

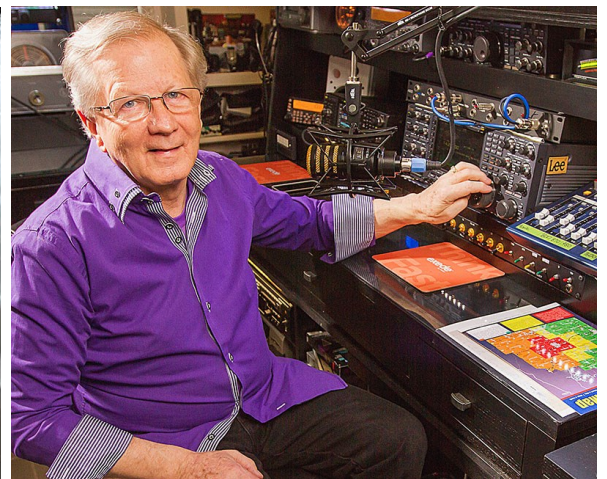
Microvolt

Monthly newsletter of the Utah Amateur Radio Club

August 2026



Professional Amateur



Why is our craft called *amateur radio*, and why are we licensed operators called *amateurs*? In many circles, the word *amateur* often carries a negative connotation, indicating unskilled, childish, or immature. It turns out that *amateur* in the world of radio means *unpaid* or *not compensated*. The term *professional* can also present a dual interpretation, in some ways inferring *paid*, while meaning expert or skilled in other contexts. The terms *amateur* and *professional* seem to hold opposite meanings, but is it possible to use both to describe the same person?

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Cover – Professional amateur

One of the hallmarks that identifies an amateur in radio is the fact that the operator must not accept payment, also known as a *pecuniary* (money) interest ([Part 97.3.a.4](#)), to communicate using amateur radio frequencies. Some exceptions to this rule are discussed in this issue's [Editorial](#).

Professional trade

Although we amateurs don't get paid for communicating by radio, many of us are engaged in technical vocations that might or might not have much to do with radio. For example, quite a lot of the amateur radio exam material surrounds concepts studied in electronics or electrical engineering, and a few licensed operators make a living in these very fields as professionals. Yet, that presents no conflict of interest or rule violation, in spite of the cross-connections. In that way, those operators are both amateurs and professionals, but by different disciplines.

Then again, some amateurs hold jobs that are directly related to amateur radio, such as ham radio courses, radio repair, radio equipment sales, and much more. Some of these are discussed in this issue's [Strays column](#). But what makes their business models legal is that they don't use amateur radio frequencies to conduct business, like place an order, exchange trade or money, or make a sale. In other words, they might use the institution of amateur radio as subjects of their businesses, but they don't use RF (radio frequency) as a vehicle to make money.

Professional behavior

One way in which an amateur can present a professional side is through his or her mannerism. This includes appropriate language, civil discussion, and proper treatment of others. Foul and obscene language, insults, gossip, and other unprofessional behavior have no place in amateur radio. Those would be amateurish, after all.



Other forms of professional behavior might not be as obvious, such as avoiding criticism of specific clubs,



operators, or operating modes, whether on or off the air. Acknowledging and praising other operators, being helpful to others, and admitting mistakes are also dead giveaways for professional mannerism. Today's world is replete with critics who insist on having their say; you don't need to be one of them.

Professional volunteers

A volunteer is a person who performs a vocation or service without compensation—out of the goodness of heart. If a volunteer is not paid, can he or she be considered a professional? In fact, performing in a volunteer role can offer a person a great opportunity to demonstrate professionalism without being a paid professional.

People who give their time in the interest of nonprofit clubs, special events, fundraisers, skilled *pro bono* service (legal, engineering, educational, tax, etc.), and even moral support, are obligated to maintain a high level of professional interaction due to their human connections.

Conclusion

Are you a professional, or an amateur? You might be a professional if your vocation pays you for your expertise, as a teacher, a nurse, a politician, or a custodian for example. You can be both if you're a licensed ham and treat others with respect, courtesy, and civility, regardless of how you make a living.

Also, whether or not you're paid for your service, the marks of a professional are deep competence, consistent reliability, and unwavering commitment to integrity. Along with those, humility, accountability (ownership), and emotional intelligence (maturity) play large roles in defining the professional amateur.

Microvolt editorial staff