

MASONIC PUBLIC RELATIONS

There was a time when the multitude made paths to the door of the man who made the best mouse-trap. Those were days when a product or a service was its best advertisement. In keeping with this general state of affairs, Freemasonry's greatest salesman was and still is the proper living standards of its individual members. In those early days, communities were small, activities were limited in number and variety, and everyone knew his neighbor and what was going on in the area. The number of distractions were few and there were not the many groups that we have today all competing for attention. With the passing years there have been many changes. As a result there is a need for expanding our point of view to fit into the current scene. There is an apparent need for engaging in dignified public relations activities.

We are all familiar with the work of the early publicity artists and their creation of "incidents" that were sometimes grotesque and shocking, merely to attract public attention. These things can be defined as "publicity" and the methods used certainly were neither suitable nor advocated for use by Freemasonry. With the multiplication of consumer products, advertising came into existence. The need to tout the product and proclaim its merits became an established business practice. This manner of advertising is not suitable and is not advocated for use by the Craft.

From time to time there have been voices within the Craft urging that the Fraternity change its method of operation and adopt some of the practices of the service groups and the tactics of the market place to attract attention to increase membership. These well-meaning members have always failed to recognize that Freemasonry is a unique organization which is selective in its membership and is neither suitable nor intended to be an association of all men. To adopt the programs suggested would change the basic characteristics of Freemasonry. It would lose its unique position, and would no longer be recognized as Freemasonry. It is clear that we must not engage in acts of publicity or advertise what we have. The concept of "public relations" is, however, of a different nature. Public relations activities may be defined as doing things which advise the public of the nature of our organization who are our members; and what we are doing in making this a better world in which to live. These programs will tell the world where we stand insofar as our loyalty to our government is concerned and inform our neighbors of some aspects of our Fraternity that are unknown to them.

In a sense, Masonic public relations is an educational process. It should inform the members of our families, our friends and our neighbors of the nature of Freemasonry and what activities it is engaging in. Any other benefits would be purely coincidental.

A reading of Masonic history discloses that the Craft for many years enjoyed an enviable prestige; its members were the leaders of the community; its work was known and recognized by all; and the leadership of our Fraternity was undisputed. Some of this has eroded as a result of the fast pace of modern day living and the many forces competing everywhere for one's time, one's attention, and one's support.

We must not forget that there are groups that are opposed to Freemasonry. The members of these opposition groups are easily led into believing the many unfounded accusations about the Craft solely because the listening members are ignorant of the true nature of our gentle Craft. Since we have been keeping our light under a bushel for much too long, the charges that we are a "secret society," that we have secret aims, and that we are engaged in conspiracy against all religion and established government are accepted by the members of these opposition groups as well as by others. An informed public will be less likely to take the charges made against us seriously and will recognize them for what they are, accusations made to serve the selfish purpose of the group making the accusations. The established practice of the Craft not to engage in debate with its opponents has proved beneficial over the years; but it does sometimes leave our neutral friends and neighbors wondering about the silence. Good public relations will indirectly ease these kinds of thoughts.

The purpose of public relations activities is not intended to be a means of advertising for new members. This would be a violation against our well-established rule against soliciting non-members to join the Craft. What cannot be done directly should not be done indirectly. Good public relations may stimulate the idea in some men that what we represent and what we are doing is what they have been seeking. This would be a periphery benefit. In all likelihood, these same persons would sooner or later have been attracted in some way if we happen to have that which they are seeking.

It is emphasized and re-emphasized that we do not engage in publicity stunts, bizarre activities to secure attention, or do anything which is undignified, contrary to Masonic law or custom or which would tend to bring discredit to the Craft.

We recognize that in the world today, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations, and news commentators are always on the alert to report events that are taking place and the activities of persons and groups. These are the instruments used in public relations activities. When we decide to engage in Masonic public relations, these tools must be understood so that they can be used. When we supply these sources with information, we are helping them; we are helping the general public receiving information; and we are taking our place in today's world. Since there is much competition in this field, we would like to discuss some of the things that make such activities successful.

At the outset, a decision must be made whether the Masonic Public Relations work shall be done on the lodge level, at the District level, or on a community level. This will depend a great deal on local conditions. It will depend on the size of the community, the areas covered by the newspapers, radio and television stations in the area. It will also depend on the nature of the project or programs.

After the scope has been decided, a public relations officer or committee should be appointed by the Worshipful Master or other governing officers, depending on the nature of the effort.

The Masonic Public Relations officer or committee should be selected with care. The officer should be well qualified in the use of the English language; have a pleasant personality; know

how to talk with people; have an adequate educational background; be a person of sound judgment; and have some knowledge of the communications field.

The first matter the Masonic Public Relations officer should study and consider is if the objective of the Craft in the area is being served. He must be completely informed as to the projects and programs planned with other community groups so that all these efforts will be blended properly. We will next need to study what tools are available in Masonic Public Relations, making a list of all the general and Masonic newspapers and magazines in the area, as well as the radio and television stations. One must not forget that there may be industries or business houses in the area that have what are known as "house organs" which welcome news about what is going on in the community along the lines of patriotic activities. There may be trade journals circulating in the area. One must not overlook that there are business places, school bulletin boards, grocery store bulletin boards, and factory bulletin boards that welcome short news items relating to the area.

