

LEADERSHIP IS EXPECTED AND RESPECTED

One of the most irritating and disconcerting things during any Masonic meeting is when two or more Brethren on the sidelines get into a sotto voce discussion. It's even worse when one of them is hard of hearing. When this happens during degree work, it can throw off even the best of ritualists. We've all seen--and heard--it happen.

It is a distraction from the solemnity of the ritual. It's discourteous to the degree team; it's robbing the candidate of the benefit of what should be a meaningful experience; and it is insulting to the Brethren who are trying to hear.

Unfortunately, the offending offensive Brethren don't seem to realize that they are disturbing their colleagues. They don't realize that they can be heard ..or, possibly they don't care.

How to overcome situations like this is a leadership problem which faces many Masters. Should he rap the gavel and ask for quiet? Should he have someone go over to the offending Brethren and ask them to be quiet? Should he ask them to leave the lodge room? Or should he ignore them?

The answers to these questions will depend on many factors. The mantle of leadership comes in many guises. The personality of the Master will to a large degree, dictate the manner in which he can best cope with the situation. There are some with strong authoritative images, who can maintain order merely by a meaningful glance; while others must resort to persuasion, reasoning or other methods . We recognize that the Worshipful Master has the authority to take strong action. His word is LAW. However, in the interest of "peace and harmony" he will--if he is a good leader -- use only the "force" necessary to overcome an infraction. Gentle persuasion is probably the best tool he has. By "whispering wise words of counsel in the ear of an erring Brother" or having it done, will usually secure the desired results.

We heard of one Grand Master who was speaking at a lodge in his own Jurisdiction which had a reputation of sideline chatter. Even as he was speaking, the lodge Secretary and the lodge Treasurer became involved in a heated, whispered argument, which proved most distracting. In fact, it became so disconcerting that the Grand Master lost his train of thought. Rapping the gavel, he addressed the talkative Brothers and sternly told them that he had been invited to speak; that he intended to speak, but that he was not going to have any competition. Upon resuming his prepared remarks, you could have heard a pin drop, it was so quiet. In fact, the remainder of the evening, the lodge maintained a subdued attitude. Everything was quite proper.

As he left the temple, he said to himself that that was probably the last time he would be invited to that lodge. How wrong he was. He later learned that at the next meeting of the lodge, the Secretary apologized to the Master and to the lodge for the embarrassment they had caused and

moved that the Grand Master be elected an Honorary Member of the lodge. The Treasurer seconded the motion, which was unanimously carried. He is the only Past Grand Master holding Honorary Membership in that lodge.

In recounting that story, the Grand Master, now Past Grand Master, uses it to illustrate several valid points of leadership. (1) Leaders MUST lead! (2) When you are in the "right," you have nothing to fear. (3) Leadership is expected and respected. (4) Harmony must prevail .

Courtesy - common courtesy - is a trait of mankind. It is a two-way street. It is a hallmark of a Mason.

We frequently see Masters who try too hard to be a "good old boy." They joke too much, and in doing so, invite a great deal of sideline chatter. Their meetings become so informal that the lodge is subjected to ridicule. Their lack of leadership is counter-productive. Instead of creating an atmosphere of dignity and decorum, they produce a comedy of contagious errors, which reflect upon the character of the lodge, and frequently drives the Brethren away from the lodge in droves.

Even worse, however, is the silver-tongued Master who is a born ritualist. His intonations, expression and sincerity are superb when he delivers the ritual. BUT, as soon as the lodge is closed, he becomes a loud-mouthing, foul-mouthed, woman-chasing rogue. He completely ignores his own beautiful rendition of the charge "to put into practice outside the lodge, those principles which are inculcated therein." This "Frankenstein Monster" has the leadership potential of an "off mule."

Everyone in leadership positions in any field of endeavor, either consciously or subconsciously, develops a style of leadership techniques which fit their personality. What is effective for one might be an absolute flop for another. Some of the leadership techniques could easily be described as gimmicks.

On the night of his installation, one Master announced that he was assigning a specific task to each of the 200 members of the lodge, which he would like to have completed within three months. What he had done involved a great deal of planning which is an essential in leadership. Over a period of months, he had developed a list of things which needed to be done around the lodge. He charged one member to see that each task was accomplished.

No one job involved much time or effort, but it did involve everyone. Tacking down a piece of upholstery on the Junior Warden's station; scrubbing the lavatory; painting the stair rail; repairing strings on aprons; cleaning the glass on the Past Master's pictures; replacing a frayed cord on the Secretary's desk lamp; oiling the hinges on the Preparation Room door; replacing a tile in the kitchen floor; having the window curtains dry cleaned; helping the Secretary address envelopes; preparing a telephone roster; refinishing the Stewards' and Deacons' rods; developing a roster of Widows-and the list went on and on. Each task was matched with a member's name, one who had the time and ability to do it.

To coordinate and supervise the execution of the assignments, the Master assigned his officers. This, too, is an important element of leadership.

In the following weeks, the lodge building was a hub-bub of activity, as the members gathered to carry out their respective responsibilities. Some came during the lunch hour, others in the afternoon and some in the evening. Fellowship reigned as one Brother helped the other. Wives frequently came along to help out, and often brought along refreshments. Even after a job had been finished, many came back to see what else was being done. A coffee-klatch developed. Cribbage and pinochle games often started after the work was done.

The exciting thing that happened though, was the dramatic increase of attendance at even the Stated Meetings. And, at these, the Master was careful to exercise another trait of leadership by recognizing the accomplishments of each member and showing appreciation. Not only did the lodge building sparkle with its improvements, the members had become Masons in the true sense of the word, with a genuine concern for one another.

Just as the "spin-offs" of the Space Program have produced many improvements in our daily lives, the "spin-offs" of this Master's leadership have had a lasting effect upon the lodge and upon the community. A Master is expected to show leadership. He did. And his leadership is respected. However, his brand of leadership might not "fit" another.

The first impression many visiting Brethren get of a lodge is their reception by the Tiler (or, if you prefer-Tyler). How meticulous is he in checking your dues card; having you sign the register; seeing if you can be avouched for or if you need the "dreaded Committee;" providing an apron or in taking up "the word" can either "turn you on" or "turn you off." His is a thankless-yet important-job, yet it is somehow often ignored.

One Tiler in a small town lodge was getting more than his share of harassment from one of the members one night. Finally, after about five minutes of constant harangue, the Tiler became fed up. Picking up the "implement of his office," he said, "My job is to keep off cowans and eavesdroppers. I wish to H-----it was to keep off horses- asses." It was crude. Yet it was forceful. It accomplished its purpose. It was a form of leadership.

Much has been said and written about Masonic Leadership. (See Short Talk Bulletins: 1-70, Lodge Leadership; 4-52, Masonic Manners; 2- 41, Master; 10-39, Art of Presiding; 2-48, Parliamentary Law in Freemasonry; 10-74, Powers of the Worshipful Master.) (See Masonic Digests: Leadership - how to Develop It; Leadership Training; Think Tank for Junior Wardens.) There are no hard and fast rules. Leadership is a matter of interest for every Mason. Leadership is common courtesy. Leadership is a two-way street. Leadership is essential .

We show our leadership by the way we act toward others. It's as simple as setting the example by the way we conduct ourselves on the sidelines, or as complicated as controlling the discussions on an emotion-packed motion.

Each of us has some leadership potential or ability. It's a trait worth developing and practicing. Just as a pair of pants won't fit everyone, we must tailor our leadership abilities to fit our own personalities.