

The New Breed of Freemasons

All Freemasonry exists at the lodge level. Yes, I am sorry – it is only at the lodge level that Freemasonry exists. All the gold braid means nothing, all the programs mean nothing, and all the edifices mean nothing, if we don't ensure Masonry's survival at the lodge level.

Now don't get me wrong. Grand Lodge officers are all wonderful people! Right? It kind of reminds me of that one liner – you know why Grand Lodge officers are buried in double depth graves? Because deep down, they aren't that bad.

Also, please don't mistake that I am about to stand here and talk about some new program to solve all of the problems of all of the lodges – I am one who believes we actually over program lodges, and in doing so take away from our original intent – but that is a topic for another speech.

A Most Worshipful Brother once said something to me to this effect – we are all here because of one thing - Masonic enthusiasm – someone gave it to each of us, and each of us must pass that on to others.

The last four letters of enthusiasm are I. A. S. M. – I am sold myself. I Am Sold Myself. We all must believe that Freemasonry is the most superior of institutions known to mankind – and it is.

As interested brethren, we are all especially enthusiastic. Why? Not only because we are the best and most noble institution known to mankind, but also because younger men are becoming interested in Masonry in ever increasing numbers and are seeking to join our Fraternity at a rapid rate. Will this turn the tide in decline of total membership numbers? Probably not in the near future, but in time it will.

This however is going to compound some of our underlying issues that have aided in our membership decline and if we are not careful, will soon have this new, interested young blood turning away from that which he sought out.

For you see, today's new Mason is smarter, more informed, better educated, used to instantaneous communication, used to the heftics of the business world, and has less time, so therefore will not put up with it being wasted. Will challenge what he is told, will question why things are done – and we better have the answers to those questions. For him, we need to get our house in order!!

Our numbers have diminished, we are struggling financially, members are apathetic, and our image with the public is tarnished and lacks credibility. Why? Because we have failed miserably to adapt to changing times. How can we expect the world to take Freemasonry seriously if we do not take ourselves seriously? If we truly want to make the world a better place, we must first get our own house in order.

Whenever I consider the state of Freemasonry I am reminded of the movie “no time for sergeants” (1958, starring Andy Griffith) where Will Stockdale (Griffith) confounds Sergeant King (Myron McCormick), a ‘lifer’ satisfied with the ease and repetition of his path, who inevitably counters with the line, “don't make waves.” Frankly, the Sgt. Kings of the fraternity have lulled us to sleep and seem to be more concerned with chasing their next apron as opposed to solving the problems of Freemasonry.



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Back in the 1970's, Bro. Gerald ford was the last U.S. President who had the courage to go before the nation in his State of the Union Address and say in effect, "My fellow Americans, I am afraid to tell you the state of the union is not very good." It was honest; it was candid. But it ultimately cost him his re-election

The lesson here is that people do not want to hear the truth. They do not want to face reality. They cannot deal with it.

However, as Masons I would like to believe we are strong enough to accept the truth. And the truth is, the state of the fraternity is not very good. If we can accept this, we can then seek remedies to correct it. After all, you cannot treat a patient if he doesn't know he is sick. Attacking symptoms with band-aid solutions is simply not going to hack it anymore. I am afraid we need to perform some surgery.

Back to our new Mason – you know - the one who has sought us out and liked what his research uncovered.

Firstly, our new Mason thinks globally, has studied what he has joined and learned about 'universal brotherhood.'

I am baffled by those brothers who cannot think of Freemasonry beyond the four walls of their lodge room, or beyond a district or a Grand Jurisdiction. Are we too old or set in our ways that we cannot learn a thing or two from our neighbours, or they from us? Is there some Masonic law prohibiting cooperation towards a common endeavour? I think not.

Freemasonry is a special society separated by jurisdictional walls that we have built ourselves. Now is the time for us to find ways to work together in a concerted effort as opposed to autonomous units. Our strength lies in our unity, not our division.

Imagine for a minute when he gets involved and finds the division within Masons - for example the Prince Hall situation. He will soon wonder if we only talk the talk.

