



## Leading With Integrity

The Scouting Journey of ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson.

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You could say that Rex Tillerson's path to the corner office began on a portage trail in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota and Ontario.

As a 14-year-old Scout from Stillwater, Okla., the future Exxon Mobil CEO traveled to the Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base for a 10-day canoeing adventure. But adventure turned to anxiety the first time he tried to portage a canoe from one lake to another; it seems his 115-pound body was no match for a canoe that weighed upwards of 85 pounds.

"I had gone about 15 or 20 yards, and I just couldn't do it," he recalls. "I was ready to quit; I was in tears."

Fortunately, Tillerson's crewmates, who themselves were struggling with heavy tents and food bags, helped him hoist the canoe onto his shoulders. He survived the portage and improved his technique to the point that he needed no help when his third turn to carry the canoe came around.

Fifty years later, the Distinguished Eagle Scout and Silver Buffalo Award recipient still can recall the confidence boost he got from that experience.

"That has stayed with me all my life," he says. "There's never been anything I didn't feel like I could conquer."

Self-confidence is far from the only thing Scouting taught him. As a member of Troop 20, he learned the leadership lessons that have helped him excel as a manager and executive.

"Exxon Mobil has great training programs, but that's not where I got it," says Tillerson, whose college degree is in engineering, not management.

Tillerson's leadership training began in his Scout patrol, where he first watched older Scouts lead and then became a leader himself — always under the watchful eyes of adults. Sometimes he had to lead his peers, sometimes he had to lead younger Scouts and occasionally he had to lead Scouts who were older and more experienced.

"If you think about that model, it's very, very similar to what we encounter in the business world," he says. "As a leader, you're always going to have people who are less capable than you; that's representative of the younger Scouts. You have people who are as capable as you; that's your peers. And you have people who are maybe more capable than you, but you have been put in a position where you've got to lead them. And you've got to interface with someone you're accountable to; that's the adult leaders."

### **Instilling Lifelong Values**

Of course, the world is full of effective, self-confident leaders whose moral compasses rarely point toward true north. Tillerson credits Scouting — along with church and family — with instilling in him the lifelong values found in the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

"I talk to a lot of business groups, and I tell them if you need a template for a business conduct policy, start with the Scout Law," he says. "If you've got a business model where everybody does that, you're not going to fail. If you get people to buy into that business model, you've got a winner."

Tillerson's commitment to Scouting values was put to the test in 1995, when he was on one of what would become many overseas trips. In his first meeting at the home of a government oil administrator, the man demanded a \$5 million bribe before he would do business with Exxon. Tillerson recounted that moment in a speech after he was named 2013 International Executive of the Year by the Marriott School at Brigham Young University.

"I was 43 years old, relatively young, and this was the first time I had been overseas by myself to do a deal like this," he said. "I paused a minute, looked at him and said, 'Your Excellency, I can't do that. If that's the basis on which you want to do business, then we can't do any business. I appreciate you receiving me at your home.' And then I left."

On the long flight back to Dallas, Tillerson wondered if his integrity had cost him both a \$4.5-billion deal and a career. But his boss offered full support, and before long the same official was inviting him back, with no strings attached.

"The subject of a bribe never came up again in the two and a half years I worked there," Tillerson said in his BYU speech. "All I had to do was say no in a respectful way."

### **Giving Back and Moving Forward**

Fifteen years later, Tillerson again said yes to Scouting. Despite the pressure of leading a multinational company with 80,000 employees and \$19 billion in annual earnings, he became national president of the BSA. During his two-year term from 2010

to 2012, he helped the organization focus on what he called the Main Thing: serving more youth.

“Our objective is to get them captured, get them into this structure that is Scouting,” he says. “If we can capture them for three or four years, we’ll change the adults they’ll become; I know that as sure as I live and breathe today.”

But perhaps Tillerson’s greatest service to Scouting came after his presidency ended, as he worked quietly to shepherd the organization through twin decisions to drop restrictions on gay members in 2013 and gay leaders in 2015.

“I reconciled that with many people around the Scout Oath,” he says. “I said we have a duty to God and country. It’s not *or*; it’s *and*. We have always respected the religious beliefs of our members and allowed them to express their beliefs in whatever way is suitable to them and their families, as long as they have that recognition that there’s someone bigger than us. The ‘and country’ part is that we have to respect the laws of our land.”

In a heartfelt speech at the BSA’s annual meeting in 2013, Tillerson said the decision on membership standards marked the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

“Now, there’s another train about to leave,” he said. “I know where this train’s going. This train’s going where there’s millions of kids that want to be served. This train’s going where we’re going to save lives. We’re going to reach in there and save children from their poor conditions. We’re going to serve kids and make the leaders of tomorrow, millions of them. That’s where this train’s going. I need — we need — every one of you to be on that train. The main thing to remember is to keep the Main Thing the main thing. And the Main Thing is to serve more youth.”

After all, there are plenty of canoes that need to be carried with confidence, plenty of people who need to be led with compassion, and plenty of decisions that need to be made with courage and conviction.

### **A Lifetime in Scouting (sidebar)**

Rex Tillerson was born to be a Scout. His maternal grandfather, Ray Patton, had been a Scout in the early days of Scouting and later led the troop where his father, Bob, became an Eagle Scout. Among his earliest memories are visits to Camp Perkins near Wichita Falls, Texas, where his father had been a staff member and where his parents met.

After World War II, Tillerson’s father became a Scoutmaster and Order of the Arrow lodge adviser in Wichita Falls. He drove a bread truck but eventually quit (taking a pay cut) to become a district Scout executive. The family moved to Vernon, Texas, where Tillerson became a Cub Scout and where his mother, Patty, was his den leader.

The Tillersons then moved to Stillwater, Okla., and ultimately to Huntsville, Texas. Along the way, Tillerson became an Eagle Scout, was inducted into the Order of the Arrow, attended the 1969 National Scout Jamboree, went to Philmont and the Boundary Waters, and joined an Explorer post. Like his dad, he served on camp staff for several years, only stopping when he had to pursue summer jobs that supported his

coursework at the University of Texas. (When not studying engineering, he was active in Alpha Phi Omega, the Scouting-affiliated service fraternity.)

Like many former Scouts, Tillerson stepped away from the program until he had children. He then jumped back in, serving as Cubmaster twice and as assistant Scoutmaster. His son Tyler is an Eagle Scout. When he moved to Dallas with Exxon, Tillerson joined the executive board of the Circle Ten Council and eventually joined the National Executive Board. Prior to becoming national president, he served as honorary chairman of the Generations Connections program, the facet of the BSA's 100th Anniversary Celebration that celebrated how Scouting values and traditions are shared across generations. Given his own Scouting story, it was a most appropriate assignment.

### **A Career in the Oil Patch (sidebar)**

Rex Tillerson joined Exxon Co. USA as a production engineer in 1975. He rose quickly through the ranks, assuming leadership of Exxon operations in Russia and the Caspian region during the 1990s. After Exxon's merger with the Mobil Corporation in 1999, he became an executive vice president. He was elected president in 2004 and became chairman and CEO in 2006.

As a prominent CEO, Tillerson is involved in many business and philanthropic groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and the Ford's Theatre Society. But there's no doubt where his loyalty lies: "There's nothing I'd rather spend my discretionary time on than talking about the Boy Scouts."