

## Reaching Out on the Repeaters— And Getting Responses



You've just unpacked your first FM transceiver and you're dying to use it. You punch in the frequency of the local repeater and listen. Silence. You key the microphone and, in your most confident voice, announce, "WB8IMY listening."

The repeater transmits for a few seconds, then stops. Surely someone is reaching for their microphone. They'll call you in just a few seconds...won't they? The seconds stretch into minutes. "WB8IMY listening," you announce again.

Still nothing. Maybe you just picked a bad time. You decide to try again in an hour or so. As you reach for the power switch, the repeater suddenly comes to life.

"WB8ISZ, this is WB8SVN. You around, Dave?"

"WB8SVN from WB8ISZ. I'm here. Did you just get off work?"

It's a safe bet that one of these two hams was listening when you called earlier. Why didn't they answer you? 🐼

**H**ams pride themselves on their ability to communicate, yet there is an odd contradiction: Many hams are quite shy! The nature of amateur radio gives these shy communicators the best of both worlds. With the exception of visual modes such as amateur television, no one can see you when you're on the air. You could be holding a conversation with someone while wearing little more than your underwear. They'd never know! In other words, ham radio allows us to hold the world at arm's length while still maintaining contact. It can act as a filter and a shield for those who are uncomfortable with close, personal communications.

Breaking through the shyness barrier to communicate with a stranger is difficult. Think back to your school days. When the teacher asked for student volunteers, did you hesitate? Perhaps you wanted to see if anyone else was willing to join you. No one wants to be the first to raise their hand.

A similar situation occurs on repeaters. When you announced that you were listening, a dozen people may have heard you. As a new ham, however, no one recognized your call sign. You're a stranger, an unknown.

For many hams, the familiar line of reasoning is, "Hmmm...I don't know this person. What would I say to them? Nah...I'll wait. I'm sure someone else will give them a call." The problem is, when all the hams on the repeater feel this way, no one replies.

And so it goes on repeaters throughout the country. The problem isn't you per se, it's that fact that you're a stranger. So how do you make the transition from stranger to friend?

## Breaking the Ice

If you keep announcing that you're "listening," someone is bound to come back to you eventually. This could take a long time — especially if you're trying to start a conversation during less popular hours. To really break the ice and shed your "stranger" label, you need to assert yourself on the air. That is, you need to become part of an existing conversation.

Listen to the repeater during the early morning and late afternoon. That's when it's likely to be used the most. As you hear stations talking to each other, listen for an opportunity to contribute something—even if it's just a question. Let's say that you find two hams discussing computers:

"KR1S from WR1B. Well, I'm definitely going to pick up a new solid-state drive for my station computer."

"Yes. I've heard they're much faster and more reliable."

Even if you don't own a computer, I bet you can think of a question that will give you an excuse to join the conversation. In the pauses between their transmissions, announce your call sign.

"WB81MY"

"Well, there's a new voice. Ah...WB81MY, I think it was...this is KR1S. How can I help you?"

"Hello. My name is Steve. I'm thinking about buying a computer for my amateur radio station, but I'm a little confused. You guys seem knowledgeable. Can you give me a recommendation?"

Perfect! Stroking a person's ego is the best way to get them talking. With luck, these hams will be more than happy to show off their expertise.

If you engage in enough of these conversations on the same repeater, you'll gradually melt through the shyness barrier. In time, your call sign will be as familiar as any other. When you say, "WB81MY listening," you'll have a much better chance of getting a response. After all, they'll know you.

## Getting Involved

Another way to establish yourself is to become involved in club activities. Look for a local club that's active in public service events. Attend the meetings regularly and be prepared to volunteer whenever they ask for help.

Don't worry about your lack of experience in public service operating. You'll be told exactly what to do and, in most cases, an experienced ham will be nearby.

Whatever you do, don't let social fears keep you from enjoying ham radio to its fullest. If the locals are too shy to talk to you, reach out and contact them. You'll both benefit from the experience!

### Tips to Try

- **Try asking for a signal report rather than simply stating that you're "listening." A report request gives an otherwise shy ham an extra incentive to call you. Try this: "W1BXY testing. Can someone give me a signal report?"**
- **Join a club that's active in public service activities. Volunteer for as many events as possible.**
- **Active contest clubs are also good prospects. Offer your time to assist in several major contests at the club station.**