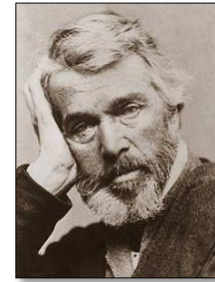


IT'S ALWAYS A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

And In Freemasonry, It Is No Different

John W. Bizzack, PM

Scottish philosopher and essayist Thomas Carlyle gave a series of lectures on heroism in 1840, and later published his work under the title of, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*.¹



Thomas Carlyle

He argued that the actions of the "Great Man" play a key role in history, claiming that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men."² His book led to what is called The Great Man Theory.³ He believed heroes shape history through both their personal attributes and divine inspiration. According to Carlyle, history is influenced by extraordinary leaders. This ability to lead is something with which certain people are simply born, Carlyle believed, and not something that could be developed.

The ideas he put forth inspired early research on leadership, which almost entirely focused on inheritable traits. This theory relies then, quite heavily, on the notion of being born rather than made (nature rather than nurture). Later, other historians, anthropologists and researchers questioned the "Great Man" theory as unscientific and argued that men were merely products of their social environment.⁴

What Carlyle's work did in the 1840s was to set in motion the formal study of the psychology of leadership and it has not stopped since.

There has always been a mystique about leaders. The definitions of leadership involve abstract words such as visionary, charismatic, proactive, and purposeful, and since these terms are so nebulous, putting leadership in specific, observable terms is complicated; and a clear definition remains elusive.

¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship, & the Heroic in History*. New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1841.

² *Ibid.*

³ Villanova University, The Great Mason Theory, May 6, 2019, <https://www.villanova.com/resources/leadership/great-man-theory>, accessed June 4, 2021. (The Great Man Theory centers on two main assumptions: great leaders are born possessing certain traits that enable them to rise and lead, and great leaders can arise when the need for them is great. (Those who support the theory say leaders are born with the attributes necessary to set them apart from those around them and that these traits enable them to assume roles of authority and power. Great leaders are heroes, according to this theory, that accomplish great feats against the odds on behalf of followers. The theory essentially implies that those in power deserve to lead because of the traits with which they have been endowed).

⁴ Herbert. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, Appleton, 1896.

William James, (1880), "Great Men, Great Thoughts, and the Environment," Lecture delivered before the Harvard Natural History Society, published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1880.

When we look at how our idea of leadership has unfolded over the past 140 years alone, we see how that which is necessary in the moment seems to influence a great deal of what we think leadership is. In other words, there is no right or wrong way to lead all of the time.

Effective leadership seems to have more to do with a certain kind of intelligence and skill that requires knowing and understanding how and when to apply a variety of styles at the right time.

As the interest in the psychology of leadership increased over the last century, a number of different leadership theories have appeared in attempts to explain exactly how and why certain people become great leaders. Amazon, reporting over 60,000 books on the topic of leadership, illustrates the size of the market for these books, as does the fact that leadership training is a \$366 billion global industry.⁵

With volumes of literature, writings, and programs trying to *explain* and *define* leadership by merely listing qualities, characteristics, and traits is like explaining and defining the solar system as merely outer space. When we try to explain and define leadership through qualities and skill levels alone, we see just how it is that nothing complicated is learned casually, and leadership is nothing if not complicated.

Because leadership is such an elusive concept and means different things to different people, we might, more often than not, find ourselves in agreement with General George S. Patton's assessment of leadership. When asked for a definition, Patton paused, then said, "I'll be damned if I can define it, but I know it when I see it."⁶

Perhaps one reason we do not seem to uniformly create effective, quality leaders is found in the methods we have come to traditionally use to convey the concepts of leadership.

Perhaps Patton's impression offers us a better perspective of what leadership is when it is absent.

Explaining the theories, controversies and the changing definition of leadership is the proverbial monumental task. Can all the psychological, historical, sociological, ethical, and religious factors that influence leadership be adequately addressed in a leadership workshop, seminar, annual class, or even one book?

Common sense seems to scream at us when it comes to leadership and tells us that it should be no mystery that different times and circumstances can call for different kinds of leaders and people with abilities that lies far beyond the capability of science, books, conferences, programs, and

workshops to always analyze correctly.

⁵ The Size of the Training Industry, March 2021. <https://trainingindustry.com/wiki/outsourcing/size-of-training-industry>, accessed, June 29, 2021.

