

Teaching Teens Amateur Radio Using Cowboy Ethics

Cowboy ethics help high school hams build an EmComm team.

Devon Day, KF6KEE

Teaching emergency Amateur Radio to teenagers is challenging. It is not just about using a radio or about operating procedure. The process is more complex than that. Students need to know how to conduct themselves during an event where their communication skills might be needed.

I read about a teacher at Cherry Creek High School in Colorado named Ann Moore. After reading the book, *Cowboy Ethics — What Wall Street Can Learn from the Code of the West*, Ann decided to try to teach the principles of cowboy ethics. The result was more than she expected. Students with diverse backgrounds and even learning disabilities came together with a new view of their own world. After talking to Ann on the phone, I was convinced I could teach the 10 cowboy ethics in urban Wilson High School located in Long Beach, California.

I am the advisor for the Wilson High School's Amateur Radio Emergency Communications (AREC) team. I decided to put cowboy ethics to the test. Once the team assembled, I put up an overhead of the 10 cowboy ethics and began to relate each to their job as EmComm operators.

1 Live Each Day with Courage

I went on to explain that, in the event of a real disaster, we would all have to work calmly and dig deep to stay focused and do our communications job to the best of our ability. We are the only high school in Long Beach Unified School District with a student emergency radio team as part of the school emergency plan. In addition, I went on to compliment the team members who have failed their ham radio exams, but returned home and continued studying. That takes courage. The students kept working toward their goal without fear of failure.

2 Take Pride in Your Work

This ethic provided a great opportunity to talk about equipment that had been hastily put away and now needs repair. Last year

our mobile radio station was packed up with bottles of water left inside. Equipment could have been destroyed but fortunately was not. In addition, transcribed messages need to be done neatly and accurately. When covering an event, the student team must represent the school with pride. This is demonstrated by their professionalism during an operation.

3 Always Finish What You Start

Again, students began to understand that they cannot just leave one person hanging while they take off for their next engagement. This has been an ongoing problem and now has been addressed. Each team member now understands that they need to pull their own weight.

4 Do What Has to Be Done

Not all aspects of Amateur Radio are fun. The cleanup, the organization and replacement of used supplies is tedious but necessary.

5 Be Tough, But Fair

Both Wilson AREC Team Captain Max Chang, KJ6EMB, and I agree on this one. With 17 students on the team, this is the largest Amateur Radio team our school has ever had. People are going to have to wait their turns, be patient and take orders.



Chip Margelli, K7JA, designed a mast launcher for military masts like the one the Wilson AREC team uses. Margelli demonstrated it and we built one the next day. Here Philip Scholnick, KJ6MCD, and Carina Ochoa, KJ6MCB, are using the Margelli mast launcher for Field Day 2011.



Wilson AREC team members work on the mobile radio station featuring 2 meter/1¼ meter and 2 meter/70 cm mobile radios. With a 50 A power supply and Powerpole connectors the radios can be easily interchanged. The station can be powered by ac, a 100 Ah gel cell, the team's generator or a car battery with jumper cables and Powerpole connectors. From the left are Corleone Ham, KJ6DXN; Philip Scholnick, KJ6MCD; Max Chang, KJ6EMB, and Kevin Keo, KJ6LNZ.

6 When You Make a Promise, Keep It

This one is pretty easy to understand. For the radio club, it has to do with commitment and money. If you borrow money for equipment or books, pay it back. If you say you will participate in an event, be there on time.

7 Ride for the Brand

Knowing that some information passed on the radio is confidential is really important. Wilson's Amateur Radio operators always have to protect the best interests of the school. Students need to conduct themselves in a professional manner. They need to dress in a professional way. They must not repeat confidential information. Next year's student emergency radio program completely depends on the choices this year's team makes.

8 Talk Less, Say More

In the case of emergency radio, this is a perfect ethic to live by. We talked about how important it is to keep a frequency clear for emergency traffic — that it is more important to transcribe during an emergency than to give information that is speculation. This was a great time to emphasize that our job is to pass directed information from school administrators rather than to pass our assessment.

I talked about the importance of transcribing all transmitted information (including noting the time and date a transmission occurred). In the case of student radio operators passing emergency traffic, all messages are to be written and initialed by the administrator in charge. If the students are participating in an actual disaster, things could get too intense. In that case the student operator would simply show the administrator how to use the radio and let the administrator pass the emergency information to the City of Long Beach EOC. If an unlicensed administrator does take the microphone, a licensed student or adult would remain at the radio to act as control operator.

