

Synergy for ARES Members and Ares Goals, by KD5BJ

Tonight's training is about Synergy, which refers to the combined effort and cooperation among individuals to achieve a common goal or mission. Synergy creates a whole that is greater than the simple sum of its parts, whether is teamwork between members, strategic partnerships with served agencies, or relationships with donors and grantors.

Synergy improves productivity and makes goals that help any group as a whole to achieve more. Synergy is essential to bring to the table different perspectives, discuss means, skills, tools, their pros and cons, and all in harmony.

Many non-profits organizations waste time and efforts in fighting opinions and personalities, even to the point of driving an otherwise thriving organization to self-destruction. Keeping clear goals in mind and working in harmony transforms that outcome in successful endeavors.

For example, Lee County ARES mission statement is to provide emergency radio communications to public safety and other organizations in the event normal communications fail or are inadequate. Put simply, when 'comms' go down, we step up!

The vision is to engage with allied agencies and organizations in training exercises and support during both anticipated events (parades, fairs, career days, etc.) and unanticipated incidents (emergencies or urgent situations).

We also engage in visionary and quantifiable goals such as purchase and equipment of a mobile unit, such as the EmComm trailer, the ARES romm in the EOC, the building of common individual go-kits, the equipping deputies an/or other First Responders of back-up radio communications to talk to dispatchers in case their system goes down, protect equipment from EMPs and CMEs, etc.

Synergy benefits an organization by giving its members the power to work even better together and increases efficiency, creativity, and effectiveness in achieving goals. For example, individuals are open to share facts about equipment, such as radios, repeaters, digital modes, or skills, like climbing towers safely or interacting with served agencies, without the apprehension on stepping on toes, or being criticized.

On the same token, when someone brings concerns about said equipment or skills, can do so amicably. Pros and cons are evaluated, maybe tested, and a decision can eventually be made without winners or losers. As experience or challenges change, or the equipment proves inadequate, it can be sold and replaced without penalty to the individual who first suggested it. Whatever it takes to successfully achieve the goal.

Synergy emphasizes the importance of clear and open communication among team members to foster collaboration. Ham radio operators are notorious for communicating by bouncing signals off the moon, but misunderstanding one another while sitting across the table.

Synergy is critical to advance a shared vision: it allows to discuss the significance of the group's vision and it aligns everyone toward the common purpose. Being involved in emergency, we need to remember to keep the low common denominator in mind. We are going to have skilled operators, and not so skilled operators involved in the incident.

We might have ARES members coming from other counties who are totally unfamiliar with ICOM radios, for example, or digital modes. More basic operations will find more collaboration and will pave the way to successful integration of other ARES members serving our served agencies efficiently. And the opposite is also true. Synergy would equip us when we deploy somewhere else assisting individuals and groups we do not know.

What are the most commonly used method? Probably analogue and voice. Do we have a PDF that explains simply how to operate our radios? If we need the tweaking of the repeater, or restart it, do we have enough chosen and skilled people who can do that, or the knowlege is in the hand of a single person that might be away during the incident? What is the most common digital method that all train on, Winlink? D-STAR, DMR? Which one is easier to learn on the fly by a novice or which one is most commonly used? What do the SOC or hospitals use? What's best for a Star request?

As ham radio operators, it is our nature to experiment with new and not so new technology. We are enthusiastic learners ready to apply new methodologies to emergency communications. In our enthusiastic explorations we must not forget that we are a non-governmental group that provides reliable, efficient communications when all else fails. That is our focus, and we must aim at technology easy to use for everyone, used by most, with the fewest points of failure possible.

In emergency, it boils down to the KISS rule: Keep It Simple Stupid. And we need to integrating with synergy not only within ourselves, but also with potential ARES members coming even from other states to help us in Lee County.

Also important is to consider the needs of our County Officials, and what serves them reliably. Reliability is key, because during an emergency or disaster, we will be fighting with the infamous Mr. Murphy, equipment problems, shortage of personnel and people on the other side of the radio.

Reliability and simplicity are absolute keys, and together with synergy we will face with peace any task in the most stressful circumstances.

Practicing synergy every day builds trust and respect by strengthening relationship, bringing us together even in disagreement, without perception of hurting feelings or needing alliances.

Synergy will be contagious to new comers. We are a team that wants to grow. We're already growing in technology and infrastructure, and we will grow also in personnel.

As we grow, we must be ready to lead a steady path to success and train new people coming in. We also need to use familiarity among ourselves to our benefit, not to our loss. Family members can pick up a fight easier than acquaintances. I am talking by experience after having observed other groups, not only ARES, but also livestock groups. Great associations can be brought on their knees by just a member and/or lack of empathy for one another.

Treat to others like you like to be treated is the universal golden rule.

I just realized that many newer members are unfamiliar with our Strategic Plan. Even in the midst of so many activities and projects, we need to find the time to pause, re-examine the Plan, and update it.

We can even add into it a Standard Operating Procedures for members. After all, with have SOP for activations, why not having it for normal day-to-day, blue sky activities. Define clear responsibilities, fostering a culture of understanding and diplomatic relationship will not only help us greatly, but it will help others to integrate with us in any deployment here or anywhere else in the world.

The Strategic Plan will help us also stay focus on missions, goals and tasks ahead.