

Character Matters

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In last month's column, I noted that during the most recent Conference of Grand Masters of North America, one of the break-out session presentations was on *Civility* and how, as Masons we should be an example for the rest of the world to look to for civility and decorum. A website with the focus of *Restoring Civility in Society*, www.civilitycenter.org, has been revamped and improved as a result of the partnership established with Freemasonry and spearheaded by the Grand Master of California, Russ Charvonia. The *Civility Center* website provides a wealth of information and recommendations for establishing an atmosphere of *Civility* in our everyday lives and how to engage with others in a positive and civil way.

Quoting from the website on the *Principles of Engagement*:
They are guideposts for attracting collaborators and establishing relationships among them.

1. View everyone in positive terms. Seeing everyone as a potential resource and agent of change helps to level the playing field and engage all stakeholders.

2. Develop a common language. The language we use can either unite or divide people. How can we discuss change if we don't understand each other? Being aware of the problem, and agreeing on the terms to be used, is a good start.

3. Build strong relationships and trust. It is impossible to overstate the importance of trust. which builds bridges across boundaries and makes relationships solid.

4. Remember our shared humanity. It is easy to forget we are all humans, with more commonalities than differences . Common sense and history tell us we can work together to solve common concerns - and that when we separate ourselves, we are less effective.

5. Value both the process and the results. The gap between the two causes many people to give up on collaboration. Results-oriented people need actions with observable outcomes, and process-oriented people focus on continuing the methods that drive the action. Both are crucial for improving communities.

6. Look both within and outside the community for guidance. People living in communities need to take responsibility for their problems and find actions that will address them. We also need to recognize when to accept and use resources that are available from outside of the community. All resources need to be leveraged around a healthy attitude toward self-improvement.

The *Civility Toolkit* section has twelve categories of civility focused resources to choose from, a sampling of which includes *General Civility*, *Character & Values*, and *Communicate Civility*. All twelve general categories are further divided into multiple subsections. There is a lot of information here - blogs, training, books, speakers, and links to category-specific websites.

I urge all members of our Masonic Family, including Appendant & Concordant body members, to invest time in exploring and studying the valuable information contained in the *Civility Center* website. It will be time well spent. As I have stated before, as Grand Master of this Jurisdiction my expectation is for all members of our Fraternity to practice civility and decorum at all times,

both in and out of Lodge. In closing, I offer the following about character - an essential component of civility (*unknown source):

Watch your thoughts; they become words.
Watch your words; they become actions.
Watch your actions; they become habits.
Watch your habits; they become character.
Watch your character; it becomes who you are.*

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**A version of this quotation is titled, "Guard my tongue, [a Hebrew] prayer for self-mastery and purification . . . by Mar ben Ravina, quoted in the Talmud," identified by Daniel Pressman and Ronald H. Isaacs in their book, Siddur Or shalom for Shabbat and festivals. (Newark, N.J.: KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 2010), page 81.—Ed.*

A Just and Upright Mason

Francis G. Way

When I became a Mason 18 years ago, I was at first surprised by how familiar all of the tenets of our fraternity were to me. Lessons taught through the example of our beloved implements of architecture were lessons that were basic to the way my parents raised me; love and respect for God, respect for others, self-control, and basic tolerance for all, resonated with me because not only had I been raised that way, but also because my father always "walked the walk." It did not take me long to realize that what I was learning in lectures and in lodge were just formal statements of how I had seen my father act for years.

Dad would probably laugh at me if I called him a great teacher, yet that is what he was. He did not lecture, he did not say "Ok, this is how you do it;" he just provided a daily example of what a man should be and how he should conduct himself. He worked hard, he was fair, he was steady, he was loving, and in his last days he carried himself with such grace and dignity that everyone who came in contact with him remarked to me just how sweet and gentle he was.

Throughout the last months of his life, my father's overwhelming concern was how all of us were taking it, were we ok with his decision not to undergo treatment for the bladder cancer that was killing him. He never complained about the hand he had been dealt, he never moaned that because he was so old he was not a good candidate for treatment. He just tried every day to maintain his independence and not be a burden to anyone.

Late in the day on which he died I had a few quiet moments to myself, to sit and reflect. I was feeling some regret that over the last several years of his life he had been too tired to come to lodge, or Commandery or Scottish Rite with me. It was then that I began to realize that while we had not sat together formally in lodge or asylum or valley, we had been laboring in the quarry together every day, and that he was teaching me those final life lessons, lessons that had no lecture, but that are now deeply embedded within me. It was good work, square work and true work...

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