to the matter at hand, everything has more than one way of being viewed. In some situations, you may find an absolute right answer—such as it being better to ride on top of a horse than underneath it. I can say this through painful experience and much trial and error. But in other situations, you may be so far off the trail that you need someone else to point the way back.

I found this quote from Oswald Chambers speaks well to the idea of perspective:

“After all, it is when we think we know or understand something completely that we have no doubts in what we believe. And yet that may be the exact time that we are completely wrong.”

“Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong; it may be a sign that he is thinking.”

So in this book, I will begin the first few chapters with questions, then provide information to help inform us, and finally work toward some answers. There will be breaks where I encourage you to set the book down and think about the questions for a while. Personally, when I think through

questions, I like to go outside and work with my hands in the yard while turning things over in my mind. I encourage everyone to find the way and time that works best for them. I hear many women say they do a lot of thinking while running. It does not matter what you do, as long as it allows your mind the space to process ideas and arrive at answers—or even better, new questions.

From time to time, we will need to look things up. I do not want you to simply take my word for it. I want you to *know* what you know, not just know that you read it in my book. This is not intended to be a quick read. It is meant to jump-start your thinking about Pathfinders and Club Ministries.

This book is divided into two parts: the questions and the campouts. The big questions prepare us for the campouts. So if you purchased this book only for tips on campouts and skip the first section, you may find yourself lost in the second.

Don't worry—we will get back to club campouts and camping trips later in the book. When we do, you will see why we needed to work through the earlier chapters first. So please, bear with me.



THE FIRST QUESTION: WHAT IS A PATHFINDER CLUB?

So let us begin our discussion with this question: What is a Pathfinder Club?

It is important that we can answer this question before we go any further. How you answer it will greatly affect what you do as a Pathfinder leader.

First, let's gather some information to help us form an informed opinion.

If you read the opening sections of the *Pathfinders Staff Manual*, you will find a Preface, Philosophy and Objectives, a Mission Statement and Goals, and more. If you have not read these sections, I strongly recommend that you do so before moving on.

On the GC (General Conference) and NAD (North American Division) websites, you will find much of the same information. It is often reworded, but the meaning remains consistent. You will also find lists of things Pathfinders should be learning, such as this one from the NAD Pathfinders website:

- Camping and camping/survival skills
- Grade-appropriate leadership training

- Activities that promote community pride and involvement through outreach, such as helping in soup kitchens, collecting food for the disadvantaged, cleaning and maintaining parks, visiting and encouraging the elderly, and many more
- Interactive training in a variety of recreational, artistic, nature, conservation, vocational, and outreach areas, with awards (honors) given for successful completion

Some of these sources include many Bible verses and passages from E. G. White. However, there is one thing none of them clearly define: **What is a Pathfinder Club?**

We know what a Pathfinder should be learning. We are told what the end result should look like. People often say “Pathfinder Club” as if it were a unique, one-of-a-kind concept that every good Adventist should automatically understand. But not everyone grew up in Pathfinders—or even grew up Adventist.

Not knowing what something *is* can greatly affect how you work with it. Take king snakes and coral snakes, for example. If you do not know the difference, I would encourage you to pause right now and look each one up. Knowing the difference could literally save a life.

So now you know the difference between a king snake and a coral snake.

I would like to use these two snakes as an object lesson. Here you have two snakes with very similar descriptions. At a glance, you may not even be able to tell the difference unless you really know what you are looking at. Pathfinder Clubs can be the same way. At a glance, they may look the same, but they can be as different as those two snakes. Only by truly understanding club ministries can you know whether a club is healthy or unhealthy.

The same principle applies to understanding what a Pathfinder Club is. Please take some time now to go online and find information about what a Pathfinder Club is.

To recap, we are running a program designed to teach kids camping and outdoor/survival skills, leadership, and community involvement. It exposes kids to a wide range of recreational, artistic, nature, conservation, vocational, and outreach activities, with awards—while keeping Christ lifted up so that kids can see Him in all that they do.

Now that we have some information to work with, let's start forming some answers. Here is what I came up with during my research.

I looked around to see if I could match the items mentioned in the recap, and this is what I found by searching the main keywords.

