

The Dangers of Being “In Charge” and the Dangers of “Following”

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I'm a volunteer! I can do what I want. Yes and No. It is all a matter of your level of seriousness and public perception. It also depends on your role within the ARES 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 best be serious. You are 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 government 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.

They understand the home and family pressures experienced by volunteers, however they don't sympathy for broken promises. Remember that they have incorporated amateur radio communications into their emergency plans. This is no place to “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. Don't assume that people will “come out of the woodwork,” to help when there is a major disaster affecting the community – hams included. You cannot count on that, and neither can the government agencies. Remember, they are counting on you to be realistic for their response planning purposes.

Another pitfall 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 not be assessable to government 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. 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 member that others will follow you due to your ability to navigate the overall landscape. If you are not “a part of the team,” listening to input, and acting upon changes in the environment in an effective fashion you will look behind you to find only your shadow.

Wow! That is a lot of responsibility. 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.”

ARES members also have dangers in participating within the organization. Like a coordinator, you are a volunteer who must place their home/family first. However, if you make commitments, fulfill them. Be honest with yourself about your ability to contribute. Do not take on the responsibility for a facility, agency or 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.

Another danger of volunteers is being complacent with the status quo. “John Doe is the EC, he needs to ask me to do it.” Manure is available at most home and garden stores for reasonable prices. If you see a need, do something. Failure to try to help the situation is like failure to vote; you don't have the right to complain. Don't sit back and quarterback when you have not expended effort as a team member to help other ARES members and coordinators fulfill the fix the problem. Otherwise, you will lose the respect of others. 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 ARES 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 can lead to personal feelings between volunteers.

Wow! That is responsibility too! 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.”