

Slow Down

A Presentation at the District 8 Meeting in 2014 by Cameron C. Poe, Past Master, Chairman, Education Committee, Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

I'm writing this presentation to ask you to *slow down*.

The technology we enjoy today speeds up our lives in many ways.

We have 24-hour news and constant contact with anyone we want through cell phones, email and texts. Facebook and Twitter accelerates the hustle. We see more people walking around looking down at their smartphones, searching Google, trading messages and posting selfies and other photos as if it cannot wait.

Someone out there right now may be reading this and also looking at an incoming text in the lower right-hand corner of their iPhone...

Our society has always been in a hurry. Technology available to us today simply contributes in accelerating it. We are an industrious and busy nation for sure, and

our collective pursuit to keep up sometimes causes other things to fall to the way side. Freemasonry is not immune. When we take an honest look around, the results of the Craft and too many of its Craftsmen are in a hurry, as well.

Brothers, I am asking you to *slow down*.

We've all heard that we can't compete as a fraternity with all of this fast-paced societal evolution and technology that accompanies it. I disagree, we can, and we must. You may be a Master Mason, but are you a master of your Craft? Are you a master of yourself?

We must begin teaching, mentoring, encouraging, and *slowing down*.

Masonry is called a journey for a reason. Think about why you knocked on that outer door. Remember why you wanted to become a Mason in the first place.



I'm sure some of you could not wait to become a Mason. What's your hurry now that you've become one? Why are we rushing? When we remove obstacles or lessen standards to allow for an easier path for our initiates, what are we teaching? If we allow ourselves to compromise

instead of challenge, to disengage instead of motivate, to just be "good enough" instead of excellent...what are we teaching? *Slow down*.

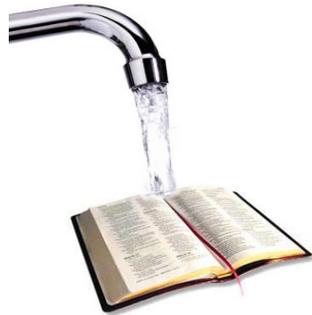
When we are in a rush to get men through our three degrees, we lose sight of what's really important, the journey. It's the effort – the work that makes it all worth it. My father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all Masons. Now, I would have probably become a Mason if all I had to do was show up and pay some dues. But I guarantee you it would not mean a fraction of what it means to me today if that were the case.

We cannot afford to relax in our responsibilities – the responsibilities we owe to interested young men. When we relax, lazy is not far behind, and when as Masons we become lazy, we contribute to the death of this fraternity.

We cannot assume that we will improve and expand the fraternity by making it easy by lowering or watering down standards. One of our axioms is that we must guard the West Gate, but by simplifying our most important traditions, by lessening experiences and putting an easy path in front of our newest members, we are not only cheating them, we are cheating the fraternity out of educated and experienced men to steadfastly carry on the principles and the fundamentals of our system for the benefit of future generations of Masons.

Slow down.

Making a man a Mason was never intended to be the end of his journey. It



takes much longer than 30, 60 or 90 days. No one is finished when they are raised. That is just the beginning! It is the beginning to a process. The degrees provide you a passport through which to continue your learning and to practice a lifelong commitment in self-improvement.

Regrettably, I've witnessed brothers giving back their proficiency and obligation as if the only goal was to memorize it. Worse yet is when they give it back poorly. Brothers that's a violation of the Grand Lodge Constitution. But I've heard brothers at Lodge say "Oh he's just nervous. It was good enough; he will be a good Mason." What organization in the world just wants to be "good enough?" What message does that send? "Good enough" is rarely all that good.

Let's slow down.