⁶ James Dunnigan, Daniel Masterson, *The Way of the Warrior*, St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Perhaps one reason we do not seem to uniformly create effective, quality leaders is found in the methods we have come to traditionally use to convey the concepts of leadership.

THE GREAT TRAINING ROBBERY

In the leadership development industry (and yes, there is such an industry) “experts” are contracted to teach leadership in many organizations, such as, major corporations, startup companies, school boards, government offices, and executive programs at numerous esteemed universities, to name a few. Many who make a living this way do wonder at times how effective their work actually is.⁷ They know there is a myriad of factors that go into producing better leaders, which includes far more than just offering leadership quotes from respected leaders of the past, listing traits, being positive, encouraging, having vision, etc., etc., and then handing out a certificate for attendance.

They know that when the leadership program ends, the new behaviors that are hopefully instilled are not always sustained. Studies have found that adult learners in a lecture setting forget nearly 50% of what they learn within two weeks, and when we consider that the most highly trained leaders are often not able to translate their knowledge into experience, we find the true value of such efforts a question worth exploring.⁸

Any hint or inference that one size fits all, and that the same group of skills or style of leadership is appropriate regardless of strategy, organizational structure, or culture is doomed. That notion flies in the face of the reality that a brilliant leader in one situation does not necessarily perform well in another.⁹

Leadership training demands context and qualified people to present it—not just people who have or hold positions of influence. Because a person has or currently holds a position of influence does not necessarily mean they are quality leaders, or, that they have the skill to present leadership topics.

Focusing on context means equipping those in positions of leadership, and those who seek to be, with a small number of competencies (maybe just two to three) that will make a significant difference in performance.

⁷ Kristi Hedges, “If You Think That Leadership Development Programs Are A Waste Of Time You Might Be Right,” 2014. *Forbes Magazine*, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2014/09/23/if-you-think-leadership-development-is-a-waste-of-time-you-may-be-right/#484ba80c5dcc>. Accessed May 2021.

⁸ *IBID*.

⁹ Pierre Gurdjian, Thomas Halbeisen, and Kevin Lane, “Why Leadership Development Programs Fail” McKinsey & Company, January 2014.

Unfortunately, what we too often find is a long list of leadership standards, a complex web of dozens of competencies, charts, diagrams and organizational values and mission statements. Each is usually summarized in a seemingly easy-to-remember way (such as the ever popular, three R's), and each, on its own terms may make sense. In practice, however, what managers and employees often see is an “alphabet soup” of recommendations. Experience shows that when an organization cuts through the noise to identify a small number of leadership capabilities essential for success in its organization, far better outcomes are achieved.¹⁰



To identify a small number of leadership capabilities, an organization must first know what it most wants from those in positions of leadership. If leadership positions are not filled with capable people in the first place, then that simply creates addition problems to overcome.

THE MASONIC LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE

Almost every Masonic jurisdiction in America has some kind of leadership training for its up-and-coming members who seek leadership position or those who are currently in such positions. Such programs have steadily emerged since the 1980s. Reading Masons know that better leadership in the fraternity has been called for since 1778 and has peppered the Masonic landscape ever since.¹¹

While we can find the expected rah-rahs and same lip service in the fraternity about such programs that we find in the business world, we do not find valid research or even a credible report of evidence to quantify the value of the investment made by jurisdictions. There is no long-term assessment of behavioral change following such training, or tracking Masonic careers to determine if a difference has been made.

What gets measured has more of a chance of getting done. If we do not know if a leadership initiative is successful or understand the behaviors that are measured and how to quantify soft skills, we have no way to know the impact of the investment of the time and energy required for such a program.

The institution has never excelled in such follow-up measurements on leadership programs, so it is not surprising that such data is not available. It does reveal that what we do in this area is

¹⁰ *IBID*, Julie K. Biddle, *The Three Rs of Leadership*, High Scope Press, 2012, Ronald E. Riggio, “The Three R’s of Leadership,” *Psychology Today*, October 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/201710/the-three-r-s-leadership>, accessed June 30, 2021 (the “Three R’s” are customarily noted as: respect, recognize, and reward).

¹¹ John W. Bizzack, *Sins of Our Masonic Fathers, The Lost Strength in Fewness in American Freemasonry*, BSF Foundation, Preface, v, Chapter 6, Grand Delusions, 121, 2018, John W. Bizzack, Dan M. Kemble, “Freemasonry’s Inattentive Ear, The Story of Unheard Calls Of Reveille To American Freemasons,” *The Rubicon Masonic Society Transactions*, Vol. 1, 2021.

either arrogantly thought to be flawless, or that we have succumbed to the deadly “that’s good enough” attitude when it comes to leadership development.

