



Second Century

Diversity and Inclusion: Driving Amateur Radio's Growth

My column this month is a collection of thoughts as expressed to members who wrote in with concerns covering diversity, the recruitment of youth, and editorial choices we have made — that I have made — over the past year. These are subjects that bring out strong feelings and opinions. Please spend a few moments with me as I cover these topics.

Amateur radio, as we know, is a diverse hobby. It provides us with vast expanses of spectrum, which encourages variety in our technical investigations and use. We have developed all manner of modes, from CW (my favorite) to voice and data modes that, again, support great variety in our types of operating. The greatest form of diversity our hobby provides, though, is that of the expansive reach of people it includes from across the spectrums of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and ability. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that most times, our transmissions encourage anyone from anywhere to answer our call!

Just as our radio signals know and respect no borders, neither does diversity in amateur radio. I recently attended the kick-off session for the IARU Region 1 strategy conference. It was astonishing to see how well the conference was attended from many dozens of countries across the region, spanning Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Just looking at the smiling faces and the eagerness with which the attendees were engaged underscored a fundamental principle of “the amateur’s unique ability to enhance international goodwill” [FCC § 97.1(e)].

The first conclusion I can draw from this, is that we need to stop drawing imaginary local, regional, or national boundaries when determining the diversity of our community. We truly need to think internationally, and this is in our DNA! Since 1925, we have been holding hands as a global community to protect and expand our radio privileges. To this day the International Amateur Radio Union, and the role that ARRL plays as its International Secretariat, is rich with diversity, collaboration, and inclusion that aids in the fulfillment of its mission.

I was on a Zoom call recently with some college students and recent college grads. The moderator asked everyone to please rename themselves, if they hadn’t already, to show their name, call sign, and pronouns. Yes, their personal pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him). The students who hadn’t already done so apologized for the gaffe, and adjusted their on-screen names. I sat thinking: how in the world would this be received by all those hams saying that ARRL needs to bring many more young people into the hobby? The generational culture gaps have never been wider — that I am aware of. This isn’t just long hair and outdoor rock concerts. These are fundamental belief systems intended to create an inclusive environment. I suspect some Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and even some Gen Yers may struggle with choosing to

relate to this new way to connect with each other. Some may feel they can’t, some even may decide they won’t. I admit, it isn’t easy for everyone.

The second conclusion I’ve reached is that asking for more youth in amateur radio represents a cultural challenge: the young people today are not the young people of *your* youth. Who they are as people is different. What they are looking for from our hobby is different. The time pressure of being digitally connected and always “being on” is different. The real-time nature of how young people consume content is different. Even their shifting opinions and preferences relating to social media are different from just a year ago! Amateur radio must recognize and embrace these differences — and dynamically adapt to accommodate them!

I respect the wide points of view on the matter of diversity. I am very aware of how these changes will be met with discomfort in the coming years. I hope that as a member, you’ll hang in there whenever and wherever they appear within the hobby — including the pages of *QST* and elsewhere.

The final conclusion is that this is a challenge for our radio clubs and our teachers: you represent the best places and the best people to lead us as a community, with regard to setting the example for engaging youth and embracing diversity. We’ve been busy at ARRL HQ, strengthening our team in Field Services and in Education & Learning. These will be the principal areas of focus where we move diversity to the top of the agenda and keep it there as we look to grow amateur radio and grow ARRL.

We’ll be looking for you at the ARRL National Convention and HamCation in Orlando this month. If you’re there, look around. In what ways could we help attract more people, from across our differences, to our common passion for radio?

Be radio active! Be the connector that grows the hobby! And if you have a friend who isn’t an ARRL member, encourage them to consider joining.

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