



## Second Century

# A Question of Leadership

*With this being the Year of the Club, it's a good time to ask yourself, how active are you with a local radio club? Perhaps you get involved in one aspect or another, from Field Day, to POTA outings, to exam sessions, to public service events. Clubs can have myriad activities throughout the year. The one thing every club must have is leadership. After all, volunteers cannot be managed — they need to be led.*

Being a leader in a club can be a challenging and rewarding experience. It can also put you in the cross-hairs of criticism or, at times, a lack of appreciation. The first fundamental truth club leaders must accept is that every member involved and engaged is a volunteer. They are trading away their time and experience to participate in some aspect of the club, but they cannot simply be managed. When working with volunteers it is important to discern the difference between leaders and managers. Leaders inspire, build influence, and motivate people to follow them; managers hold authority and ensure tasks get done.

Consider the role of the club president, or an ambitious club member who takes on the organizing role for this year's Field Day. These leaders are often driven individuals, sometimes with professional leadership backgrounds, who step up to plan events, create agendas, and move the club forward. They'll likely look to others for help, assigning club members to various tasks. They'll concern themselves with funding sources and expenses. Then they'll take on the job of managing the teams to get things done. Have you seen this model? The clubs will accomplish much — but can leave certain members feeling like they've missed the fun or enjoyment that originally drew them to the club or activity, ultimately leading to resentment.

Club members don't just want to be part of a system accomplishing tasks. Rather, they're most likely looking for experiences — amateur radio experiences — and outcomes that satisfy the reason they became a ham in the first place.

How can club leaders avoid being task masters? A Field Day volunteer who only shows up to follow instructions may complete tasks, but one who learns why decisions are made — and gets to share the results — comes back next year eager to help again.

A first step is acknowledging that volunteers are motivated by purpose, not assignment. This comes through using the foundation that this monthly column tries to establish: to inform and inspire.

Club leaders should use their considerable experience to give guidance and training to club members. Use the opportunities presented, such as monthly club meetings or weekly tech nights, to drive learning and create curiosity with members. Inspire them by helping to take small steps that lead to success. Give a group, again such as a POTA activation group, not just the framework to go out and operate, but to learn from the experience and to share the experience with the rest of the club. All the while, stand at the side of the room, giving them the spotlight.

At Headquarters, we know very well that members love to tell their story and to earn recognition. Staff learn quickly that our role as leaders is not to finish members' sentences. Rather, ARRL's role is to inspire members and non-members alike to be radio active and to connect — to share their experiences with others. It is all about creating programs that help draw out the various voices and experiences our members are having, and making, with amateur radio.

As I always do, I am encouraging you this year to be radio active — get in with your local clubs, and get involved with the various areas your fellow members are pursuing in the hobby. Be a connector — bring more people into the club, especially those with unique experiences and demonstrated skills. And choose to lead — gently and in purposeful ways that inspire others to participate and share their voices. Choose to put yourself out there, all the while basking in the bright light of your club's success.

David A. Minster, NA2AA  
Chief Executive Officer