



Do You Know?

29 Oct 2017

Do you know what makes an exam session successful?

Some people might reply that a successful exam session is when everybody passes their exam(s). Whether the applicants pass or not is not a valid indicator of your team or your exam sessions being successful or not. It simply means that your applicants were prepared. If the applicants all failed their exams does that mean your team didn't perform their duties in accordance with the FCC rules or VEC policies? Because they failed their exams does that mean your procedures and paperwork were not 100% accurate and complete? Of course not.

Whether the applicants are successful or not depends solely on their level of preparation. To paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, "If they fail to prepare, they are preparing to fail." Nothing your team does during your exam session will change that.

So, what makes an exam session a successful event? It's pretty simple:

- Planning
- Preparation
- Training
- Attention to detail – Procedures and paperwork are 100% accurate and complete
- Total compliance with FCC rules and VEC policies
- Open communications
- A friendly and helpful atmosphere during the exam session

What do you have to do to be successful?

- Plan and train for every exam session like it was the D-Day invasion in Normandy.
 - Don't become complacent and do not rest on your laurels.
 - Past success does not mean future success.
 - Sweat the details because it's all about the details.
- Repeatedly reinforce your team's goals with every member of the team:
 - **Total compliance with the FCC rules and the policies of the Laurel VEC** – no exceptions
 - **Paperwork that is 100% accurate and complete** – no exceptions
 - **Efficient and timely processing of paperwork but not at the expense of compliance, accuracy, and completeness.**
- Identify the roles and the responsibilities inherent in each step of your workflow. Ensure they (the subtasks) are described in detail, discussed, and reviewed with the members of your team.
 - Registration
 - Exams
 - Grading

- Notification of results
 - Paperwork preparation
 - Documentation inspection and signing
 - Documentation review and presentation
- Constantly review your workflow, procedures, and roles before and after each exam session. Adjust anything and everything if necessary to ensure compliance with the FCC rules and VEC policies, improve the accuracy and completeness of the paperwork, and increase the efficiency of your workflow.
 - Assign each VE a specific role within each step of the workflow for each exam session. Rotate your VEs in and out of the various steps in the workflow over the course of your exam sessions to expand their knowledge and experience. This will help you identify their weaknesses and strengths, which can be used to your advantage.
 - Because most observed errors occur during the Registration and Certification steps in the workflow, consider using a checklist to help the VEs who are assigned to those steps. A checklist can focus on specific subtasks in the Registration and Certification steps in the workflow where a majority of errors occur.
 - Welcome the applicants and provide an overview of your exam session workflow, including what you expect from them and what they could expect from you. Include your policy on retesting. Consider injecting humor into the discussion, whenever possible, to get the applicants to relax, if only for a little while.
 - During the exam phase, the VEs administering exams should confirm with each applicant the exam(s) they desire to take, the order in which they desire to take their exams, and make sure everyone gets the correct exam.
 - When an applicant completes an exam, the VEs administering the exams should review the answer sheet to ensure all questions were answered before grading the answer sheet. If not, they should return the answer sheet and upon completion, grade the answer sheet.
 - As soon as possible after the exam is graded notify the applicants in private of their results.
 - If they passed, explain what will happen next and asked them to be patient as it could take 10-15 minutes to finish processing their paperwork and get it all signed.
 - If they failed, show them their results and if reasonable, offer them the opportunity to try again.
 - If they failed miserably recommend they go home and study some more.
 - If appropriate, inform them of some other nearby free exam sessions over the next few weeks. Return their paperwork as appropriate.
 - After the documentation was reviewed, results confirmed, and documents signed, the applicant's paperwork should be delivered to the team leader or designated representative.

- You or your designated representative should review all of the applicant's paperwork for accuracy and completeness with the applicant, have him/her sign the paperwork as appropriate and present them with their CSCE.
- After congratulating them (VEs not monitoring or grading exams stopped by to congratulate the successful applicants), consider giving them a package of papers that discussed topics such as your club and meeting schedules, ARRL, ARES/RACES, local and on-line dealers of radio equipment, amateur radio related websites, etc.
- Following the exam session:
 - Before you e-mail your session results to your Regional Coordinator, review all the session related paperwork including applications to insure the information entered into *SessionManager* is 100% accurate.
 - If you don't use *SessionManager*, review all the session related paperwork including applications to ensure the information is 100% accurate before mailing the session paperwork to your Regional Coordinator.
- Following the exam session, consider sending an e-mail to the entire team with an overview of the session, the results, any problems, successes, etc.
- Keep your team informed of any changes to your workflow, the VE roles and responsibilities, FCC rules or Laurel policies. If there are any changes to the FCC rules or Laurel policies, share with your team any impact on your workflow, roles, and responsibilities and the adjustments that must be made.
- Share every e-mail you might receive about your team's performance with all the members of the team. If the feedback was negative, review your workflow, procedures, and policies, etc. Determine if or why the team might have done something wrong and adjust or correct your procedures and/or workflow, if appropriate.
 - Solicit feedback from the team
 - Provide feedback to the team.
- The majority of negative feedback will most likely result from a lack of understanding of the rules and policies we are required to follow. For example:
 - The FCC requires every applicant to provide a SSN or a FRN. No exceptions.
 - Part 97 and Laurel policy do not require you to offer applicants the opportunity to retest a failed exam.

Planning, preparation, training, attention to detail, compliance with the FCC rules and VEC policies, multiple quality assurance checks (You can't check too often), open communications, and a friendly and helpful atmosphere during the exam session contributed to your successful exam sessions.

By the way, if the applicants are successful, that's just icing on the cake.

Now you know.