A member of our fraternity who does not complete his proficiency in accordance to our Constitution, is not a Mason. When that happens, we end up with just another member – a "member" who will represent us all and this honorable institution to the outside world and other Masons. Should we not want – no, demand, that he learn each word of the catechisms? Should we not demand our instructors instruct? Should we not want brother to understand and capable of explaining what the words and phrases in our rituals mean? Should he not fully embrace and totally grasp the lessons and meaning of each degree? He can. All we have to do is *slow down* and teach - and assure those called upon and give their time to teach are suitably qualified

to do so. If our instructors are less than qualified, how can we expect our candidates to achieve genuine proficiency?

The Word is Not the Only Thing We've Lost

I'm going to give you an example of something that we are coming close to losing in Masonry in Kentucky: the sheer reverence of one the most important things we do. Some believe it's already lost, but I disagree.

The loss of reverence does, however, come from that mindset that we have to speed everything up, faster meetings to get home to watch the ballgame. Faster lectures, faster degrees, faster education conferences, faster District meetings. In accepting this attitude, we become increasingly casual in what we do and pass off as Freemasonry.

I want to give you some homework; homework designed to make you think about how casual you may have become.

Go home and give the three signs of Masonry in the mirror. Do it just like you would in Lodge. What will you see?

I've been Master of a Lodge. Some of you that have not had that opportunity may not fully appreciate the outlandish things

we see from the East as the signs are given.

There are brothers, who think they are giving the signs, who look like they are waving in a plane, directing traffic at a busy intersection or working the floor at a livestock auction all at the same time. *Slow down.*

I belong to a Lodge that receives a lot of out-of-state guests. You should see them try and keep up with what I call the "Kentucky Speed Salute."

The habit of being casual and thoughtless when giving the signs didn't start just a few years ago. It's been around for some time and left uncorrected.

Nonchalance has clearly crept into our Masonic protocol and etiquette. Nonetheless, it can be corrected, but it's up to each individual Mason to do so, and Masters of our Lodges to assure it is corrected consistently.

Here's how it can be fixed. Consider it your homework.

As Masons, we all know there are numbers which are significant in our degree and structure. Those numbers are, 3, 5, 7, 9, 32, 33 etc. When the Master asks for the three signs of Masonry, he says, "Together my Brothers, with the signs".

Count to three as each sign is given and watch what happens. I'm only asking for 9 seconds of your life to give the proper



sign and due guard - 9 seconds. Hold each sign for a count of three. Do it every time and watch what happens.

Our due guards and signs are one of the most significant things that separate us from the rest of the world. One of the things that separate us from being just another civic group or organization. It's part of who we are as Freemasons. It deserves - no, it demands the respect to our fraternity by taking a mere 9 seconds out of our meetings and devoting it solely to one purpose: *the proper salute of a Mason.*

When you brothers who sit on the sidelines want to speak in Lodge, do so by standing up. Give the proper sign, if you hold it for three seconds you will have the attention of everyone in the room - and you will be the example for others to do the same.

I'm asking you to *slow down.*

Return the signs as they deserve to be given - set the example and whisper wise counsel in the ear of a brother who is not doing the same. Ask him to apply the 9 second approach instead of the "Kentucky Speed Salute."

If we don't give the due guard and penal sign its due respect and reverence what are we teaching?

How many veterans are here today? Just raise your hand, thank you Brothers for your service to our country.

How many of you have ever just waved at a superior officer instead of delivering the respectful salute you were trained and instructed to give? Did you ever just give him a thumbs up or a sloppy upward gesture as a substitute? Is that acceptable in the service? Of course not, but it seems many think it is ok to do it in our lodge halls. No, Masonry is not the military, but the point is very clear.

The signs are one of the simplest, yet most important things we do. Our casual and sloppy gestures that too often pass as signs can be corrected, but as previously stated, it's up to each individual Mason to do so, and for the Master of every lodge to assure continuity and conformity.

Go on... stand facing the mirror and count to three on each sign, see what happens. We are an institution with many purposes - one of which is self-improvement. Improving the delivery of the signs is a step in the right direction.

Brothers... isn't it time we slowed down?