

# The Radio Hotel

## FT8 - A Change of Attitude

by Rick Hiller – W5RH

I grew up in last century's Amateur Radio world with CW and SSB being my friends. No AM or RTTY for me. Rag chew QSO's were the mainstay of operation and DX country count chasing mostly being done with "5 9 Texas" type exchanges. When the new digital modes came along I found them to be more like RTTY. Legit, but still not my cup of tea. Then came the JT modes being utilized for EME work and for EME that made perfect sense, but I still didn't partake. When JT moved to FT and into the normal HF modes of short QSO's for DX'ing and contesting I found it totally uninteresting. Working stations you can't hear? No thanks. My ears and brain were my information demodulators and I liked it that way.

But then, just recently, along comes Gerald Youngblood, K5SDR, the founder, CEO and top notch SDR guru from Flex Radio in Austin writing an opinion piece that I just happened to stumble across. It can be found here: <https://www.flexradio.com/insider/articles/ft8-tipping-point-for-ham-radio/>

As he, I too had received my novice license over 50 years ago and met the technical challenges with excitement and wonder. But I stayed the on-air course of CW and SSB that I had set, varying little, only diving deep into the world of antenna systems that supported my on-air ops. Gerald, on the other hand, went with the flow toward leading edge technology.

He references a book about "The Tipping Point" – a critical point in time and technological development beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place. As he puts it, "The tipping point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire." He sees the phenomena of FT 8 being just that tipping point and questions whether it is positive or negative. Some think FT modes will kill amateur radio and others believe that such innovations give the hobby new life. He discusses the opinion of many that FT modes will be the end to Amateur Radio. I personally didn't see that FT8 based demise, but I still had no interest. He points out that FT-8 is a weak signal application, not a low power application and highlights a few benefits of the mode. Such as:

- FT8 counters the recently current dearth of sunspots
- FT8 opens "dead bands"
- FT8 lets little pistols work DXCC like a big gun
- FT8 lets you work the world from small or deed restricted lots
- FT8 lets you work weak signal DX without proficient CW skills
- FT8 lets you work DXCC on 160m without a big station
- FT8 is amazing and literally space age technology

Yes, FT8 is mostly automated and it reduces the skill required to make DX contacts. It also removes conversation and the human factor from the QSO, but that is true of the majority of DX chasing in any mode. Now here is where he gets to the core of the matter and pulls at my heart strings. He states, that it is his opinion that FT8 is at the very heart of what amateur radio has been about from its inception – *amateurs who love the art of radio enhancing the art of radio*. The FCC in Part 97.1 lists the five tenets that define amateur radio, the second one being: "*Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.*" I had forgotten this part of the definition, as to what makes my favorite hobby possible. FT8, as I now see it, is an example of what will keep it alive and relevant. What will kill amateur radio is if we cease to innovate, become old and grumpy, and no longer bring new blood into the hobby. Unfortunately, I have for some time now resembled that remark. But with a new onus, I now intend to change.

A new year is right around the corner and is prime for me to venture into the wonderful world of DX'ing behind a computer. A lot to learn, but as Gerald says, "FT modes are great all of the time and there will be times of phone and CW QSOs when the numbers are right". In my mind now, these are the best of both worlds. For me, a 'not too late' necessary change in attitude. I hope one for you too. FT8? Indeed, as I explore my sixth decade of interest in shortwave radio. Thanks, Gerald. Enjoy your hobby, 73....Rick W5RH