

Kindness in Amateur Radio

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February's "Op-Ed" called on all of us in the Amateur Radio community to treat one another with greater civility and respect. I could not agree more with that call and want to add a few words of my own.

I recently coauthored, with Michael O'Malley (Yale University), a book called *Leading With Kindness*, which was published by the American Management Association. In the book, Michael and I reject the old idea that people must be forced into productivity and we show that any organization is most productive when kindness guides the actions and decisions of its leaders. We show, with considerable data to back us up, that our current economic crisis was aided greatly by an epidemic of unkindness in American management.

By "kind" we don't mean a wimp. Gandhi was quoted as saying, "Don't mistake my kindness for weakness." The kind bosses we talk about are like good parents — people who make hard decisions and demand high performance with integrity. But they are also folks who display compassion, gratitude and humility.

Kind management not only improves the daily experience of those who work in an organization, but in difficult times it can ensure an organization's very survival. Research shows — not unexpectedly — that people working under "bully" bosses are reluctant to pass vital information up the chain of command. In a word, if employees repeatedly get slapped down for speaking up, they simply stop telling their bosses what's going on. Managers and leaders who don't show respect to those under them pay for it by being stranded without information and support when they most need it, as recent events so painfully show.

I'm inclined to believe some Wall Street leaders who testified that they really didn't know how dire the state of their companies had become. If, like so many American managers, they had long since bullied their employees into a resentful silence, it is almost guaranteed that the collapse of the organizations they presided over came to them as an unpleasant surprise.

Leadership styles are perhaps even more important in the Amateur Radio world, made up as it is of a patchwork of independent clubs and suborganizations. Amateur

Radio volunteer organizations can thrive and function efficiently under leadership that values respect and kindness or they can deteriorate under imperious, "tough-minded" leaders. Many such leaders are not bad people. They are good people who just learned some bad habits by example (oftentimes angry parents) and who imitate and propagate that bad example in any group they join.

While the free flow of information up the chain of command could have insured a greater measure of corporate survival, the free flow of information from place to place in time of disaster, facilitated by the network of Amateur Radio operators, has at times aided actual, human survival. Imagine the situation if, after Hurricane Ike, the ham network that temporarily replaced failing cellular networks had been weakened or made less cooperative because of unkind leadership within the Amateur Radio community. Human safety may have been at risk and a remarkable opportunity to provide a true service to the larger community would have gone unrealized.

We've all seen clubs with strong leaders who presume that their group needs toughness to keep folks moving. A bullying leadership style can sometimes get results but only in the short term. Time and time again I've seen that clubs with leaders who respect their members, and organizations who respect and value other organizations, are the only ones whose good influence has a chance to last.

A key tenet of kind leadership and management is to treat all employees as volunteers. There are few things a person can give more valuable than their time — the only truly finite commodity any person has. A kind manager acknowledges the gift of another person's time by establishing an organizational culture of mutual respect. In the Amateur Radio community, where nearly everybody really *is* an unpaid volunteer, the advantages to valuing the gift of any person's time by treating them with respect should be self-evident.

Kind leadership could do more than help the current Amateur Radio community thrive. If we want to pass on Amateur Radio, that particular body of knowledge and set of traditions that inspire such fascination and fun, we have to maintain not only durable organizations, but ones that will continue to attract new people — and that means having

leaders and members who, both in meetings and on the air, lead with kindness.

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4) Articles containing statements that could be construed as libel or slander will not be accepted.

5) The subject matter chosen must be of general interest to radio amateurs, and must be discussed in a way that will be understandable to a significant portion of the membership.

6) With the exception that the article need not be consistent with League policy, the article will be subject to the usual editorial review prior to acceptance.

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SPECIAL VP9 CALL SIGNS

◇ 2009 is the 400th year anniversary of the settling of Bermuda by Sir George Somers. There are many island wide events planned by most organizations. The Radio Society of Bermuda has been granted a special call sign for use this year — VP9400/xx. The xx suffix is the operator's call sign, VP9400/LP, for example. There are a few Novice licensees who have a three letter suffix, such as NMT. — *Rose Spershott, VP9LP, Secretary, Radio Society of Bermuda*