

ATTRACTING MASONIC LEADERS

This Short Talk Bulletin is adapted from a paper presented by the late Most Worshipful Brother Houston A. Brian, Past Grand Master of Arkansas, at the 1969 Southwestern Conference on Masonic Education. Brother Brian went to his Eternal Rest in December, 1977. His widow, Mrs. Mattie Brian, Graciously permitted us to use it as a Short Talk Bulletin.

With our population increasing rapidly, with the longest sustained era of prosperity in the history of our country, with shorter working hours and, consequently, more time for activities of one's choice, it would seem that membership in Masonry would be increasing steadily.

However, in most Grand Jurisdictions, we find year after year an alarming loss in membership. Many of our Brethren are laying aside the working tools of life. Many more are giving up their Masonic affiliation by simply refusing to pay their dues. When we add that each year finds fewer men petitioning for the Degrees, the overall situation presents a picture that is of grave concern to those of us who realize that no other organization, be it civic or fraternal, has as much to offer its membership as does the Masonic Fraternity.

Before we criticize our former Brethren too severely for allowing their membership in the Craft to lapse for non-payment of dues, perhaps we should take a long, hard look at Masonry as it is being exemplified in our Lodges today, particularly in relation to the leadership qualities of the officers in our respective Lodges. In doing so, let's attempt to ascertain the reason for our present dual dilemma of suspensions on the one hand and the lack of interest in the Fraternity by non-members on the other.

Today young men reaching their majority are better educated than those of any generation which has preceded them. They have been taught by us to spend their leisure time wisely and to affiliate with organizations that are run smoothly and efficiently by competent people with leadership ability. Is it any wonder that it is difficult to keep them interested in an inefficiently run Masonic Lodge? Have you ever observed a business fail when it seemed to have all the ingredients for a successful future? Not long ago a new business opened its doors in an excellent location. Its owner had ample capital for the venture, the products offered for sale were good, and the prices were competitive. Everyone predicted a bright future for this concern, but in less than a year it failed dismally. The owner did not have the leadership qualities necessary and would not employ the right kind of personnel to operate the business successfully.

We know that the mission of Masonry is laudable, that through its teachings good men become even better men. We have also experienced the warm fraternal fellowship which the association with our Brethren and their families affords us. In view of this, interest in Masonry, from both within and without the Fraternity, should be on the increase. Why, then, do we find the opposite to be true?

Perhaps the fault lies in the fact that we have allowed our Lodges in many instances to be run by Brethren who do not have the leadership qualities necessary for the efficient operation of any organization, more especially a Masonic Lodge. I have seen Brethren who would not even have been assigned the chairmanship of a relatively unimportant committee in a going venture of any nature because of their inability to get the job done effectively serving as Masters of Lodges with membership in the hundreds. Yes, in many instances Masonry is using for its leaders Brethren who would not be accepted for leadership anywhere else. This is not to cast aspersions against these Brethren. They are good men and good Masons, but Brethren who simply should not be allowed to become Masters of their Lodges because of their inability to perform the duties of the office in a satisfactory manner.

Find a Lodge whose Master and other officers are leaders in the true sense of the word, and you will find a Lodge in which the Brethren value their membership, participate in the activities of the Lodge, keep their membership active, and through their actions, in and out of the Lodge, attract other good men to petition for the Degrees.

Does the Masonic Fraternity have within its membership Brethren with leadership ability; and if so, why do we not put these Brethren's talents to active use in our Lodges?

In most Lodges the Master and other officers attempt only to use the Brethren for ritual assignments. A Lodge is fortunate if one out of ten of its members will accept a ritual assignment, and the other Brethren are usually not given anything at all to do.

Masonry without acceptable ritual in the opening and closing of the Lodge and in the conferring of the three Symbolic Degrees cannot fulfill its true mission as a Lodge. The Master who has real leadership ability will see that his Lodge is proficient in ritual. He will then devote his energies to other avenues of service, thus assuring his Lodge a well-rounded program of Masonic activity.

