

## CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Amateur radio contains a unique breed of people. At the slightest need for help, they gladly offer help to one another with projects, even to fellow hams who they may not know. At least they always have in the past. For as long as Charlie can remember, there was never any question that fellow hams from far and wide would rally to the aide of a fellow ham, even a total stranger. The most popular type of project needing group assistance is antenna work because most often, several pairs of hands are needed to work together to raise a yagi, swap a rotator, pull ropes or guy lines, look for tools, run to hardware store, etc. All the while, the owner of the property runs around making sure that everyone has what he or she needs. That's the normal process in any older ham's world.

While watching some pre-game shows on TV leading up to the Super Bowl, Charlie came upon a program with Howie Long, comparing several old school football players with modern players. Howie interviewed the old schoolers and compared their attitudes and work habits to the current generation. While intellectually tracking the message being presented, Charlie sublimely found himself thinking about ham radio and applying what he was hearing to old school hams and the modern crop.

He related much of what was being said on TV to old school hams and DXers. He first thought of probably his favorite young student, Brian and how proud he and Mary are of this fine young man. From a wet behind the ears high schooler, Brian progressed rapidly to pass his Extra class code and theory tests, then complete a six year Master's program at MIT and is now finishing up his engineering thesis for a Doctoral degree. He is pretty special, indeed. Under Charlie's mentoring, he learned the Amateur's ways and rules as Charlie knew them, so his knowledge is what we can rightfully call "old school" despite the fact that he is a young man and new Amateur.

Charlie also recalled a round table conversation in which he participated after last month's club meeting. Allen, one of the club members was asking the guys on the repeater for help in raising his new 11 element HF log periodic which is quite large and awkward to handle, impossible to install by himself. He needed a crew of about six. Charlie, Mike and a couple more old timers had volunteered but they needed a couple of younger experienced tower persons to work at the top, guiding the lines and dropping the boom into the mounting brackets. One fellow jumped in and offered to help and said he could probably get a second person to climb with him. He said that the two of them would be willing to do the work for \$50 per hour. Allen acknowledged the offer and said he'd get back to him. Charlie squeezed his mobile mike and said, "Allen, Mike and I have a couple of friends who'll help up on the tower. He then asked Allen to call him by phone later for details.

By the time Charlie made it to his DX Hill home, Mary had a message for him that Allen had called and would be waiting for his reply. Charlie called him and said that he didn't want to say anything on the air but he advised Allen not to hire professional help for his project. The club members can help him. Allen said, "Oh, I'm not hiring professionals. The fellow who made the offer is a salesman. He does work like this on weekends and nights." Charlie asked if he runs an actual part time business working on antennas and towers and Allen replied that he didn't believe so.

Charlie was really dismayed that a fellow ham would charge an hourly rate to do antenna work or any other help for another ham. It's different if the person does this for a living and runs a business doing tower work, etc. Whether or not a ham, if that's his business, he should expect to be paid fairly. But, fellow hams who aren't in the business never charge one another for work they do for other hams in

need. Hams always help one another, especially doing tower work. After all, if they didn't, it's very unlikely that many of us would have a tower or anything on it. It's far more work than one person can practically do alone. That's always the way it's done in the "old school". It's sort of like the old barn raising as was done in the very old days.

Charlie could easily relate Allen's tower work to the TV show he was watching and could easily see the similarities between older football players and older hams. It's a generational thing. Newer hams don't have the fraternal sense of brotherhood that their predecessors had. What a shame. Whenever Charlie thinks about that salesman who wanted to charge a fellow ham \$50 per hour to work on his tower, he simply shakes his head and says to himself, "What a shame".

Shortly after the TV program about old school football players, Charlie received a phone call from a club member who asked a question that just about ruined the rest of his day. The person on the phone was a club member named Ted who was asking about his license renewal. He had received mail marked "warning" from the W5YI VEC informing him that his license was about to expire and he was in danger of losing his license unless he quickly mailed the enclosed card along with a check for \$8.00 to W5YI for them to take care of the confusing process of renewing his license. Ted was quite nervous and was calling Charlie because he knew that everyone in the club went to him when they had questions. It was his first renewal and was afraid that he was going to lose his license which he had worked very hard to get.

Charlie asked Ted to calm down and tell him the date on his license. It was four months down the road as Charlie suspected and he could see the scare tactic that 5YI was using. He was offering to perform a free renewal service for a fee of \$8. But, no one can renew his/her license sooner than 90 days prior to its expiration. By mailing their warnings four months before expiration, it gives the 5YI crew 30 days to frighten hams into sending \$8 checks before anyone else notifies them of the impending expiration. The renewal process is done on-line and you may complete the process in a couple of minutes entirely FOR FREE. If you are an ARRL member, the League will renew your license at no cost. They will even notify you for free when your renewal date is nearing. The W5YI website states "Renewing your Amateur radio operator license can be confusing" and click here to let us do it for \$8.00. It's not confusing at all but they would like you to think so.

Charlie told Ted that it was outrageous to charge any money for performing a free service for a fellow ham, especially one that takes two minutes. Of course, W5YI is a business and is entitled to charge for its service. But at the rate of \$8 for two minutes, let's see, that's \$240 per hour!! That's really outrageous for purely a clerical task! Charlie asked Ted to plan to come over in about a month, when he will be within 90 days to his expiration and enjoy some of Mary's baked goods while he renews his license on-line for him for free. In the meanwhile, Ted should tear up the mail from W5YI and tell his friends to do the same.

Charlie has been having some difficult times lately. Trying to accept the values of the new generation is not easy for him. He will never accept the concept of hams charging fellow hams for their help with the exception of cases where hams run a business to service towers or repair radios for his living. Amateur radio is wonderful fraternity including people from all walks of life. Some try to use trust to their personal benefit and advantage. The old school would never tolerate that. The new school will have to learn it the hard way. In the meanwhile, call Charlie for help.