A study must be made of each item on the list. The format of the publication, the nature of the coverage, the style used must all be considered. They must also be given specific attention to the person involved in each item under consideration. For example, the radio station's news commentator's style should be studied and an interview with him might be in order. If the local television station has "interview style programs," these should be given careful consideration. If the local newspaper has a column that deals with society news, club news, and related subjects, this columnist should be interviewed as well as the style used in his column.

There is no substitute for personal contact. Each editor, etc., should be contacted with the view of getting acquainted, telling him of your objectives, and listening carefully to his point of view and his requirements such as "deadline dates," format, policy, etc.

PREPARING THE MATERIAL

When you start actual work, you will find that your material will fall into three general categories: 1) News releases of things to come; 2) news reports of past events; 3) past or present reports relating to persons.

It is essential that such news item covers the following well-established areas in the first paragraph: Who is this about?; what has happened or is about to happen?; when did it happen?; why did it happen?; how did it take place or is about to take place?

Here are some general rules that should be observed in preparing the material.

1. The material should always be submitted in writing. There may be exceptions, of course. For example, if a prominent member of the Craft has passed away, you might want to call the editor of the local newspaper to advise him of the fact at once, so that it may be mentioned by him when he writes the news item.
2. The manuscript should be typed, doubled spaced, on one side of the paper, and with wide margins. This makes easier reading and the margins will enable the editor to make additions and changes on the face of the document rather than having it re-typed

for the printer. The easier you make it for the editor and the less changes he must make, the more likely he is going to accept and use the item . 8 1/2 x 11 " paper is customary.

3 . All names must be spelled correctly. This is not only necessary for correct identification of the person, .but it is bad public relations for the person who reads his misspelled name in a publication. If the editor gets too many complaints about the material, he will be inclined to throw all the material he receives from you in the waste paper basket.

4. All dates, addresses, and description of places should be correct. This is especially true in reporting coming events. There is nothing more frustrating than to hear of a coming event, make a note of it, and then make an effort to attend, to find that you have been given the wrong date or the wrong address.

5. The announcement of future events should be sent in time to give the editor ample time to include it at the proper time. Bear in mind that editors prepare most material far in advance of the date of publication.

6. Reports of past events should be sent in as soon as possible irrespective of the deadline dates of the publication. Material that arrives after all space has been allocated sometimes never appears in print.

7. If the manuscript is sent to a large newspaper or organization it should be addressed to a specific person or department in order to receive prompt attention and to insure that it will not be lost by being transmitted from department to department.

8. The manuscript should clearly contain the name, address, and telephone number of the person who is sending the manuscript, as well as the information of the person who is to be contacted if additional information is desired or there is need for clarification of some of the material. (This information is usually placed in the upper left-hand corner of the first page.)

9. Whenever possible, it is advisable to send pictures of persons or events. These make the article more attractive and more likely to be accepted. For example, if the article deals with a colonial play, a picture of one of the actors dressed in colonial attire will make it more likely that the item will be accepted and used. Black and white glossy pictures are best.

10. Never apologize for sending the manuscript. If this is necessary, it is best that the manuscript not be presented at all.

11. Keep a copy of every manuscript that is sent to anyone. Should a dispute arise later as to any mistake having been made, it will help determine who made the mistake.

12. Be co-operative at all times with those who are sent material. Never get angry if the material is not used; you never know the actual circumstances at the time the manuscript was received. Bear in mind that you have a great deal of competition for the space. If after a few tries without success, it might be well to drop over for a friendly visit with the editor. You might diplomatically inquire about the material sent and ascertain if there was something wrong with it.

Bear in mind that the editor wants material, he needs material, he needs help to operate, and that you are not asking for any favor but merely to learn in what way you have failed to fit into his requirements.

13. In sending items to radio and television stations, brevity is of the essence. You may have to write and re-write the item so that there is not one unnecessary word in the statement. The shorter it is the better and the more likely it will be accepted and used.

14. Prepare the manuscript in a form that it can be used "as is" or with very few corrections. Rarely will a manuscript be accepted if it needs a major overhauling. 15. For example, if you send a manuscript advising the editor of a program with a speaker, be sure you cover at least: the name of the group sponsoring the meeting; the address of the organization or of its officers; the specific place where the meeting is to take place; the specific date and hour of the meeting; the name of the speaker; the identity of the speaker; the title or subject of his talk.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cutlip and Center, *Effective Public Relations*. (1952; Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliff, New Jersey.)

Alexander B. Adams, *Apollo Handbook of Practical Public Relations*. (1970 soft-bound edition; Thomas Y. Crowell Co., Apollo Editions, 201 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.)

Ralph Stoody, *A Handbook of Church Public Relations*. (1939; Abingdon Press, New York and Nashville, Tenn.)

Bicentennial Handbook for Illinois Lodges, 1976. Grand Lodge A.F.&A.M. of the State of Illinois.