

IDEAS AND LEADERSHIP

Bro. Allen Roberts is one of Freemasonry's most talented and respected authors. He has written many books, and articles, and has always strongly supported Masonic Education and Leadership Training. In this STB, Bro. Roberts explains the importance of effective leadership and how the newly created Masonic Leadership Center can be of help to all Freemasons. -- Editor

Leadership! This is the key to Freemasonry's growth. (And we believe we can offer some assistance.)

Leadership. It must be the key that unlocks the door to Freemasonry's potential. Digesting and using ideas are the backbone of leadership. This pierces and destroys apathy. It's the key that unlocks constructive leaders.

A good leader motivates other people to get things done! This is a fact that has been known and stressed for hundreds of years. The constructive leader realizes he must depend on others to accomplish his goals.

Thomas Edison, one of the greatest inventors of any age, told us why he was successful. He said he was an awfully good sponge; that most of the ideas he developed were those of other people. Edison evaluated those ideas, adapted them and adopted goals for himself.

They became his goals. By perfecting these ideas, and directing his associates, he was able to achieve his objectives. This is fine, if there is only one person--you--to consider. It's entirely different when we're working for an organization. Then these goals must be set by everyone involved. My goals are fine, but they are mine alone. You may, or may not, help me reach them. But if we establish goals together, they become our goals. We then stand an excellent chance of reaching them.

Every seminar and workshop I conducted for over 40 years began with this statement: Every person in this room knows something no one else knows. The truth of this statement becomes quickly apparent. By bringing together this vast store of knowledge, everyone becomes the beneficiary.

We've often heard stories about the reinvention of the wheel. The wise leader seeks methods to improve on this creation of the stone age. Brother Henry Ford did it when he gave us the horseless carriage. He not only improved the wheel, he enhanced the means of travel. He did so by developing the ideas of those who had come before him. This helped him change the life of every person on earth, forever! Then along came others to improve on what Ford had achieved.

There's a lesson in this one example that every leader should follow. The automobile of today wasn't conceived and designed from nothing; it benefited from what Ford, and those who came

before him, developed. Countless man hours and millions of dollars were saved to use for other purposes.

Consider what I call "the miracle of television." Those of my generation can remember the first crude radios. We can look back and follow the improvements through today, from the ideas of yesterday, and expect further advancements tomorrow. These ideas have been incorporated into television and the other means of communication we enjoy, and too often take for granted.

It's not difficult to consider another "miracle"--the personal computer. Even a younger generation than mine can look back on the day the electric typewriter was a wonderful invention. Fortunately, along came the "space age" with its inventions of better means of communication.

The computer was far out of reach of all but the wealthiest businesses. There were a few, thank goodness, working to change this situation. The world of communication has been completely revolutionized!

It doesn't take much thinking to understand why we have the "miracles" of today in communication. Constructive leaders improved on the ideas that began thousands of years ago. From the sticks used for drawing, to chisels, to quills, to ink and pen, to type, and then Gutenberg's movable type. This latter freed people from ecclesiastical bondage by making the printed word available to all.

No longer did the "average" person have to depend on the translations of a few learned clerics for the knowledge available. No longer did man have to learn by "mouth to ear." Books became more and more prevalent. Libraries began to become accessible. Schools expanded. Other means of accumulating and disseminating information grew.

What has this to do with Freemasonry? Everything, I hope.

For hundreds of years Freemasonry has been the leading fraternal organization in the world. It has set the mode for the morality of man. It has stood for justice for all peoples. It has been far ahead of its time.

How can I say that? By researching the past.

If we follow the history of our operative brethren we learn how they constantly improved their methods of building. They continually modified the ideas and methods of other masons and builders. The cathedrals, castles, and other buildings that have withstood the ravages of time are testimonials to their continual progress.