A pamphlet entitled "To Set the Craft to Labor" has been prepared for the use of Lodge officers in Arkansas. In this pamphlet the Master is urged to assign each Master Mason, within easy driving distance of his Lodge, one or more specific responsibilities. This is to be done through committee assignments. The work of some twenty-five committees is spelled out in detail for the Master's guidance. At the end of each committee assignment in the pamphlet space is provided for the Master to list the Chairman and the other members of that particular committee.

The size of a Lodge, the nature of the community in which it is located, and the type of activities conducted by the Lodge will determine how many committees are needed to carry on an active and sound program of Masonry. A small Lodge will adjust downward the number of committee assignments to those which can best fill its needs. A Lodge with a big membership may need to increase the number of committees in order to be certain that every member who lives nearby will have definite work to do for his Lodge. The idea is to give the general membership a job to do and then to exercise leadership by suggesting to them ideas, projects, programs, and activities on which they can work through committee assignments. For this plan to be effective, the Master should appoint his committees immediately after his installation and then call upon them for progress reports throughout the year.

Care should be exercised by the Master in choosing the Chairmen for the committees. A well-informed Brother, who is a skilled ritualist, should head up the Ritual, Lecturing, and Certification Committees. A Brother who enjoys preparing food and serving it should head the Dining Room Committee. A Brother who has the ability to write interesting news items should chair the Publicity Committee, etc. Once the membership is working actively for the Lodge, Brethren with leadership qualities will emerge.

It is high time that we in Masonry realize that the Master should be a man with aggressive leadership. For far too long we have used as a criteria for choosing Lodge officers Brethren who can quote a little ritual but who may otherwise evidence absolutely no leadership ability. These Brethren have never been called upon for leadership anywhere else and never will be.

In a thriving small town in Arkansas there was, until recently, a Lodge hall which was, to put it mildly, in a sad state of repair. The roof leaked, there were no rest room facilities, and

the Lodge was heated by unvented heaters. The Hall was on the second floor of a building with no cooling facilities, and in the summertime the heat was unbearable. For more than ten years the few faithful Brethren who attended Lodge tried as best they could to devise some method whereby they could build and equip a new Lodge Hall. Their efforts were in vain, and the Lodge continued its steady decline in both membership and general activity.

A man with leadership ability moved into this particular town and affiliated with the Lodge in question. As Master, he had served his former Lodge with distinction. In due time he was elected Secretary, and through his efforts some Brethren with leadership ability began to attend Lodge. The Lodge elected one of these aggressive young Brethren Master of the Lodge.

As his first order of business, the Master with the help of the Secretary examined the Lodge membership roll with a view to the selection of a committee to head up a building program. They found that the President of the Bank was a long-time member of the Lodge, that a successful building contractor and a prominent realtor, as well as other leaders in the community, were also members. A general meeting was called, and these Brethren with leadership ability and know-how in the fields of building and financing were invited to attend. Along with the faithful few who had held the Lodge together for years, they were asked to suggest ways in which a site could be secured and a Lodge Hall erected which would be a credit to both Masonry and the town. Within a very short time concrete plans were formulated, and a beautiful, functional Lodge Hall was erected. Today this particular Lodge is a credit to the community in which it is located, and Masonry benefits there from. Members with know-how qualities had been available for years, but lack of Lodge leadership had failed to generate interest prior to this time.

In many of our Lodges a Brother is expected to begin serving his Lodge as an officer in the station of Junior Master of Ceremonies. Normally this means that to work through the chairs and to serve as Master of the Lodge will take seven years. Most men with leadership ability are called upon in the community to give of their time and talents in many avenues of service. Because of this, many of these Brethren will refuse to give seven years' service to their Lodge, but would, in many instances, serve faithfully for three years. I submit to you that a real leader

can contribute more to Masonry in three years than a great many of the of officers of our Lodges at present could contribute in three score years.

In summation, there is no easy way to attract leaders within the Fraternity. In fact, there is no easy way to attract a leader in any endeavor of any consequence. Yet, in our civic clubs leaders continue to emerge. In business, leadership asserts itself. In Masonry, we must learn the knack of involving our membership in our Masonic activities to the end that leaders will emerge.

If we do this, interest in Masonry from both within and without will increase to the end that our sons and those who come after them will have the privilege of becoming Master Masons in a Lodge in which they will value their membership.