

Take This Blog, Please!

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Received a great letter the other week. Candid observations about this blog (and this blogger). Edited for length and clarity, here's an insight, intuitive letter from reader Kurt Drew (reprinted with his consent):

Dear Mike,

I've been an avid reader of your reporting on Raleigh/Wake fire services since the beginning. You recently received national accolades for the blog and rightfully so. However, the blog that won those awards isn't the same blog that we're reading today.

In the past, the blog was a direct reflection on the happenings of that week/month/year. Rarely were there posts that I didn't want to read. And readers were rabid to add comments. But now, looking at twenty-two current posts on the front page, most of them don't have comments. Personally, I've only read two of those.

The blog of past was a highly anticipated event. I couldn't wait for the next installment. Double-digit comments were the norm. But this has changed.

The blog of the present has an identity crisis. Is it a history blog? Is it a fire service blog? Is it some strange hybrid? And if the blog is confused, the readership is equally confused.

Don't get me wrong, some of this history is vivid and interesting. And it aligns with your personal description at the top of the blog home page: "Author, historian, photographer, buff." But it also seems that "buff" has taken a backseat to your other hobbies.

I'd like to broach the subject of censorship. Sure, this is your blog, and you determined what should be posted. But from a readers perspective, it seems like you don't want the blog to interfere with your relationships in the Raleigh/Wake fire service. If this is true, perhaps it's time to move on. Perhaps give the blog to another local buff?

I won't speak of the times that my own comments have been censored. It's one of things that wouldn't lead to a solution for either of us. But censoring comments is one symptom of what's probably "too many irons in the fire." No pun intended!

You've grown and your goals have changed. And buffing (or at least, blog reporting and open conversation therein), has moved further down your list of priorities. Look at Statter911 and Firegeezer, however, and their blog is their number one hobby.

Thank you, Kurt.

In response, I say "spot on!"

Now for a surprise. He wrote that letter in *December 2011*. For reasons too weird to believe, his message only reached me last week! (Tip: Facebook has this thing called an Other mail folder)

The One Constant is Change

We've been blogging for ten years (!) now. There have been over 2,840 postings. At the beginning of this thing, they were short missives. Tentative in tone. And it slowly built a readership.

Over the last few years, the evolution has continued. Content, posting frequency, comments, and moderation (censorship?) of comments. And, alas, probably slowly losing readers.

Despite being written back in 2011, the reader is accurate in his assessment of what's happened (and continued to happen) on this blog. My personal priorities have shifted in recent years. Blogging is no longer at or near the top of my "hobby queue." Personal relationship considerations have also grown and it's proven remarkably challenging to wear multiple hats in this context.

But the proof's in the pudding, and most readers have likely formed similar conclusions. Today's blog isn't like the past blog.

So What Now, Charlie?

Thinking that a couple things could happen.

First is an obvious "opening" for any local buff who wants to "report on and facilitate discussion" about Raleigh/Wake or even regional fire service happenings. Could be a blog. Could be a discussion board. Could be a Facebook group, maybe. Interested? Will happily help brainstorm, and can even assist with implementation.

Second, this blog could benefit from rebranding or restarting. Maybe move to a new platform, for a fresh restart. We'd retain the current blog, however. There's too much legacy content that's worth preserving. Too many good articles on fire history (or such) that people still find via Google.

Third, maybe discuss the sort of "collaborative community" needed in these parts. What's on people's wish list? What online experience do you want? Do people miss more of the "inside baseball" discussions, and behind-the-scenes opinions, perspectives, or rumors? Do folk favor a more spicy interactions? Bit of adversity in talking about things, and more busting of chops?

(Optional fourth option. Assess the quality and quantity of currently available information. How are we doing for learning what's happening? Does a "citizen reporter" still need to be on the beat? Or can anyone "tap the pulse" through Facebook, Twitter, mainstream news, and such? Probably already know that answer...)

When Maturity Attacks

We've all grown a bit with our online selves. Daresay even matured, through experiences ranging from blogs like this to comments on news sites to personal Facebook postings. Been there, done that.

If someone builds a new blog, will it work as good as the old blog? Do people still want to discuss things the way they used to discuss things? And, gasp, maybe even exclusively using real names??