From the far flung lodges, or guilds, came an attempt to associate the operative masons with speculative associates. The men who had been admitted to the builders' guilds who were not craftsmen, wanted the lessons of the operatives perpetuated. This brought some of the members of four English lodges together in 1717. From this meeting evolved the Freemasonry we follow today.

Some criterion had to be developed to bring order out of what could be chaos. So, James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister, was chosen to do the job. He solicited all the old writings available about the operative craft. From these documents he compiled the Constitution of the Free-Masons, which the Grand Lodge of England adopted in 1723. His history of the craft, which he found in the old documents, has been termed, rightly, as "fanciful." But the Charges and regulations are, for the most part, still followed today.

Among these we find: Charge IV: Officers must be chosen by merit, not by seniority or favoritism; apprentices must be capable of learning the art and being of service; work must be learned before becoming a Warden; a Master must have served as a Warden; a Grand Master must have served as a Master.

We find that even in the 1720s the importance of good management and constructive leadership were emphasized. But actually, we can trace the ideals of management to the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Among many such lessons we find Jethro teaching Moses how to be a good manager. He suggested Moses delegate authority and responsibilities; how to set up an organization much as the large, successful, corporations are structured today.

This means that leaders will surround themselves with subordinates who will tell them the truth. It's easy for men to attempt to be popular by always agreeing with the "boss," even when they know he's wrong. But this can, and often does, lead to disaster for the boss. Being encircled by "yes men" can destroy a would-be leader.

Article V in the Constitutions tells us that Freemasons must perform honest work for fair wages. And the Grand Lodge must approve the working tools. It is, therefore, necessary for the leadership at the top to be the best it's possible to find. The top leaders set the tone for their whole jurisdiction. Obstructive, or poor, leaders suppress growth; constructive leaders will help their Lodges and members reach for the stars.

Freemasonry, like most non-profit and commercial organizations, is not totally democratic. This makes it all the more necessary for Freemasonry's leadership to be constructive. The iron fist the leader can use must be enclosed in a velvet glove. In a voluntary organization, such as Freemasonry, the leader can order no man to do anything.

For over 75 years The Masonic Service Association has provided information to Grand Lodges and Lodges throughout the country. Far too much of this invaluable information has been ignored.

The Conferences of Grand Masters and Grand Secretaries have provided excellent information that could have produced phenomenal results for the Craft. Much of this information has been spoken and recorded in Masonic Educational Conferences such as the Midwest and Northeast. What was spoken, taught and recorded has been, for the most part, buried so deeply it has rarely been employed. The thousands of hours and dollars that went into the planning were lost.

This isn't as it should be. A few Masonic leaders have pleaded for years for the establishment of a central location where leadership and educational material could be stored. Merely storing it,

however, is only part of the answer. The information must also be cataloged, indexed, reviewed, then made readily available for all Grand Lodges truly interested in educating their leaders and members.

Over forty years ago I coined this phrase: There can be no dedication without Education; Leadership provides the background.

The means is now available for Freemasonry to develop the leadership it must have to remain a viable force for good. By teaching Freemasons how to be leaders Freemasonry can have thousands of Master Masons dedicated to the principles of our Fraternity. This will continue the growth of the Fraternity. Freemasons who understand Freemasonry will be teaching and working with Freemasons.

How has this important stage been reached? Why can Freemasonry stop reinventing the wheel, but continue to improve on its design and utility?

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association's Board of Directors offered its facilities for a Masonic Leadership Center. The Philaethes Society, a small Masonic research body, contributed enough money to the Center for the minimum necessities to get it started. One of the Society's members,

Paul M. Bessel, agreed to act as the Center's Executive Secretary. Others have volunteered to help. They will review transactions and books, then index them for the Center.

Much information is now available. Time, patience and the assistance of volunteers will provide the Masonic leadership with tested programs they can then modify for their Grand Lodges. There will be no cost to Grand Lodges and appendant bodies for this information, although monetary contributions will gladly be accepted. Transactions, books, programs, and other educational items pertain..... Freemasonry are solicited.

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