A study from the 1980s tells us something else interesting about leadership training programs.

Organizations in that study that tried to launch some leadership transformation, or inject a new example of leadership into their ranks through such training programs, met with disappointment. What they discovered was that even those who were well-trained and motivated could not apply their new knowledge when they returned to their home offices because they were entrenched in comfortable and long-existing ways of doing things. In short, the individuals has less power to influence or lead the system surrounding them than that system had to shape them.¹² The parallel to the institution of organization Freemasonry should be obvious.

To one level or another, and perhaps moreover in Freemasonry, leadership training programs do not always take into account that they are also going into battle against that granite-like mindset within the organization that is part of, and makes up much of, the Masonic *culture*.

Underestimating how the deeply embedded the *that’s the way we’ve always done it* belief does

**To one level or another,
and perhaps moreover
in Freemasonry,
leadership training
programs do not always
take into account that
they are also going into
battle with that granite-
like mindset within the
organization that is part
of and makes up much
of the Masonic culture.**

not prove to be a recipe for success. Brutal honesty from those promoting any leadership training must address the question that if our system and practices of electing and appointing our leadership in the fraternity works so well, why do we need leadership training at all? It is necessary and acknowledge, then concede, that much of the leadership at all levels is broken and woefully lacking.

If we do not genuinely understand the deep-rooted beliefs about how things work in the Masonic organization, the precious-held beliefs of a jurisdiction’s leadership that can make constructive change an uphill battle, and have the will to tackle those specific issues too, we are missing the point of trying to deliver leadership training.

Embedding effective leadership development programs in an organization is real work, and monitoring that impact so as to make improvements over time is equally as important as selecting the most qualified men in the fraternity to conceive, coordinate, and execute the program.

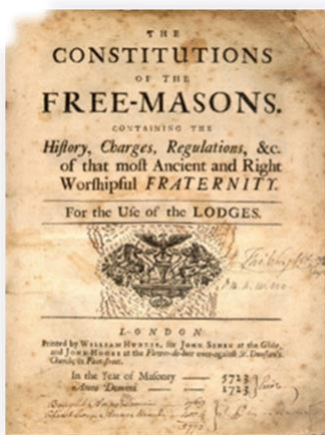
MASONIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM CREDIBILITY

When asked if online leadership programs work, we commonly find anecdotal data choking on the answer often given, “Yes, they work!” The answer to the follow up question, “How do you

¹² Michael Beer, Magnus Finnström, Derek Schrader, ‘Why Leadership Training Fails—And What to Do About It, Harvard Business Review, October 2016.

know?” often abandons reason when the answer is simply, “Because so many show up (or) take the course online.” The same kind answer is heard one asks about annual or quarterly attempts to have a leadership seminar or workshops. Asking whether attendees actually carry home and apply all they may have gleaned from the experience often meets with a pause, but a popular answer is, again, grounded in the anecdotal and often found to be, “If it helped one person, then its working.” That, of course, is not a measurement and not much of answer either.

No matter the number of attendees or the vibrancy of the presenters involved, men still have to return to their respective lodges and battle mindsets that usually drain the enthusiasm to do so. Some may persevere and break through some of the culture’s natural resistance to any kind of change to process, but many do not. In the absence of valid tracking to prove otherwise, the observation stands.



Wise counsel from Andersons Constitutions in 1723 and 1738 has not always been followed down through the centuries for reasons that are too extensive to explore in this writing. The issue of leadership, however, was specifically addressed in the first and second constitution.

“All Preferment among Masons is grounded upon real Worth and personal Merit only; so that the Lords may be well served, the Brethren not put to shame, nor the Royal Craft despised; Therefore, no Master or Warden is chosen by Seniority, but for his Merit.”¹³

The guidance is clear in that leaders are to be selected because of their abilities, not because of their money, social position, or popularity. By any standard, this is reasonable and sound policy and counsel.

Our practice of the progressive line continued to distance us from the seminal guidance, a fact illustrated in a recent study that showed that 67% of Masons surveyed were unaware of either the existence or the significance of Anderson’s Constitutions.¹⁴

The progressive line practice is not a terrible concept, it just does not prove to be more than a perchance process—like Russian Roulette. In theory it is supposed to prepare Masons for eventual leadership positions and give the other members ample time to determine if a brother is, or will ever become, “leadership material.” A problem was quickly apparent with the practice: once a member was appointed or elected to a chair in the progressive line, he was often assured of progressing regardless of whether he had, or developed any skills or aptitude for leadership.