“Scouting, or the Scout Movement, is a movement with a strong focus on the outdoors and survival skills that aims to support young people in their physical, mental, and spiritual development so that they may play constructive roles in society.”

I also found lists of scouting-related groups like this one:

“Movements organized by churches, such as the Salvation Army's Adventure Corps and Pioneers, Adventism's Pathfinders, the Nazarene Caravan, the Pentecostal Royal Rangers, and Awana, as well as faith-wide groups like the neo-pagan SpiralScouts International. Other groups such as Camp Fire, the YMCA, YWCA, Sokol, Rotaract, Boys' Brigade, and Girls' Brigade also have similarities with Scouting.”

I also found this statement in my search:

“Though similar in many respects to Boy Scouts, Pathfinders have a stronger spiritual emphasis in all their activities.”

So here is my bare-bones conclusion: Pathfinders is a scouting organization sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Many leaders struggle right here because they do not fully understand what they are running. How can you lead a

church-centered scouting club if you do not realize that you are running a scouting club? This misunderstanding can seriously limit a club if leaders think of Pathfinders only as a church social group.

I have also seen the opposite problem, where a club focuses so heavily on activities that the kids rarely have an opportunity to see Jesus. In some cases, opening ceremonies did not even include a prayer—just go, go, go from one craft to the next.

When you think “just church,” you lose the big picture. The youth of your church will be comparing your club to every Girl Scout and Boy Scout troop their cousins are part of. They will compare your hikes to theirs, the number of outings, the exciting projects they participate in, the life lessons learned, and more.

Families who are not long-time active Adventists—those who attend church activities simply because they are church-sponsored—will be making comparisons as well. It will not be enough to say, “Well, we have Bible in our clubs,” or “We have a Christ-centered curriculum.” That will also not be enough if you are trying to use Pathfinders as an outreach program to show Christ to the surrounding community. People need to see that your club is a special place where all the good of scouting is happening, *along with* the love of Christ.

What I take from this is that Pathfinders is not only a scouting organization sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but that there is another vital piece. Our clubs need to be strong centers of scouting that are also Christ-centered.



THE SECOND QUESTION

So now let's ask our second big question: What do people look for in a good scouting group? Let's take a look at some possibilities.

I Googled what to look for in a good scout troop. You may want to do the same. Most of the lists I found were for BSA, but I also found lists for Girl Scouts and some general lists for choosing a good club or group, such as 4-H or Girls & Boys Clubs. I took the most recurring items and made a list. Here are the top points that showed up across several sources.

In the last chapter, we noticed many similarities among different scouting groups. In the list below, you will see many of those similarities again, even though different groups use different terms.

1. How active is the club?
2. How well staffed is the club?
3. Can you see the members of the club living their Oath/Pledge/Law/Motto? Do the leaders regularly demonstrate and point out opportunities to the club—times when members can apply their Oath/Pledge/Law/Motto?
4. Are the club's patrols/units/small groups in use, and does the leadership of the club have expectations for the patrol/unit/small group leaders?

5. Do the patrol/unit/small group leaders change regularly enough that all members get to learn and practice teamwork and leadership skills?
6. Is the club outdoors enough?
7. Are the kids given enough time and support to earn their Badges/Honors/Chips?
8. Are the kids advancing in level regularly?
9. Are the adults good role models for the kids, and do they take mentoring seriously?
10. Does the club have uniforms? How much do they cost, and when are they used?
11. Is there good communication with parents?
12. Is there a long-term calendar that is clearly posted?
13. Are meetings run by members, or dictated by adults?
14. Are dues, fees, and fundraising clearly explained?
15. Do the leaders regularly attend local directors'/troop leaders' meetings?
16. Are all staff members up to date on their training?
17. How well equipped is the club?
18. Does the club go camping regularly?
19. What kinds of adventure trips has the club done, and what is it planning?
20. What is the club's history of youth achieving the top levels?
21. Does the club have a program for older scouts?
22. Were you asked to join the club? And was it a staff member or a club member who asked?
23. Have you looked at other clubs in your area?
24. Can your kids tell you what they have learned after each meeting?
25. How is discipline handled in your club?

When you invite a new family to join your Pathfinder Club, these are some of the most common questions they will be trying to answer.

