

INVOLVEMENT IS ESSENTIAL

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What to do with the newly-made Mason is a challenge that has faced Worshipful Masters, subordinate Lodges and Grand Lodges perhaps more than any other question. The fledgling Mason abounds with enthusiasm and energy; he is ready to work and eager for an assignment. It is precisely at this time that many Lodges fail miserably. Indecisiveness on the part of Lodge leadership and inertia on the part of Lodge members allow a priceless resource to go neglected and which will probably never be utilized properly.

There are a number of reasons for this neglect and lack of utilization. Too frequently, Worshipful Masters are pushed through the Lodge stations so quickly that they reach the East unprepared and immature. In short, they don't know how to identify potential skills, much less how to utilize the people who possess them. Accordingly, there is a remarkable lack of management by objective. Secondly, the immaturity of the Master literally propels him to surround himself with his close friends to the point that a clique of personality sometimes emerges, and those who do not belong to it do not get the opportunity to serve or to be recognized in a constructive way. This type of management often permits a Past Master to control the Lodge in ways that he perhaps never intended. Ritual tends to be performed by a select few; potential dramatists seldom get an opportunity, and when they do, it is often too

This lack of involvement is very readily demonstrated by the small number of Brothers who attend Lodge Communications. Lodges can count themselves blessed if they have as many as ten percent in attendance. The brethren regret the statistical facts and often ask why. The obvious answer, non-involvement of Brothers, rarely impresses itself upon their minds, and when it does, the brethren ask how this involvement can be accomplished; how can these newly-made Masons, who fall by the wayside each year, be retained.

There are some basic answers to these questions. The problem is readily capable of solution. Determination to meet the problem and stick with the treatment for it on a sustained basis is very difficult at best. Lodges did not create their problems overnight; accordingly, it will take more than a day to solve them.

One of the most discernible ways to involve newly-raised Masons immediately is in the area of Lodge Visitation and Relief. Not much expertise is required, and there is a fabulous opportunity for the Brother to gain valuable experience. Each Masonic Lodge reflects a vast range of ages and conditions among its members. Ages range from twenty-one in most Jurisdictions, to more than one hundred.

Many Lodges have a considerable number of their brethren who are emeritus. Herein lies a golden opportunity, for these brethren constitute a veritable wealth of experience, knowledge and talent. They are usually eager to share in each of these areas. They are literally waiting to be asked. All too frequently they are not asked. Many of these brethren are quite willing to go to Lodge, but cannot unless assisted. Cataracts are the reason for many. Even though operations are very successful, night driving is out of the question for many. Then there are those brethren who need physical assistance to get to Lodge. Many Lodges have faced reality and installed elevators and riding chairs for the infirm. Coronary disease inflicts the young as well as the old. It is a wise Lodge which addresses itself to the needs of the Brethren. There are also those Brethren who feel because of age or health that they cannot leave their wives alone. Here is an excellent opportunity for the wives of the brethren to get involved by sitting with these ladies while the men go to Lodge.

A wise Master can utilize the newly-made Masons in this area most effectively. Think of the wonderful instruction these senior Craftsmen can impart. Think also of the precious example their lives set for these impressionable Craftsmen. What an opportunity exists here for teaching, learning, sharing, caring and for growing. The most fantastic examples are being set, and a young Mason is being molded in the finest tradition possible.

Many elderly Masons live in retirement homes. Often they are unable to go to Lodge. A special opportunity exists here for the newly initiated. Visits to these brethren mean so much. A visit, albeit it brief, is two-edged. The old Mason is cheered by it, and the young Mason is richly rewarded internally. He builds up that store of rich, vibrant, experience that adds so much to the construction of his spiritual temple.

There are the Masonic widows. Women on the average, have a considerably longer lifespan than do their husbands. Most Lodges have a responsibility to a large number of widows. A resourceful Master can and should have at least one Widow's Night each year, and the Lodge widows should be included in all social and festive events. It is important that visits be made on a regular basis to insure the widow's welfare. Newly-made Masons and their wives should visit the widows in the company of older Brothers. The Brothers and their wives can help the widow to shop; they can assist her in meeting appointments with the physician and the dentist. They can see to it that she gets to and from church, and vitally they insure by their presence and concern that she is important as a person - as a special creation of God.