Any Mason who believes that *all* such brethren in this process who end up in the East or in Warden chairs, are adept and capable only because they have moved through the chairs is not

¹³ The Constitution of the Free-Masons, Andersons Constitution, The Charges of a Freemason, Section IV, Of Masters, Wardens, Fellows, and Apprentices, 1723 and 1734, 49.

¹⁴ Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge: Survey Results and Analysis, William O. Ware Loge of Research, Covington, Kentucky, 2019.

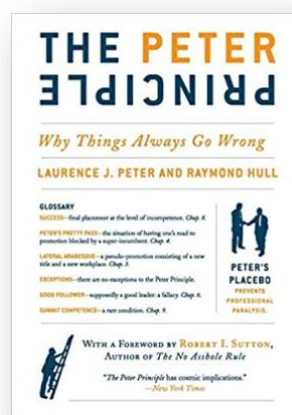
paying attention, and the unwavering belief that the progressive line theory consistently develops quality leaders feeds such inattentiveness.

Unless there is a strong field of candidates from which to select, a lodge that steadfastly follows the progressive line model is likely already struggling. The so-called progressive line is, in fact, regressive, and serves only as a thoughtless conveyor belt. As a result, a lodge gets the quality of leadership it deserves.

Many have come to believe that to disrupt the progressive line introduces disharmony into the lodge, when actually moving men into chairs for which they are not ready, capable, or in some cases, even interested, creates the potential for so much more than just disharmony. When a lodge does not recognize their line issues, that lodge has larger problems than just the line. Lodges that accelerate advancement through the line and end up with a member sitting in a principle officer chair only a few months after being raised a Master Mason, not only create a grave disservice to that new member, but to their lodge. Doing so is like putting a man in charge of parachute packing on his first day of work, even though he has never seen or packed a parachute. Suffice it to say, such practice is far from effective leadership development.

In the *Masonic Dictionary* article “Kakistocracy,” Dale Sabin presented a summary of the problems that beset Freemasonry, with the withering but undeniably true verdict that Freemasonry has become a kakistocracy.¹⁵ Sabin starts his commentary by saying:

Post WW II Freemasonry has seen a de-evolution of the Fraternity from a grand Philosophical Order to a pseudo-mystical public charity, under the management of men who not only misunderstand the philosophical and esoteric aspects of the Craft but attempt to correct their irrelevance by increasing membership of like-minded individuals and boosting public support by concentrating their efforts into charitable fundraising, which it does poorly. To the young Candidate, we promise Philosophy; what we actually deliver is politics, bad food, incredibly boring business meetings, and badly done Ritual. The new Mason, disappointed by this subterfuge, either fades into the background, quietly and individually studying and practicing Masonry as it was meant to be, or simply becomes inactive, if he doesn't actually demit. The latter will never be seen again, the former makes himself a Master through his individual effort and study, but will never ask, or be asked, to serve in a managerial capacity. Why? Like calls to like, incompetence breeds incompetence. In business we refer to this, usually



¹⁵ Dale Sabin, Kakistocracy, Knights of the North, Masonic Dictionary, <http://www.masonicdictionary.com/kakistocracy.html>, accessed, June 14, 2021. (Kakistocracy definition: government by the least qualified, from the Greek *kakistos*; worst, superlative of *kakos*; bad., American Heritage Dictionary, 4th edition), *Taking Liberty: Restoring Freemasonry by Returning to it a Virtue it Once Gave Us*, The Level Club of New York, A Masonic Society, 2012, http://thelodgeroom.blogspot.com/2012_02_01_archive.html, accessed June 14, 2021.

with a chuckle, as "The Peter Principle:" an individual rises to his own level of incompetence.¹⁶

Sabin's assessment may sound harsh to many, but those who may disagree should put forth their evidence (not opinions or anecdotes) to defend a counter assessment.

He ends his writing by telling us that "Masonic kakistocracy is only one problem among many our Fraternity faces; fortunately, it shares the same cure: better quality, better-educated Masons."

The good news is that many share optimism in his suggested "cure." The bad news is that the remedy has not been widely accepted, much less embraced since it was first prescribed in scores of Grand Lodge Proceedings in the late 1800s.

