

Is your club "friendly?"

<Editor's Note: RC Online welcomes every and all modelers to contribute to the system, about good stuff and bad stuff.

"Hi Jay,

I recently decided to get back into R/C flying, after an absence of about 23 years, and I visited three fairly nearby flying fields. Times certainly have changed!

Twice, I was the only spectator, and I was obviously interested, since I moved up and down the fence looking at the models and watching as they were either prepared for flight, or serviced after a flight. Although I made eye contact with a smile whenever I could, not one person came over to say Hi and ask if I was interested in R/C flying! The "came over" part involved a distance of 12'-17' max.

At the third field, there were two couples in their mid-twenties, my friend and myself, in the spectator area. It was an exact repetition of the above. In all three instances, I had to raise my voice to attract someone's attention, always picking someone who wasn't busy with a model, so that I could ask a few basic questions about joining a club and starting to fly again.

Had I not already made 99% of the decision to return to the hobby, I probably would have said, "Screw You!", and gone off and done something else to occupy my recreation time!

At none of the fields was I offered the opportunity for a close-up look at the models. The overriding impression that I got from the people I talked to was that my accosting them was viewed as an intrusion. One of the couples walked over to ask some questions, and they were treated the same, so it isn't that I've got such a rotten personality that no one would willingly talk to me!

Nobody I talked with volunteered anything. I had to ask a specific question for every bit of information that I got. Nobody introduced themselves, or asked my name. Nobody said something like, "If you're really interested, give me your name and phone number, and I'll have 'Charlie' call you. He's our resident "talker", and he can explain everything to you, maybe set you up for a trial flight on a trainer and introduce you to some of the guys and gals at our next club meeting." In fact, I got the name of one of the club "talkers" from a hobby shop, called and left a message, explaining who I was and why I had called.

A week later I called and left another message. Four days later, I obtained a different name and phone number and got the information I wanted. And, No, the "talker" wasn't out of town!

I treat people that I don't like, who are Guests for whatever reason in my home, my place of business, or I just happen to run into on the street, with more warmth, interest and courtesy than I was shown at any of these fields! Not only was I not impressed, I was actively disappointed.

I just joined a club, but the choice was based solely on travel distance and the fact that I need a place to fly and the services of an instructor to get my hand back in. If I owned a farm, or lived in the boonies, I'd have said the hell with it and accepted the risks and probable extra expense of re-learning on my own!

Your idea of a club having one or more trainers available for a trial flight by visitors is excellent! With the advent of the buddy box - I can't remember ever seeing one, when I flew before. - I don't understand why clubs don't jump on this idea, as a means of getting people interested in the hobby. If this is against AMA rules for some reason, then I disagree with the rule, and it should be either changed, or ignored! Needless to say, the club I joined doesn't have any trainers so designated, and if the other two clubs do, they kept it a closely guarded secret!

The definition of PR at the three fields I visited, as it came across to this visitor, is Private & Restricted! Judging by some of the Internet posts I've read, often authored by people in their teens and twenties, I'm not the only visitor who has come away from a flying field with this feeling!

Only once, at any of these fields, did I see a young person flying. A boy of 14, or so, was learning to fly a helicopter. The next youngest person I saw was in his mid to late 30's. Yes, I realize that a few visits to only three fields in a tiny geographic area doesn't constitute a reliable sampling of R/C flying in the United States. But, since most of my visits were in the early evening and on the weekend, it does say something with a fair degree of reliability! The first club meeting that I attended a week ago was an exact duplicate. Ironically, it was held in a school!

Maybe the older folk, predominant in my small sample, have lived through the hassles of raising children, and they just don't want the Peace and Quiet, figuratively speaking, of their hobby disrupted by beginners and the care and attention they require. Maybe. Or, maybe it's something else that I've been out of the hobby too long to pick up on such short re-acquaintance. But what ever it is, in my opinion, it's shortsighted!

As everyone knows, long term planning in the United States, by Government, business and maybe R/C clubs (?), can be defined accurately as, "the time encompassed by the consecutive life spans of two drosophila flies!" Could this be one of the reasons why I've read several posts in the R/C newsgroups about the decline in interest and/or the number of participants in the hobby? Are they true? I don't know.

Even if they aren't, expecting very many people to grin and bear it through the inattention, reluctance and what some will view as the outright rudeness that I experienced to enter the hobby anyway, is unrealistic. This is an expensive hobby even at the 40 size trainer level, and there are a lot of fun things to do competing for those dollars. Fun things done by fun people with fun personalities who are obviously "happy" to have someone express an interest in doing what they enjoy doing so much themselves! They'll be only too glad to take the R/C flying field visitors on the rebound!

In my opinion, unless a majority of the R/C Clubs actively embrace the philosophy of PR as meaning Polite and Receptive, those "decline in interest" posts will probably come true."

Bob Richards
rricha2215@aol.com