



Second Century

We Need a Reset

Truer words were never spoken. This declaration came in a message from one of our Section Managers. The persistent bashing of ARRL has become ridiculous, especially when it is represented as “communications” by those in our small community who are bent on spreading misinformation, insults, and personal attacks. Critical comments can be very useful. Recreational attacks on social media and in other public forums, where participants “eat their own” and only serve to drive off good people within amateur radio, are counterproductive and reckless.

Why did you get into amateur radio? For me it was literally to “Tune in the World with Ham Radio.” I’ve loved chasing WAS and DXCC since my earliest days in the hobby. Contesting was the next step, and even as someone whose family and career choices provided very little time for ham radio, I always made time to get on the air.

Maybe you got radio active because of your love of science, or public service events including EmComm. Or perhaps it was the technical side, including setting up and maintaining repeater sites, or computer controlling your satellite ground station, or designing UHF/SHF antennas, pushing for the tiniest improvements in signal gain.

Did you join amateur radio to play politics? Did you join because it gave you the chance to be a big fish in a small pond? I suspect the answer is no, but it’s clear we have attracted (or harbor) some who take advantage of our small community for self-interest and a self-serving soapbox.

Since coming to ARRL as CEO some 3 and a half years ago, I’ve worked tirelessly at changing the culture at Headquarters. It began with a simple guiding principle: create a culture of “Yes.” In order to accomplish that, we had to retool how we work together, and that required a shift from stovepiped departments to high-functioning collaboration. I’ve seen huge improvements in how we work, including our engagement with valued member-volunteers. And we’ve received fantastic feedback from members. We have much more to do as we pursue the digital transformation of ARRL, but so far the results have been gratifying.

Alongside all of that good work, there’s an area in which I am failing. I am failing to make a cultural impact on our community. Certain members continue to run to their keyboards to spew hateful rhetoric in search of some self-gratification — where success is measured by a whopping 10 or 20 responses. I am failing to convince grown-ups with many years behind them that their rants against ARRL, and indeed against each other, will prevent us from getting younger people interested in joining and staying with amateur radio.

Recently, during a company meeting, ARRL employees challenged me as to why so much fiction is being propagated about the organization and its people — and more importantly, why we wouldn’t take action against it. That’s a hard question to answer after they’ve seen their colleagues on the editorial team attacked with an online petition that was

started to remove them from their positions. In another instance, an ex-employee attacked our VEC because of an issue with 1 × 1 call signs. “Incompetent,” the online rant claimed, only to be echoed by a former ARRL Director who exclaimed that everyone at HQ is incompetent! Why would we let these nonsensical claims go unchallenged?

A group of so-called “thought leaders” sent a letter to donors that could at best be classified as irresponsible and ill-advised. One of our donors called HQ to discuss it. His final comment represents how we corporately view these nonsensical comments. He said, “I carefully read the letter, walked across the room, and carefully placed it in recycling. Where it belongs.” And that is the answer to ARRL employees: We see these public posts, we are no longer surprised by them, we look no further than the source, and we move on.

Sometimes that simple guidance becomes difficult to follow. The irresponsible behavior online recently rose to a new level. Seemingly in response to a post made in one of these rhetoric-filled Facebook groups, one member decided to execute an anonymous letter-writing campaign to other group members, attacking the author of that post along with one of our employees at HQ who had nothing to do with the post. The bounds have been pushed beyond civility.

We need a reset. We cannot change the world. We cannot change our country. But we can make changes within our small community. We need to stop writing hall passes for bad behavior. There’s no excuse. There are many people on social media who *are* doing great work, who we passionately work with every week. We should all be striving to follow in their footsteps, working for the promotion and protection of amateur radio.

As I finish this column, I am going to take my own advice to be radio active. I will turn on the radio and look for you on the air! If people around you are reading these nonsensical posts online, be that voice of reason that encourages them to get away from the pathology and politics, and get back to amateur radio. Disagree with this column? Come and see me at one of the conventions we attend, and let’s talk!

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