Secondly, we need to run the business of Freemasonry efficiently at all levels, for inefficiencies will frustrate him, and we will quickly lose his interest if he feels he cannot make it more professional and more in tune with the times. I am appalled at what I see in the administration of lodges and Grand Lodges. Not only are our information systems horribly antiquated, they lack consistency from lodge-to-lodge, lodge-to-Grand Lodge, and Grand Lodge-to-Grand Lodge. Instead of devising a standard and consistent system that can be universally applied, Grand Lodges keep reinventing the wheel at incredible costs. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the administration of our lodges, or Grand Lodges.

We need to know about: -

- Other Grand Lodges - jurisdiction, contact and address data, areas/zones/districts, local Masonic laws, history.
- Grand Lodge administration - payroll, accounts receivable, accounts payable, inventory, membership, banking/investments, budgeting, charities, Administration costs, etc.



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- Lodges - jurisdiction, contact and address data, officers, bylaws, history, dues, inventory, banking/investments, budgeting.
- Members - status, contact and address data, events (e.g., degrees, offices held, awards, etc.), skills inventory.
- Miscellaneous - news, schedules, projects, charities, job portal.

Not only would such a system reduce our administrative burdens, it would be viewed as a vital communications link between lodges, Grand Lodges, members, and the outside world. Of course, security/privacy precautions would have to be implemented to safeguard unauthorized access to data, but this is simple to do. Even the Shrine has a central location for such processing.

Imagine: the ability to verify a member's status regardless of the jurisdiction; to communicate between jurisdictions; to report sickness and distress wherever it occurs; to have a common and consistent approach shared by all. Quite simply, it would be mind-boggling. It would greatly reduce the financial burden for administering records at both the Grand Lodge and lodge level, yet bring a level of consistency never dreamt possible.

It is certainly feasible to do all of this. Establishing a universal system shouldn't be too hard to figure out. There is also some slick technology now available to make all of this happen. What makes this viable though is for us, as Freemasons, to implement it on a global basis. Allowing our lodges to work more productively can have a dramatic effect on our ability to act as Freemasons. And the new Mason is keenly aware of this.

Improve communications – today's younger Mason, as stated earlier, is wired to go. He has the Internet and therefore the world at his fingertips. He has his cell phone, PDA and Blackberry to keep him organized and connected. As such, he will look to his organization to grasp the technology, and utilize it – he won't put up with listening to laments that the public has misconceptions about Freemasonry, rather he will question why we don't just do something about it.

Spiritual anchor

In the wake of the events of 911, and in the face of organized religion, today's new young Mason is looking for a spiritual anchor. He has, by and large, turned his back on most organized religions, and is looking for us to provide that 'moral anchor'. Now don't get me wrong – it is not that he is not religious, but appears to be turned away from the hypocrisy that is organized religion – i.e. universality vs. no other religion is right; peace and brotherhood vs. wars and bloodshed, and the list goes on. We have, or we advertise that we have exactly what he is looking for – universal brotherhood with a strong moral anchor. What are we doing as a lodge, other than some ritual with some archaic terms to give him that moral anchor, and better yet, when we are outside the lodge room, is our behaviour consistent with what we are supposed to be about? If not, we have failed our new Mason, and he will not be around long.



Empower the lodge

I am a firm believer that the lodge should be allowed to make more decisions at the local level. Many lodges feel paralyzed because they live in fear of Grand Lodge. Such gridlock frustrates and inhibits Freemasons and is the root cause for creating apathy. Instead, the emphasis should be on simplifying lodge life as opposed to creating overhead or other burdens. In other words, I believe it is time we got Grand Lodge off the backs of the lodges. We need fewer bureaucratic rules and more Freemasonry.

I do not suggest the Grand Lodge's role is insignificant. Far from it. It is important but I believe we have gone overboard. I see the Grand Lodge's role as one of providing administrative support, as well as guidance and leadership. If our Grand Lodge officers are only going to administer what we currently have and lack the foresight of where we should be going, then we have some serious leadership problems. Our new member would expect no less.