9 Remember That Some Things are Not for Sale

For the past 6 years, Wilson's Amateur Radio team has expanded due to the support of the radio community and outside donors. Elmers have taught the students and the advisor for free. Members of Wilson High School's parent radio club, Associated Radio Amateurs of Long Beach (www.aralb.org), have been a constant source of support and advice. The ARES® emergency coordinator for sub area 3, Bill Bradley, WD6FON, is



Students worked through the night to help the Santa Ana Response Team with Field Day 2011 and demonstrated many of the cowboy ethics they learned in class. It was a fantastic Field Day. Pictured from left to right are, in Row 1 sitting, Max Chang, KJ6EMB; Philip Scholnick, KJ6MCD; Corleone Ham, KJ6DXN; Row 1 standing, Derrick Brown, Jimmy Draper, KJ6ELZ; Carina Ochoa, KJ6MCB; Sarah Carner, KJ6LNY; Joshua Martinez, KJ6NBC; Brandon Silvi, KJ6EMD; Javier Ruiz, KJ6MCE, Devon Day, KF6KEE, and Kevin Keo, KJ6LNZ.

actively working to bring more area schools into the ARES® network for the City of Long Beach and is actively involved in the Wilson High School radio team. In addition, Long Beach Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Director of Education Sibyl Keirns, KA6RXX, has taken the entire team under her wing to teach emergency radio procedure.

These important community trainers volunteer their time and expertise to the Wilson radio operators. Many skills were acquired from the generosity of radio instructors who allowed us to participate in their radio courses through scholarships. This also includes Gordon West, WB6NOA, who offers scholarships to the Wilson AREC team so they can upgrade to the next license. In addition, the Long Beach Yacht Club has offered the use of their private repeater in order for the AREC team to practice drills. Shoreline Yacht Club has offered free license classes and the use of their radio room. The RMS *Queen Mary* management team extended free admission to the Wilson AREC team so the Wilson HS radio team could utilize the equipment in the W6RO wireless room as they practiced HF radio under the guidance of W6RO seasoned operators.

The ARRL has supported me through Education & Technology Program grants and two ARRL Teachers Institutes (www.arrl.org/education-technology-program). The information I gained has launched circuit board construction, robot and antenna projects and a new language arts-technology pilot class. What the students at Wilson High School have gained cannot be assessed with a monetary value. Community service has no price tag; it is its own reward. Amateur Radio operators have a long tradition of serv-

ing as volunteers. Wilson High School's success in radio is the result of this generosity.

10 Know Where to Draw the Line

We interpret this ethic to mean that when anybody is out of line, step up. No innocent bystanders are allowed. As old-fashioned as cowboy ethics sounds, there is a place for them in an urban setting. When students cross the line for misunderstanding any of the previously mentioned ethics, team members must address the problem. Staying quiet (an urban trait) when a team member is making a mistake is not good for the team. Each team member is held responsible for the ethics of the entire team.

After I went through the 10 cowboy ethics with my radio team, I scanned the room. Twelve

serious faces returned my stare. The Wilson Amateur Radio Emergency Communications team understood these Cowboy Ethics. Urban kids were able to relate to ethics of rural cowboys whose handshake was their contract.

If you ask a Wilson AREC team member why they joined the team you will be surprised by the number one response: "Radio sounded like fun." It is a lot more fun when each team member knows what they need to do to make the whole team work well. Trust grows with sound ethics. Teens, who know they can trust one another, can do amazing things.

Photos courtesy of Devon Day, KF6KEE.

Devon Day, KF6KEE, an ARRL member, is an English teacher at Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. She is a National Board Certified teacher who has worked with students and ham radio for 11 years. She holds a General class license. Devon is a Freedom Writer Teacher and is included in the book Teaching Hope about teaching "at risk" children.

Wilson High School was built in 1925. It has produced Amateur Radio operators from the 1940s to the '70s. These operators continue to stay in contact with Devon's radio operators and lend support through donations of equipment and continued encouragement.

Devon credits her skill with Amateur Radio to a huge support system in Southern California and through mentors from ARRL who have always been there to lend assistance. Devon Day can be reached at Wilson High School, 4400 E 10th St, Long Beach, CA 90804, dday@lbschools.net.

