

The Responsibilities of Being “In Charge”

I’m a volunteer! So I can do things the way I want to, right? Actually the answer is, Yes and No. It is all a matter of your level of seriousness and public perception. It also depends on your role within the organization.

For those who are “coordinators and leaders,” you are in the spotlight. What you say and do is just as important as what you don’t say or do. If you chose to accept an appointment as a leader of a volunteer organization, you had best be serious about it. You will be confronted with real world, and amateur radio world expectations.

In the real world, you are a coordinator of an entire organization that will have relationships with served agencies that exist in a professional environment and have to contend with legal responsibilities to protect and serve the citizens of a particular geographical area.

Served agencies understand, the home and family pressures experienced by volunteers, however they don’t sympathize with broken promises. Remember that they have incorporated amateur radio communications into their emergency plans. This is no place for “pie in the sky salesmanship.” Be realistic, and tell the truth. If you can provide 100 people to help during a disaster, that is wonderful! If you can provide 2, tell them that as well. Don’t assume that people will “come out of the woodwork,” to help when there is a major disaster affecting the community – hams included.

Volunteers may come out of the woodwork all right, but you can’t count on them to be of service. You can’t count on them, and neither can the agencies you serve. Remember, they are counting on you. You must be realistic as to what services you can provide them, so they can incorporate that into their response planning.

Another consideration of being a coordinator is “not being around.” A volunteer you are, and your home/job/family is the most important thing. However, you can’t accept responsibility and then, not be assessable at a reasonable level, to the served agencies and the membership of your organization. If your life has changed, and you don’t have the time/resources to lead; pass the torch.

There is no shame in that, and doing so is far more honorable than not doing your job as well as you think it should be done. It is a sign that you care, because you want to see things accomplished with the energy of someone who has time.

“I’m a volunteer, and I will run things how I want,” does not work in the real world application of emergency communications. You are not a supervisor at someone’s place of employment. One hundred percent of your “power” comes from your ability, to be an effective team leader, that others will follow you due to your ability to navigate the overall landscape and see the big picture. If you are not “a part of the team,” and if you fail to listening to the input of others, or fail to act, upon changes in the situation and find effective solutions, you will look behind you to find only your shadow.

Wow! That is a lot of responsibility isn’t it. Yes, it is. Volunteer organizations are very dynamic, and are wonderful because of the energy poured into them by people who care. As a leader of volunteers, you can go to the Moon, or you can sink faster than the Titanic. Whether you have 2 or 200 members, honest, committed effort results in the most satisfying experience you can have. “You made a difference.”

All members of the group also have responsibilities in participating within the organization. Like a coordinator, you are a volunteer who must place your home/family first. However, if you make commitments, fulfill them. Be honest with yourself about your ability to contribute. Do not take on the responsibilities for a facility, agency, or any task, if you cannot realistically fulfill them.

Like a coordinator, if your life's situation changes and you cannot do the task as well as you think it should be done, pass the torch. One pitfall of many volunteers is being complacent with the status quo. If you see a need, be willing to do something about it. Otherwise, you don't have the right to complain. Don't sit back and quarterback when you have not expended effort on your part. Otherwise, you will lose the respect of the others, and rightfully so. Being a team member is the key. Don't go it alone, work with other members to accomplish the needs and goals of the group.

Consistent, honest effort and a common sense approach is the rule for all coordinators and members.

Be realistic about your capabilities, limitations, and willingness to "get out of your recliner." Failure to do so will result in lack of effectiveness of the organization, can result in unnecessary stress, and may create situations that can lead to personal feelings between volunteers that could and should have been avoided.

Wow! That sounds like a lot of responsibility for everyone. Yes, it is. Serving the community is not a matter of "I am a volunteer, and I can do what I want." It is a matter of "I am a member of a team, and other people count on me to help create a serious organization." Moreover, to that end I will do my very best. This should be the attitude of all who desire to serve.