

The (AC) Power of Motivation

Sitting in my shack, soldering parts onto a circuit board, I find myself thinking, “this is getting to be entirely too much fun!” I’ve dabbled in building stuff throughout my ham radio career, but I never really enjoyed it that much ... until now. Difference? I’m more motivated now. I’m really enjoying working QRP, and want to be able to hit the trail (or at least my local park) by the time you read this “Take It to The Field” special issue. So here I am in late April, building a QRPKits “SOTA tuner”—winding toroids, soldering components onto a pc board and measuring lengths of wire for ended half-wave (EFHW) antennas on the three bands on which my QRP rigs operate. And I’m having a blast!

(*Side-note:* I must say I don’t understand why so many kit-builders seem to dislike winding toroids. Sure, it’s tedious. Sure, you have to count carefully. But, hey, you are actually *building* an electronic component! How often do we get to do that nowadays? Virtually nobody rolls their own capacitors anymore. And how many of us have built our own resistors, transistors or diodes? If they don’t come built into the substrate of a chip, then they come as pre-made, pre-labeled parts that we can, at best, solder into a circuit. But toroids and coils? *We can still make them ourselves!* Their values are determined not by what it says on the label but by how many turns we wind on the form. In this world of pre-made, pre-assembled, everything, we should cherish the opportunity to actually create an occasional component.)

Back to motivation... As with my last project, I depended heavily on long-distance advice and support from my colleague, Richard Fisher, KI6SN, while building this one. It has been mostly his “Trail-Friendly Radio” columns in *WorldRadio Online*, along with N6GA’s QRP columns and our various specials here in *CQ*, that have been my main motivations in doing all this low-power and portable stuff to begin with. So I was somewhat surprised to get a text from Richard telling me that I was motivating him as well. “You’ve inspired me,” he wrote, “to use the EFHW wire with counterpoise. Built a little tuner from scratch a few years ago. Great antenna for T-FR. Still haven’t had time to put that new FT-817ND on the air. Maybe this will be the incentive!” So his motivating me is motivating him!

Another story: My first (and so far only) contact with my “Tuna Tin 2” flea-power transmitter was with Anthony “Goody” Good, K3NG, who was operating from a hill-top in Pennsylvania in the dead of winter. That contact, and a subsequent exchange of e-mails, motivated me to ask for an article about his adventures as a SOTA (Summits on the Air) “activator.” He was motivated to write it, and you can read it on page 44.

Of course, Goody’s exploits are tame compared with those of Z35M, who operates from just about any location imaginable (see p. 13), or KT5X, who *runs* up mountains to operate from their peaks (p. 20)! These are just a few of the stories we share this month in our second annual “Take It to The Field” special. Don’t worry ... not everything involves sitting on mountaintops! (We had several more great articles that didn’t fit in this issue, so we’ll be sprinkling them through upcoming issues to keep motivating you—and me—to “take it to the field.”)

Something I’ve noticed about the power of motivation is that it is always AC. Unlike DC (direct current) which is always one-way, alternating current *must* flow in both directions in order to work. Likewise, you simply cannot provide motivation to another person without getting some yourself, either directly from that other person or from the process of trying to help. Try it. You’ll like it!

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Saying Goodbye and Saying Hello...

We at *CQ* recently lost two good friends, and the entire ham radio community has lost two towering figures. *CQ* “Washington Readout” editor Fred Maia, W5YI, became a Silent Key in late March after a battle with cancer. He was 76. Fred had been a *CQ* columnist since 1985, and from 1978 to 2003, was editor and publisher of *The W5YI Report*, a biweekly ham radio newsletter. As regular readers of his column were no doubt aware, Fred’s knowledge of the history of amateur radio regulation was encyclopedic, and he took great pride in placing new developments into their proper context based on that history.

But Fred’s most lasting contribution to amateur radio was his role as a primary architect of the volunteer examining program. He was the first Volunteer Examiner Coordinator (VEC) appointed by the FCC in 1984, a long-time member and frequent chairman of the Question Pool Committee, and his W5YI-VEC organization grew to be the second largest administrator of amateur license exams in the U.S. In addition, Fred teamed up with Gordon West, WB6NOA, to produce a series of license manuals for both amateur and commercial FCC exams. Fred had been battling prostate cancer for a couple of years, but asked those around him to keep it private, which we all did. Over the course of this year, though, the “treatment” seemed to be taking as much of a toll on Fred as the cancer itself. After submitting his May column, Fred called me to report that his prognosis was not good and that he would have to give up the column. He thought he had several months, but it turned out to be weeks. Fred’s work touched the lives of everyone who ever took a VE-administered FCC license exam or applied for a vanity callsign. He will be greatly missed.

Another master of radio’s history has also left us. Bob Shrader, W6BNB, lived much of that history—he was 98 when he passed away on April 11—and he got his start as a radio operator in the Merchant Marine back in the 1930s. Later, Bob literally wrote the book on electronic communications. His text, *Electronic Communications*, is a standard reference on the bookshelves of thousands of RF engineers. Bob was also a prolific magazine writer and we were privileged to publish many of his articles here in *CQ*. It was Bob who taught me that the term CW actually referred to a continuous *amplitude* wave, which is what sets it apart (along with its much narrower bandwidth) from the *damped* wave of a spark-gap transmitter. I still have several of his articles in my “waiting for the right issue” stack and will try to publish as many as possible over the coming months to help keep Bob’s legacy alive just a little bit longer.

Moving from goodbyes to hellos, I am very pleased to report that retired FCC amateur radio enforcement chief Riley Hollingsworth, K4ZDH, will be joining our staff of contributing editors. When Fred told me he would have to stop writing his column, I immediately began looking for a successor. Riley was the first person I thought of and, to my delight, he accepted the offer immediately and enthusiastically. His column, to be called “Riley’s Ramblings,” will debut next month and will cover regulatory matters as well as other issues that he feels are important and/or interesting to our readers. Welcome aboard, Riley! We look forward to a long and enjoyable association.

I hope this issue motivates all of you to get out there and “Take It to The Field!”

73, Rich W2VU