Guess there's one way to find out. Who wants to be a blogger? Raise your hand and let's see what happens.

Mike,

I to have noticed a slow down in blog postings. Maybe this can be contributed to easier and quicker forms of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram. It could be several high profile disciplinary procedures that have made the news dealing with what people post about (see Charlotte FD). Although I would venture a guess that your last comment holds true, we have all matured some and we don't sweat the small stuff as much as we used to.

I still log in once in a while to see what you post though.

Scooter

Apex Batt Chief (Scooter) - 06/04/15 - 22:05

Blogging is tough. And it is hard work. My hat is off to you Mike, for keeping it up so long, even though it has slowed down a bit. Take a look at mine for a comparison. It is not that I do not want to keep it up, but there are time constraints as well as the 'concern about what one is saying' constraint that results from disagreement or misunderstanding of what is said.

DJ - 06/07/15 - 12:49

Interesting observations and criticism. Sorry for Mr. Drew that he doesn't eagerly await your next post. I'm not a fire "buff," so my visits are intermittent and usually done late at night at the firehouse when I ought to be getting whatever rack time I can. Young kids keep me from having much time to surf the web at home. I think you do a great job, Mike. There's way more to the fire service than the vast majority of our "customers" realize. I hate that term "customers," by the way. I'm not selling anything. I think Mr. Drew's use of the term "censorship" is completely wrong, however he might perceive it. Moderating is the more accurate descriptor. As we all know to well these days, the easy anonymity of the internet sows seeds of discord with astonishing speed. And, it doesn't take long before the vitriol becomes unbearable. This isn't to say that this blog is plagued by the kind of spiteful bashing found on politically oriented blogs of the comment sections of news

webpages or many YouTube videos. I just think your moderating, Mike, is well done, and maintains civility. It's your blog and you can run it how you like. I feel you are very comfortable receiving of well-intentioned criticism as any level-headed intellectual should (and would) be. Anyway, there are a few thoughts. Take care and goodnight...

Bob - 06/14/15 - 23:28

Thanks for the thoughts, Bob. The term censorship has appeared here before, and it seems appropriate enough. I like visceral impact of the word, in particular. Moderation is the preferred term, I guess. But maybe there's an even better word that belongs here.

Makes me think of a discussion board that I participate in, as a reader and occasional poster of comments or new topics. The moderator(s) of the board will occasional close a topic, with the language like "I think we've said everything that needs to be said here". Or maybe "There's no remaining value in the discussion of this topic, so we're closing this."

What the heck? Do the readers agree with this? That's my occasional reaction, and a time where the C word is ready to be cited. But maybe there's a better word than censorship.

I've long tried to "craft" our conversations on the blog, as a sort of sculpted product or steered ship. My hand of late (and of recent years) has been nearly invisible. Been a while since you've seen [Editors note] or [Comment deleted] and a parenthetical explanation or suggest therein.

There have been times when I've dropped people personal notes. "Hey, are you sure you want to say that?" Or "Hey, I think you're trying to say this, what if you try saying it this way?"

Just as there have been times that I've outright deleted, for various reasons. You might've seen the occasional "Legeros, you suck" comment (and usually with more colorful language). Or maybe you remember more targeted comments toward particular people or departments. "Oak City VFD sure burns them down, don't they?"

At the end of the day, my goal is always same. Help facilitate the best conversation possible. That's included maintain civility, as well as clarifying questions, rephrasing statements, and playing devil's advocate.

Since I'm still here and maybe a chunk of readers, I guess my style of facilitation (which includes censorship/moderation) has been effective enough. It's been darn fun and a good education, that's for sure.

Legeros - 06/15/15 - 08:14

Good point about moderators whose moderating shows a thin skin when comments and/criticisms cut a little deep. I've seen those too, but I think that forums (I hope my Latin teachers don't read this) such as those drive away the activity and the problem takes care of itself. I guess when I hear the word censorship, I automatically hear it at being used in it's most pejorative sense, which is necessarily always the case....

Bob - 06/19/15 - 23:12

Name: (real name preferred)
E-mail: (optional)
Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question