

What does it take to be an Effective Net Control Station – Tom Lykins, K4LID

Throughout the years, one thing I have enjoyed in amateur radio is being the Control Operator of a net. It may be a Section-level-net, Regional Net or, just a "good-ole- rag chew-net." While there have been various guidelines set up for nets, there is one that many of them have failed to address. In order to be a good and effective Net Control Station you must have what I call "good people skills." In other words, you must like people. You must learn to be an effective communicator and be able to interact with the members on your net "one-on-one," or you will never really master the art of being a good Net Control station.

The question then is--"how can I acquire these skills?" First, you must listen to the group for which you want to be an NCS. It may only be a traffic net or just a "rag-chew-net. Learn whom the people are, who participates in this group activity and something about each of them. Become part of the group yourself. You must learn to interact with them and identify with things they are interested in even if the subject matter has no interest to you personally. Try to educate yourself on the topics they discuss even if you only have a very basic and rudimentary understanding of the subject matter like fishing, auto racing, motorcycles, guns, knives, campers, recreational vehicles and the list goes on. Try to become somewhat familiar with these topics so you can let the members of the group discuss their interests. There will still be plenty of time left for you to get on the air and talk about your interests. As much as possible, try and become an "ombudsman" on as many subjects as you can. This is not to say that you must become an expert on each and every thing that is brought up but, at least, know where to get answers to questions or have a good idea where persons may go to get the answers. Offer help when asked. Try not to force your thoughts or ideas on the group or one individual unless asked to do so.

Now, let's talk about how to conduct the net. As Net control station you are the "boss" to a point. This is to say that while you are in charge of the net you don't do anything that would be counter-productive to the net. By being the boss you control the net. Don't let the net control you. All too often Net Control stations have never learned this skill. If you are going to be a successful Net control station you must learn this skill above and beyond any other. If a station steps out of line just admonish him lightly and say that he or she will be identified in due time. In this day and age of "political correctness" we have, unwittingly, diminished our effectiveness as a Net Control Station. We have become so concerned about "hurting someone's feelings" that we forget why we are here in the first place. If we use tact, we can effectively do what we started to accomplish. • Get the call signs right. Don't guess or "flub up." This is a total "turn-off" to the net participants. If the net you call has a comment section, when addressing the stations for comments always call the stations, know their names and try to come up with something that is unique to that person. If you don't know their names and locations, it is your responsibility to find out. Never just give partial call signs as this sends a message to net participant that you really know nothing about them. This will generally turn them off and they are not likely to participate in your net again. The net participants want to be able to identify with "you." You are their director for that few minutes you are calling the net. Unconsciously they are looking to you, for guidance of-a-sort. • If your net is a traffic net, it is imperative that you know and understand the National Traffic System and how it is supposed to work. Never "guess." Understand all functions of Nts and learn them well. If you need to keep a desk reference at your operating position then do so. Study it. Don't try and leaf through it and guess what you should be doing.

Never hurry through a net. Before agreeing to be a Net Control station, study how long it takes for the person whom you perceive as a good net control station to call the net, and pace yourself accordingly. Net participants can tell if you are in a hurry to "just get it over with," and, this is a big turn-off. All too often, people want to call the net but don't know just where and how to begin. While their heart may be in the right place, it is not just something that happens. Never give a net "stolen minutes of your time." It takes both study and practice.