

Rotating vs. Permanent Crew Assignments

Every backpacking crew has a variety of tasks that must be accomplished each day on the trail - supplying water, cooking, cleanup, navigation, etc. In addition, at Philmont two positions, Crew Chief (Leader) and Chaplain Aide, are specified and will be filled by one youth for the duration of the trek - they are permanent assignments. **How all of the other assignments are handled is a crew decision.** The two most common approaches are to rotate them through the crew so that each crew member does each of them a couple of times, or to make permanent assignments so each crew member does the same job the entire trek. What follows is but one approach for filling the other positions in crew - there are many possibilities. If you prefer, invent your own process. However, the following suggestions are known to work.

No matter your choice of "permanent" or "rotating" assignments, a crew starts off using "rotating assignments" and a duty roster. Each crew member should have to opportunity to perform each position at least once during the months of training. The Crew Chief and the Chaplain Aide positions should be included as rotating assignments on the crew duty roster. This way every member of the crew gets to experience all of the crew assignments, and the crew gets to see each member in the leadership positions.

It is strongly recommended to hold your Crew Chief election during the Watchu Mountain Adventure in May. The election sets the stage for the last, and most important, seven-to-ten weeks of training and makes for an exciting finish to the Watchu Experience of preparing for Philmont. Once the Crew Chief is in place, the crew then decides whether they want to use rotating or permanent assignments for the other crew positions.

If the crew decides to go with "rotating" assignments, simply continue using a duty roster, now prepared by the Crew Chief, throughout the rest of training and during the Philmont trek. If they go with "permanent" assignments, the elected Crew Chief and the crew members together assign each crew member a position. The permanent assignments are based on the "capabilities" and "preferences" of the youth members of your crew. Again, the Scouts make all these decisions. Since you have trained them well, they will allocate the tasks properly. They will have worked as a team throughout the months of training and they know who can do what ... better than you do, guaranteed.

There are pros and cons to each approach:

Rotating Assignments - the duty roster approach

1. Pro - Scouts experience all assignments throughout training and the 11 days at Philmont.
2. Pro - There is a clear sense that the assignments are fairly allocated.

3. Con - There is considerable variation in performance. For example, not everyone is a good cook.
4. Con - Speed of execution will not be optimum, since each crew member has a new job every day.
5. Con - No matter how well the duty roster is documented, disputes may arise as to who does what.

Permanent Assignments - each crew member has fixed tasks

1. Pro - Scouts get to experience all the assignments during the early months of training.
2. Pro - There is no question who does what, eliminating the Crew Chief's need to enforce the duty roster.
3. Pro - Things get done with excellence, quickly. Each task is performed by an expert.
4. Pro - Generally there is more time for blue skies and backcountry program.
5. Con - Scouts do not get to experience all assignments during the final months of training and the 11 days at Philmont.

For some, item #5 under Permanent Assignments is a big "con", but that is not necessarily so. In the end, with a well-trained crew, either approach will work very well. All else being equal, the permanent assignment approach may stand a better chance of guaranteeing the real Philmont experience. But it is the crew's choice! Either way, make sure nothing gets in the way of time spent engaged in the fantastic backcountry program. Do all you can to provide plenty of time for the most incredible outdoor adventure many will ever experience.