If there is to be an honest and relevant start to the real work involved in the development and provision of leadership training in Freemasonry, then approaching it as if there was nothing else in the culture that needed to be addressed along with it will not create a corps of quality leaders. That certainly seems to have already been proven.

If the development of a leadership program and its presentation cannot, or does not, talk with honesty about kakistocracy in the organization without fearing that it upsets harmony, how can members honestly critique anything that is identified as a problem that facing the fraternity. After all, everything leads back to the question of the quality of leadership.

The design and presentation of leadership training programs that do not take into account that they are going into battle against the mindset of the culture is not going to change many minds (or open them). Underestimating how deeply embedded the *way we've always done it* mindset is does not provide a recipe for success. belief is not a recipe for success. Brutal honesty from those who promote any leadership training must accompany the reality that if our system and practices of electing and appointing leadership was consistently and constructively successful, we would not need leadership training at all. It is past time to acknowledge and concede that quality leadership at all levels is woefully lacking. Another reality is that even quality training is not an overnight antidote.



If we do not genuinely understand the deep-rooted beliefs about how things work in the Masonic organization, what the precious-held beliefs of a jurisdiction's leadership are that can make constructive change an uphill battle, and then seek ways to tackle

¹⁶ Sabin. Laurence J. Peter, Raymond Jull, *The Peter Principle*, Bantam, 1969, Harper Business; Illustrated edition, 2011.

(The Peter Principle is an observation that the tendency in most organizational hierarchies, such as that of a corporation, is for every employee to rise in the hierarchy through promotion until they reach a level of respective incompetence. In other words, a front-office secretary who is quite good at her job may thus be promoted to executive assistant to the CEO for which she is not trained or prepared for—meaning that she would be more productive for the company (and likely herself) if she had not been promoted. The Peter Principle is thus based on the paradoxical idea that competent employees will continue to be promoted, but at some point, will be promoted into positions for which they are get them recognized for additional promotion.

those issues with hard facts and evidence, we are missing the point of even trying to provide leadership training.

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

Naturally, all of these theories, facets, observations, and facts are worth examining, but context on and about the topic of leadership is undoubtedly the most critical. Is an hour class here and there about leadership, or a virtual meeting, or an online downloadable program with a promise of a certificate, enough to make constructive progress? Many may believe it is and others do not.

Arnold Toynbee, a leading historian of his time, philosopher of history, an author of numerous books, and a research professor, pointed out that all civilizations progress through a process of what he called, “challenge and response.”¹⁷ Men throughout history have been confronted with a series of challenges. When they responded to those challenges successfully, they advanced. When they failed to adequately respond to a challenge, that society went into a period of decline and eventually disappeared.



Arnold Toynbee

The same is true of organizations. They either respond to challenges successfully or they go backward. Given the immediacy of the need to prevent, or at least slow, the going backwards, American Freemasonry is not in a position today, especially considering the lack of public awareness of the fraternity, to pay no heed to what valid research tells us about developing leaders. As mentioned earlier, the truth is that if we were already developing effective leaders, why would bother trying to create leadership programs?

**American Freemasonry
is not in a position
today, especially
considering the lack of
public awareness of the
fraternity, to pay no
heed to what valid
research tells us about
developing leaders.**

Everything rises and falls based on leadership. It rises and falls based on how well leaders influence others towards a worthwhile goal.

We do not see the word *humility* used very often in Masonic ritual, but our lessons are certainly attached to that virtue. Mastering humility is something that takes practice, like all other virtues, and men in leadership positions (or positions of influence) who value and exemplify humility, seem to have an edge over those who do not.

With humility comes admitting mistakes, or that we do not know everything, which seems a laudable behavior that our institution would want to exemplify. Leaders in our fraternity who have, in the past and today, labored to bring better leadership to our lodges and grand lodges are to be thanked for their work. Expanding content, context, and the manner in which we design

¹⁷ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1947.

and present such programs will always need improvement. There is no such thing as “good enough” when it comes to successfully developing leaders (or for the practice of Freemasonry).

Acknowledging that we have not always enjoyed a system of leadership development that consistently advances the fraternity, much less the historical aim and intent of Freemasonry, is not humiliating nor it is intended to create disharmony: it is fact. Those in leadership positions, or wish to be, must recognize that fact and know, that like Freemasonry itself, leadership development is a lifetime journey. They also recognize that leadership is not a position at all—it is a behavior, and leadership, in a variety of ways, is expected from men who seriously pursue Freemasonry.