

The Principles of BAMO and PEPP

Problem-Solving in the SCA
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Problem-solving is an art, as I believe any interaction with fellow humans is more art than science. Everyone sets priorities differently. Everyone has different hot buttons. Everyone has a personal problem-solving style. Knowing this can help you effectively evaluate the urgency of an issue and provide good leadership in a true crisis.

As an officer at any level, you need to be able to quickly categorize the many issues you deal with. Often you will be approached by people who are very animated by what they perceive is an urgent situation. How do you determine urgency? When do you have to react immediately, and when do you have time to sort things out? I find simply separating the truly urgent from the other situations helps keep things in perspective.

So what is *really* urgent? Well, some things really are emergencies. And this fact gave way to BAMO. To be honest, BAMO started as a way to filter out the real from the perceived emergencies. Some people live in a world of constant crisis and urgency. As a branch officer, you can't afford to. You will burn out, and be completely ineffective when the real emergencies hit.

So, back to BAMO.

Bleeding

B- (formerly arterial bleeding). A **medical** crisis. This is shorthand for any life-threatening medical emergency. Regardless of the Chirurgeons in charge, you should be dialing 9-1-1 in a real medical emergency. Officers should be securing the scene and keeping gawkers away. Information-gathering as to victim contact information is also a good idea.

Authorities On Site

A- Authorities on-site. A **legal** crisis. As a Greater Officer, you should be there when the authorities arrive, *especially* if you did not call them! Sometimes, it is just a "drive-by," but police cars and fire trucks are often the heralds for bigger problems. Go check it out. Walk quickly and do not pass "Go."

Money Missing

M- Money Missing. A **Financial** crisis. I wrestled with the level of urgency on this. But it can range from the gate box missing in action to armed robbery. If large sums of money are missing, you had best turn your undivided attention to the matter.

On Fire (or other natural disaster)

O- On Fire. A **Safety** crisis. This can be the most literal of all. Something on fire requires immediate action. The same is true for flooding, vandalism in progress, or other natural disaster. Property/safety issues need to be addressed quickly, or else you could end up back at **B** followed by **A**, and we do not want to go there – really!

Obviously, there are other urgent issues. A missing child, a potential Amber Alert, needs to be addressed quickly. Things come up that you would never even imagine. But when confronted with an urgent issue, run through the different categories above and decide whether you need to react NOW, or whether you have time to check the facts. I found that the real emergency is rare, and that most problems look better after 24 hours and some fact-finding.

Now we'll take a look at PEPP.

Procedural

P-Procedural. These are problems that are a direct result of not knowing – or not following – documented procedures. These are omissions or violations of Kingdom Law, Corpora, or Financial Policy. If the cause is ignorance, you can correct the problem by providing the correct information. If the cause is negligence or refusal, you have a basis for disciplinary action.

Educational

E-Educational. This is more than just a matter of tradition or convention. Some branches codify their traditions, some do not. In the SCA we have philosophies that do not carry the weight of law. *Examples:* leave the site cleaner than you found it. Treat our equals as our betters and lessers as equals, and so on. This is part of the 'socialization process' for new and old members alike. If undertaken in a non-threatening way, a gentle nudge can help everyone understand what the SCA is all about.

Perceptual

P-Perceptual. Tricker to deal with is this set of problems. We all view the world through unique filters, formed through experiences, our state of health, and state of mind. You will see things differently if you are tired or angry than you will if you just had a relaxing, lovely chat with a good friend.

So, sometimes a problem really isn't a problem at all, but the result of inaccurate perceptions. For example: Squire Bob is convinced that Household UberServ gets preferential treatment for camping at events. What he may *not* know is that UberServ routinely takes advantage of pre-registration for group camping with event camp-masters. Here's another: someone concludes that a Chiurgeon is dispensing medicine. Whereas SCA volunteers cannot dispense medicine, they can hand over a bottle of over-the-counter medicine to anyone who asks for them. In other words, they can't dispense pain medication, but they can hand you a bottle of aspirin and let you take your own. In these cases, tracking down the facts and setting the record straight usually solves the problem, but not always.

Perceptual problems can be based on the dreaded...

Personal

P-Personal problems. The trickiest and least objective of all problems to solve. As an officer, you should avoid being in the middle of these like the plague! You are a branch manager or branch treasurer. You are *not*, as a rule, a personal counselor! Encourage people to talk face-to-face. Pull in Peers who can mediate, if the issue gets too heated. Encourage people to solve the problem at the lowest level of intensity and try not to take sides.

Personal problems are the most time-consuming (and energy-draining) problems to solve. They do *not* represent the best uses of your time and talent!

Beyond BAMO and PEPP

Problem Children. I wish I could distill this issue into a snappy little solution. I can't. This is the nightmare of most branches, and a source of angst for everyone involved.

For people who pose significant behavioral problems, we have Courts of Inquiry and Courts of Chivalry in place. These rely on the gathering of good evidence documenting the problem, and accurate, reliable testimony by people who are willing to go on the record (and nobody should ever act on anonymous allegations!)

I hate to say it, but document, document, document. Try to address issues directly with the individual. There is no substitute for this. Highly recommended: do this in the presence of another officer or a Peer. If this person has a relationship with a Peer, pull them in immediately. Act early, document fully.

There is nothing more frustrating for a Kingdom Seneschal to discover that someone has been a local problem "for years" with no paper trail of the problems caused. Waiting two years or more to report a problem after it has occurred is far too late.

People who pose a danger or threat should be called to the attention of modern law enforcement – immediately. Modern issues (underage drinking, drug abuse, assault, domestic violence) need to be handled by the police, and investigation by SCA members should not be done. If you or the individuals involved choose not to call modern authorities, know that the SCA does not have a good mechanism to address the problem. If you make the call, the problem is handled efficiently. So – modern crimes or infractions, call the cops – it's the law!

The Grievance Procedure

Short and Sweet. If you haven't read it, read it. It can be found in Kingdom Law (Article VIII.B. To be exact). The Grievance Procedure is designed to help you resolve problems at the lowest level (almost always the best solution). It starts with dealing with the person face-to-face. Then you state your problem in writing. If necessary, you pull in their superior (if an officer) or Peer (if appropriate). The Grievance Procedure is different than filing a grievance against someone or something. You may wind up making an official complaint about an issue or a person, but you should only do so after you have exhausted all other levels of the Grievance procedure.

Presenting a problem to your Superior Officer

One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was this: if you have the time to identify a problem, take the time to propose a solution. You may not have the solution, but you will have taken an important shift in your thoughts. No-one likes a whiner. Be a problem-solver!

Final Thoughts

As an officer, people look to you for guidance. In general, it is in everyone's best interest to stay calm in the face of adversity. If it is not a genuine emergency, check your facts before you act. Then check them again. Be sure you check them at the source, not through a third party! Try to reserve judgment until you have heard all sides.

To paraphrase Mistress Daphne, former Society Seneschal, "*your friends are not always right, and your adversaries are not always wrong.*" As a former Kingdom Seneschal I have had some white-knuckled, cotton-mouthed moments. They happen. Being able to triage a situation and act accordingly is a skill that will serve you well both in and out of the SCA. When in doubt, run problems by a trusted Peer, or your Baronial, Principality, or Kingdom Officer. Talking it out sometimes helps present the right solution. Finally, remember that this is a hobby! Try to have fun!