

To Set the Craft to Work and Give Them Good and Wholesome Instruction

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If a Mason has been fortunate enough to witness or participate in the 3rd Section of the Hiramic Legend of the Master Mason Degree or to study it, he knows that when Grand Master Hiram Abiff does not show up for work one morning during the construction of King Solomon's Temple the craftsmen became confused. They were horrified that no designs were drawn on the trestle-board to instruct them on the work to be done that particular day. Abiff was nowhere to be found; their leader had not set them to work for the day, much less provide wholesome instruction about the manner of carrying out the work on that day. As a result, there was *confusion at the temple*.

One of the many lessons from the Hiramic Legend is the clear need for planning. When there is no plan, confusion *should* be expected and is the net result.

We are told lodges have a plan, but we know most are the perfunctory year-to-year type of plan, which customarily turns out to be the same plan that was in effect for the last several years with a minor tweak here and there from each new incoming Master. Some lodges even attempt to go month-to-month.¹ Is this really a plan? Sure, it is - an example of a bad one.

It might get a lodge through a year, or month with some self-defined measure of success, but is it a plan that genuinely gets a lodge through a multi-year period, a decade or longer or a plan that sets the course for its progressive evolution? The practice of recycling a year-to-year (or less) "plan" can easily be identified with lodges today whose facilities are crumbling as their membership and attendance slowly dwindle.



¹ James T. Morse, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Building a Solid Foundation, The Trowel, Spring 2013.

Perpetual motion only works when that motion continues indefinitely without any external source of energy. This is impossible to ever achieve because of friction and other sources of energy loss. In the case of Masonry, energy loss is indeed the friction common to lodges that count on the year-to-year approach. The reliance on short-term thinking and planning carries with it a hint that those who persist in practicing it feel some immunity from the laws governing perpetual motion.

Planning ahead and into the years ahead creates energy. It also creates a rudder that does not impose restrictions on a Master at all. It establishes direction in the application of the mechanics of Freemasonry as a system; it reaffirms how men wish their lodge to advance. It doesn't mean a Master cannot change any part of the plan if it is in the best interest of achieving the direction the members of the lodge wish to travel. There was most certainly a grand plan to build Solomon's Temple, however it is naïve to think the plan did not meet with a few positive adjustments in the course of construction.

In setting the Craft to work, we do have to think about what that work is supposed to be. We can go through the motions of opening lodge, conducting regular business meetings, exemplifying degrees, and then closing the lodge, but if that's all that happens usually the only men who are active are those serving as officers or reporting committee work. Is that the real work of Freemasonry? Is doing just that really setting the Craft to labor and giving them wholesome instruction? Well, in one way it is because it is part of Masonry, but not necessarily the part that rivets the attention of men who experience only that and little or nothing else. It certainly isn't the part that keeps them engaged in the lodge or the fraternity. The results of this sort of Masonic labor predictably offers little but diminished returns.

In some jurisdictions, it has been determined that for every 10 members raised, 8 will



eventually stop attending lodge.² We know Masonry will continue to draw men, but not at the rate they knocked following World War II. Our problem is not drawing men to the Craft; it is retaining them once they are admitted. There are even jokes about how a lodge Master ended a mouse infestation in his lodge building by raising all the mice to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason; after which he never sees the mice again.³

² *Ibid.*

The truthful answers to why this happens are simple and certainly correctable, yet it persists in remaining something many just talk about but do little to resolve. The truth behind the two primary reasons why we have empty seats in lodge are simple, as well: *we have not prepared new members with sufficient fundamental education about Freemasonry; and, we fail to employ those measures that we know for certain hold the attention of our members long enough for bonds of friendship to develop.* ⁴

The term “Craft” implies that we are members of or successors to an organization that was established for work. ⁵ Craftsmen labor to build something. We seem to have built numerous lodges where the men in them become casual and comfortable on relying only on the opening and closing and the predictable casual work that comes between the two as all there is to Freemasonry. When that routine *is* interrupted on occasion and uninspiring ritual briefly takes its place or is coupled with it, then we should not be the least bit surprised that as many as 8 of 10 men raised stop attending lodge.

Michael Jarzabek describes this situation like this:

With three knocks the candidate at the door enters hoping for something revolutionary. He wants to change the world and his place in it. He takes his degrees looking forward to working together with like-minded men. He wants to learn the secrets he’s heard about. He looks around the walls of the lodge and finds Washington. He hears of the American Revolution and those patriots he will soon call Brother. His heart soars. His hope appears to end in fruition.

Then we speak. There are no secrets. The revolution has been canceled. Nothing is required of him. He thought it would be more challenging. To call himself a Master Mason [in Jarzabek’s jurisdiction, Massachusetts] he only has to witness three degrees (in one day that is more convenient) and pay his yearly dues. Is this really what makes a Mason? He is told of heroes of yesterday, but none of today. He finds nostalgia where he should find inspiration. We become to this candidate just another hollow institution not deserving of his time and energy. Is the lodge really no different than the profane world? Before our candidate finds out he is

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ William B. Clark, Past Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Georgia, *The Real Objects of Freemasonry, The Genius of Freemasonry*, Edited by Paul Rich, Westphalia Press, Washington, D.C., 2014.

*mistaken, he leaves and never returns. In a few years, he will stop paying his dues and will be suspended. His hope ends in frustration.*⁶

There are clear exceptions to the evidence that Freemasonry is not universally setting the Craft to labor throughout North America. The exceptions are found where lodges plan well into the future. Just as the characteristic of a lodge that relies on the year-to-year approach, the lodges that are the exception can easily be identified as well.

In those lodges, candidates are treated as their most important members and most often mentored. Degree classes are not on a fast track. Continued Masonic education is consistent and takes place during lodge. Fraternal opportunities outside the lodge room are regular, along with pride in the delivery of proficient ritual and personal appearance in lodge. Business meetings are shorter. Dues levels have been established that support and sustain lodge expenses. Certain formerly ignored traditions are practiced. The West Gate is consistently guarded. These lodges are focused on issues that are known and proven to generate energy, but not for the purpose of hoping to create a non-sustainable form of perpetual motion. No, the energy and vitality generated by planning and placing an emphasis on seeding, consistently nurturing and delivering quality Masonic education leads



to the kind of energy necessary for the next generation to do the same. In a way, this is a form of perpetual energy, but it must be continually fed by each generation. It then becomes “the way we’ve always done it” to later generations in a positive way; a way that *sets the Craft to work*.

Unfortunately, there’s not as many of these “lodges of exception” as there is the other kind. There may never be, but that makes no difference. What does make a difference is that there are measures and mechanics that

⁶ Michael Jarzabek, Be the Revolution, extract from an article in Trowel, Summer, 2014, Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

prove men who are educated about the depths of what is offered by Freemasonry will indeed put forth the mental labor to advance it.

Masonry is a scientific school. Its purpose is education. Its objective is to teach men through its proven blueprint how to conform their lives by the practice of the virtues of morality, honesty, charity, brotherly love, relief, truth, purity in heart and thought, so that men may be raised to a higher condition.⁷

As members, we may all like to believe that happens in our lodges and all men learn how to do it. However, that is not the case. We know too that those lodges actually setting the Craft to work by engaging their members, are much more like to be around long after the others are not: they've found the key to keep Freemasonry, as a system perpetually in motion, thus preventing unnecessary *confusion at the temple*.

⁷ Clark