Every Mason should visit his Grand Lodge Home for Children or the elderly if the Grand Lodge has one. Surprisingly few do this. Those who do, need no convincing as to the reason to contribute toward the Institutional Endowment Fund. The new Brother should be involved immediately in an educational plan designed to acquaint him with the Home and the need to support it. More importantly, his education should be enhanced by visiting the institution. Lodges should make visits at special times. This group would yield benefits far out of proportion of the effort expended.

Virtually every Masonic Temple or Lodge Hall has something for the new Brother to do. Periodic physical maintenance of interiors and exteriors comes immediately to mind. Most Lodges are feeling the bite of inflation. Work formerly contracted, such as painting, could and

should be undertaken by the brethren. All of the Brothers will feel better as a result of such a group experience. Funds saved can be well spent on charitable and educational activity.

Some Lodges make a point of involving newly-made Masons in the preparation of newsletters and Trestle Boards. Often the new Brother has journalistic skill, typing ability, or other talents that make him particularly suited for this type of activity.

Secretaries often ask for and receive help in making more coherent order out of files. This can be and often is tedious work, but it is work that must be done. And the Brethren will not know who will or will not do it until they ask.

The Lodge each year should have an every member canvass. Physical contact should be established with each Brother if possible. Questions should be asked as to why a Brother has not attended Lodge. Ideas and suggestions should be solicited from all to ascertain what can be done to improve the Lodge. The physical visit will point out to the Brother that his brethren are interested and that he is needed. Often these visits yield immediate, widespread and long-range results.

Sometimes Lodges learn for the first time that a Brother is ill, that he has serious financial problems. Pride frequently has prevented the wife or other family member from asking for and receiving help. The problem, however, is that so few Lodges have anything resembling a real visitation program and few if any newly-made brethren are involved in it.

One of the really great areas of the Lodge in which to involve the newly-made Mason is in DeMolay, Rainbow Girls, and Job's Daughters activities. The youth of Masonry are involved here. There is simply no better area for Masons to invest time and talent, both of which are sorely needed-especially talent. Too frequently the brethren are prone to write a check when time is the greater of the needs. Time spent in worthwhile activity yields benefits of an intangible nature, often years away before full realization. But these benefits are the most special. To see a young boy and girl grow up to become a fine man and woman is to savor life at its finest. And this is the essence of Freemasonry, to take the good man and to make him better.

A word is in order concerning Family Nights. There is no doubt that the family needs must be considered if healthy Masonic growth is an objective of the Lodge. A plan of Masonic education which includes the wife is essential. The Investigating Committee should insist that she be present when it calls on her husband. She should be told that it will be necessary for her husband to be away from home for purposes of instruction at certain times. It should be stressed to her and to him that Masonry strongly supports the concept of the family, and that it is never to interfere with a family's harmony.

The newly-made Mason should be encouraged to coach candidates as soon as he is qualified. This will do much to imprint upon his mind the ritual and the catechism. More often than not this responsibility will send the new coach to the books to search for answers and to delve more deeply into the symbolism with which he is involved. Every Lodge should have a well-stocked library that is added to on a regular basis. All Masons, young and old, should be encouraged to consult Mackey, Pike, Pound, Newton and a host of others. The new Brother ought to make it a

habit to read The Philalethes, the New age, The Short Talk Bulletin, Quatuor Coronati Transactions, Knight Templar Magazine, and others that members of the Lodge receive. There ought to be time to discuss Masonry at all Communications. All of this will help to ground our new Brother in the fundamentals. It will help him to be a better coach and thereby a better Mason.

The above mentioned areas are simplistic in nature. All are well- known and all are in operation, to a degree, in some Lodges. The problem, however, is that there is no really systematic attempt in too many Lodges to employ all or, in some, any of them. We need to return to these basic fundamentals that have stood the test of time. There is no better time to start than with the present class of Entered Apprentices.

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