

“Mindfulness” and Ham Radio

Good news! We are officially “cool,” at least until the next fad comes along. But the current one, according to a recent *Time* magazine cover story, is something called “mindfulness.” The bottom line, as I understand it, is that “multitasking” isn’t all that great for productivity, and that our smartphones, with their constant access to e-mail and the web, really are more distractions than anything else. Mindfulness, we’re told, consists of clearing all of these distractions from our minds and focusing exclusively on whatever it is we happen to be doing at the moment.

Of course, an entire industry has grown up around the concept, with “mindfulness instructors” teaching us how to shut off our phones and to use such techniques as meditation and yoga to help us clear out our mental clutter and focus on the moment. There are even “mindfulness retreats” during which people head out to the woods for a weekend of enforced escape from e-mail, Google and Facebook. Of course, they have trained coaches leading them, presumably prepared to deal with symptoms of “Connectedness Withdrawal” (a term I just made up), which of course is referred to by its initials, “CW.”

When I finished the article, I headed to my shack to work on my latest kit project, and immediately realized that I was not only practicing mindfulness but probably qualified to make gobs of money as a Mindfulness Instructor, teaching techniques of focusing through kit-building. (KØNEB, who already teaches kit-building around the country, could become the Mindfulness Kit-Building Guru and make millions!)

Think about it. Or rather, focus, if you will. ... When you sit down to work on a kit, you need to clear your mind of its usual distractions and focus on the project at hand. You need to make sure you’ve got the right parts in the right order, place them in the right spots on the circuit board, count turns on a coil if you need to wind one, solder carefully, etc. Complete mindfulness is mandatory.

Same with DXing or contesting, putting up an antenna, or operating in a net during a public service event or emergency. Looking for a weekend “retreat” away from the distractions of cell phones and e-mail? Try a hike into the woods, perhaps a camping trip, with a portable QRP rig. You can appreciate the wonders of nature all around you and then look for a good operating location, put up your antenna and turn on your rig for our special cure for Connectedness Withdrawal. Yes, you can battle CW with a good dose of CW!

Seriously, just about everything we do in ham radio requires us to focus on the task at hand—for safety’s sake if nothing else—and to put aside the distractions of everyday life for a little while as we put our mental and physical energy into the radio activity of the moment. You don’t want to be checking your e-mail while spotting your buddy who’s up on a tower. We are, and always have been, well-trained practitioners of mindfulness, even before the term existed.

So here’s a new way to bring new people into ham radio, especially appropriate for April: Repackage the hobby as a form of mindfulness training. Charge people \$50 an hour to learn to build kits. Lead mindfulness expeditions focusing on finding the source of a mystery radio signal (see CQ World-Wide Foxhunting

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Weekend results in this issue), at \$250 per person. Lead wilderness expeditions to hilltops where cell phones won’t work and train your attendees to focus on the beauty of nature and then, of the signals coming through their headphones (make sure you pick a hilltop with a “Summits on the Air”—or SOTA—number!). That should net you at least \$300 per person per day, more if you provide food. And then you can use all that cash to buy new gear, a new tower, and new antennas to—mindfully, of course—focus your signal on the DX location you’re hoping to reach!

73 to N6CL

We bid farewell this month to CQ’s longtime “VHF Plus” columnist and former CQ VHF magazine editor Joe Lynch, N6CL. Joe has written our VHF/UHF column for 22 years and has been the editor of CQ VHF since its relaunch as a quarterly in 2002. The demands of his new job as Director of Religious Education at the U.S. Military Academy are such that he needs to focus on them exclusively (or, rather, mindfully). We will miss Joe and the many good things he has brought to our magazines over the years. Many thanks for everything, Joe, and we wish you all the best in your new position.

As of this writing, we still had not lined up a successor to write the VHF-Plus column here in CQ. If you have broad-ranging VHF/UHF interests, can write well and have time to devote to a monthly column, I’d like to hear from you. Please drop me an e-mail at <w2vu@cq-amateur-radio.com>.

73, Rich, W2VU

Combined March/April Issue

As you no doubt have noticed, our recent print issues have been very late getting out the door and into your mailbox. We apologize for these delays and want to assure you that we are doing our best to get things back on schedule.

One of those steps was taken last month, with the launch of CQ Plus, a 50+ page monthly supplement to our digital edition, combining content from CQ VHF, Popular Communications, and WorldRadio Online magazines. So far, the response from readers has been excellent and we have even more great “plus” articles for you in this issue as well.

The next major step we’re taking to get ourselves back on track is this month, with a combined March/April issue. **All subscriptions are being extended by one issue**, so everyone will still get all the issues they’ve paid for. There will be a few, barely noticeable, changes in editorial content. Space limitations wouldn’t let us include everything planned for April in this issue, so for example, the CQ WW DX SSB Contest Results will appear in the May issue this year, followed by the CW results in June. It’s likely that we’ll be juggling some contest results and non-monthly columns for the rest of the year, but those changes will be temporary. Again, we apologize for these delays and disruptions, and hope that the changes we’re making will bring things back on schedule quickly.

Reminder: Our contest, hamfest, and special event calendars are always on our website, on time, even when the issue has shipped late. Look for them under current issue highlights at <www.cq-amateur-radio.com>.