Revamp our electoral process

Anyone who believes there are no politics in Freemasonry is very naive. In fact, we have the worst kind of politics: gossip, rumour mills, and good old-fashioned arm-twisting. So much so, I believe our approach to electing officers is detrimental to the fraternity. It should come as no surprise that many grand jurisdictions now suffer from political machines where the cream doesn't necessarily rise to the top. Consequently, the talented men we desperately need to lead us are going elsewhere. Only the most qualified should progress.

Our electoral process doesn't have to be this way. Some simple, common sense solutions are available to change this and help put the right men in the right chairs. For example, nominations, position papers, debates, questions and answers, proficiency tests, etc., should be included in our electoral process at both the lodge and Grand Lodge levels. Without such processes, we are left with political machines, certainly not an intelligent way for electing officers. Again, to our new member, do we only talk the talk?

Lodge amalgamations

If your lodge is recycling past masters, your membership is declining, and your meetings are about as interesting as watching grass grow; if this scenario is true, some serious thought should be given to amalgamating your lodge with another. Your only other alternative is electroshock therapy to wake people up, which in all likelihood, is beyond rejuvenation.

Many Masons resist the concept of amalgamations due simply to the longevity and heritage of their lodge. But as one brother pointed out to me, "what is more important, our allegiance to the fraternity or to our lodge?" Good point! Sure we don't like to lose our charters, but if our lodge is in decline, it would make more sense to amalgamate with another than to painfully watch it die a slow death. As any



gardener will tell you, sometimes you have to prune to make the plant stronger. Our new Mason can't make sense of two lodges within miles of each other meeting on the same night, and each struggling.

Make lodges fun again, and a haven from the everyday business life. No backbiting. No politics. Just friendly enjoyable self-development for our new members. Our new Mason is seeking out a haven from the pressures of the workplace. If he finds more of the same in the lodge, we are no haven to him, and represent a continuation of the same conditions he is trying to find a haven from.

These are all fairly tall orders, and will take time and a major shift in thinking to accomplish, however, there are a few things that we can do right away;

Stop trying to make our organization something that we were not conceived to be. Many of our leaders would have us putting the entire focus on our charitable endeavours. There is something wrong in using this as the prime reason for our existence. We must remember that we are a Fraternal organization, conceived for the purpose to taking good men and making them better. This is what we have stood for over 288 years, as we now exist, and that has made us great. Further, our new Mason's research showed him that charitable organizations and service clubs also exist, but he chose us because of our purpose.

Then there is the ongoing litany of membership woes. We need to stop promoting membership by numbers but rather by quality. Be more diligent in the selective process of members, and raise our standards. Don't lower them. We need to continue our vigil at the gate – many members preoccupation with membership numbers has lulled us into no longer worrying about what the applicant is, and whether he is, indeed a precious metal, but rather that he may be the dross, but at least he helps us pay the bills. By accepting less, we have undermined ourselves more, and in due time will accelerate our downward spiral if not checked.

Increasing our acceptance fees and qualifications for membership would only help. I like to use the analogy of having Leafs season tickets and having Brampton Battalion season tickets. If there are obstacles that might prevent your attending, you will probably miss the \$15 Battalion game, but move heaven and earth to get to the \$200 Leaf game. Our new Mason expects and is willing to pay fees consistent with the most superior organization in the world.

The main problem with our fraternity today is that we do not practice Freemasonry. More importantly, most Masons do not know what to practice. Why? Because they have never been instructed or taught anything about Freemasonry. Today's young, new Mason thirsts for knowledge, and wants to be taught – has invested a great amount into his consideration to join, and if we do not fulfill his expectations we will never see him again.

What worked for our forefathers years ago doesn't necessarily work-in today's world. I am certainly not suggesting we abandon our past. Far from it. The concept of our principles is what has attracted many great men and has provided some of the greatest leaders of all times. Greatness begets greatness.



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But we must hold up our organization and effectiveness to today's standards. Do we want to be viewed as 'custodian's of the past' or as a vibrant organization who plays vital role on the world's stage? I know our younger brothers and potential candidates are interested in the latter.

As any surgeon will tell you, do not try to apply a band-aid when a tourniquet is required to stop the bleeding. Let's move away from a reactive mode of operating to a pro-active philosophy, with visionaries who want to see the fraternity evolve into a higher level of effectiveness.

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