

THE SHORT TALK BULLETIN
The Masonic Service Association of the United States
Volume 66 Number 2
February, 1988

[Return to Short Talk Bulletin Abstracts](#)

The Master as Manager

We would like to thank Brother Donald G. Grabar, W.M. of Reedville Lodge #321, A.F. & A.M. of Reedville, VA, for this month's Short Talk Bulletin. Brother Grabar has compared the Master of a Lodge with an industrial counterpart in a most interesting and informative way. This article was prepared from a paper Brother Grabar presented to the 9th Masonic District Educational Conference in Virginia in October, 1987.

What are management tools?

They are simply techniques a person uses in dealing with people and problems when he is in charge of a group activity. Some of these techniques, or tools, are:

Money control--Salary and bonuses

Recognition

Delegation

Hire, fire, promote

Job descriptions

Decision participation

Goal setting

Scheduling

These are some common management tools. Notice that most of them are people oriented, because interaction with people is the most important aspect of any manager's job.

How can these tools be used by the Worshipful Master?

Money Control

First let's take care of the one tool in the list that he can't use, money control. This immediately suggests that the Wor. Master has a tougher job than his industrial counterpart, because money is one of the most powerful motivations in existence. Actually this is not the handicap it might appear, because the people he deals with, principally his officers, are already highly motivated or they wouldn't be there. In lieu of salary and bonuses, the Wor. Master can, and should, substitute recognition, the second tool on the list.

Recognition

This is a technique used in industry, not always of necessity, but because it is SO much cheaper. Have you ever noticed how many vice presidents there are in a bank? Or a brokerage firm? Used in a positive manner, recognition can be one of the Master's most effective tools! For example, when someone in the Lodge helps you out, or does a good

job on some project, that effort should be recognized. A minimum recognition is a sincere thank you, but a public statement of gratitude and complimenting him on his deed in open Lodge is much better. A good many of us would work just as hard without it, but it's sure nice to know that our efforts are appreciated by someone.

For outstanding performance special mention can be made at significant occasions such as an annual Ladies' Night Dinner. Also there are certificates of merit available, which put in a frame, make a very nice presentation. Some Lodges honor a "Mason of the Year" annually with such a presentation. For really outstanding contributions to a Lodge there is the tribute of making the man an honorary member.

Don't underestimate the importance of recognition as a motivating force. Management experts will tell you that there are many men for whom money alone is insufficient compensation for their work. Without recognition a company might well lose their services no matter what their salary, and so might a Lodge lose a good worker if his contributions are not recognized.

Delegation of Responsibility

Without extensive use of this tool the Wor. Master can become extremely frustrated, and find himself "doing it all"; or at the other extreme, may fail to accomplish anything. As an example of delegation, the Wor. Master can make a meeting much more enjoyable and with benefit to his Lodge, if he will delegate someone-- perhaps the Senior Warden, or some other officer--the task of checking arrivals at the Lodge before the meeting. This will have the benefit of determining whether all the chairs will be filled by their regular occupants. If an officer is missing he can round up someone to "pro tem", and allow the Wor. Master to greet visitors, and take care of other pre-meeting chores. Delegation makes any manager, including the Worshipful Master, more productive, a very popular "buzz word" in industry; and rightly so, because there it means profits. In the Lodge it means a more profitable or efficient use of the Wor. Master's time and energy.

Hiring, firing, promoting

At first reading these tools might not seem to be available to the Wor. Master, but they are-- although not in the same way as they are for his industrial counterparts. He hires in the sense that he has appointments to the officer line. Likewise, he can promote and fire by either appointing or not appointing officers to the next succeeding chair. It has been my observation that one of the most common problems facing our own and other lodges, is one of maintaining a strong and continuous line of succession to the East. It is also my conviction that the most important thing a Wor. Master can do to insure an unbroken line of succession to the East is to be ruthless in hiring, firing and promoting his officers. He must exercise the utmost care in selecting his appointments. Try them out in the appointive line and if they do not perform satisfactorily there, they need not be "promoted" any further. In this way almost all "firing" can be done at a lower level.

Interview

There are also management tools available to assist with the selection process. It has been my observation that many men who accept a Chair in the lodge do not really know what they are doing! Some are only dimly aware of what is involved in meeting the responsibility of the Chair they have accepted, and even less knowledgeable as to what might lie ahead of them. This is especially true when the new candidate for office is a recently raised Mason, which is becoming more common these days than in the past. Before offering an office to a member an interview should be conducted with him. It should be explained to him exactly what the lodge will expect from him as an officer, and ask for his commitment to these obligations. If he understands from the beginning exactly what is expected of him he is much less likely to be a "dropout" from the line at a later date when dropping out creates a real problem for the lodge. Two principal points should be covered in the interview:

1. Taking his first office in the lodge is taking his first step toward becoming the Master of the lodge. Promotion to the next chair is almost automatic unless he demonstrates an inability or unwillingness to proceed. If he decides along the way to drop out he will create a significant problem for his lodge, and do a real disservice to his fellow officers. Tell him, "Don't start unless you intend to continue!"
2. He should be made aware that he will be called upon for some additional tasks in addition to taking part in the opening and closing of the lodge.

Job Description/Distribution

One way to assign additional tasks is to get the officers involved with the operation of the lodge. Ask each officer to accept a collateral assignment, in addition to his duties as prescribed by the BY-LAWS. By giving each officer specific assignments, not really very time consuming for any one individual, you will instill the idea that the lodge has a variety of tasks which need to be done, and how they can be distributed.

Decision participation

Means consulting with your officers before making decisions. This must be done with discretion, however, because most decisions should be the Wor. Master's, and not made by popular vote. Nevertheless, input from the officers can be valuable in arriving at a decision, and can give the officers a feeling of being part of a team.

Goal setting

Can be very productive, particularly if you can involve the officers. Most effective is for the manager--the Wor. Master--to set a broad goal or set of goals, and to ask each officer to set his own goals in support of them. It is much more effective if you can get the officers to put their goals in writing.

Scheduling

Scheduling of course is an indispensable tool, and the most important thing to be said is, "Start early!" The Wor. Master's term is going to be much more productive if he has his entire year's program laid out prior to the beginning of his term of office. Then, after he takes office, he need only think about executing his plans. The biggest breakdown in the analogy I've been creating here is that the industrial manager usually has his job for more than one year, while the Worshipful Master is usually limited to that time frame. If he doesn't plan that year well in advance the Wor. Master has little chance of achieving any goals he might have.

In summary this has been a sampling of the tools used by a manager in industry. Like many "ideas" that come from a business administration text, many are recognizable as the common sense type of thing that you should do in managing your lodge. However, these common sense type of things often benefit from being considered in a structured manner and I hope by doing so your thinking along these lines will have been stimulated to some degree.

Finally, I would like to leave you with a bit of advice I once received from my boss, which has stayed with me for years. He told me that sometimes the best way to lead is to get behind and push! Good advice for the Wor. Master to remember!