

What Came You Here Seeking?

During the course of my Masonic travels, attending the Conference of Grand Masters, and other Grand Lodge communications, there are three topics that dominate most discussions: Guarding the West Gate, providing a worthwhile experience to the new Mason, and Membership Retention. Several committees have studied these topics and have made reports. Breakout sessions have addressed them. It is obvious that these are universal areas of concern. We have enjoyed discussions on: the differences of generations, the effect of technology, and what new brothers are looking for. In the end, membership retention appears to be our largest problem. We have asked ourselves “what are new brothers seeking?”, and “how do we hold their interest?” All these issues are as relative in Alaska, as they are in any other jurisdiction. The Master should have a plan, utilize committees, guide discussion, and stay on subject. That is part of being a leader.

Leadership is "a process of influencing people to accomplish the mission, inspiring their commitment and improving the organization". As Masons we have the opportunity to be leaders, and to develop leadership in ourselves and among others. Leadership is about character, about who you are as a person and as a Mason. Few of us are destined to be leaders like our founding fathers, but by the example of who we are, we do inspire others. Leaders are individuals who you have looked up to, or tried to emulate by their example. Our new Brothers are looking to all of us to be the example and to be leaders. The first order of business of any Masonic leader is to promote Peace and Harmony among the Brothers, and that duty is incumbent upon all of us! You can be a leader by example, you can promote civility within your lodge and in your community.

Guarding the West Gate

Attracting and inspiring quality men to join our ancient Craft. We should be less concerned with numbers and more with quality. We make good men better! We need to be faithful to our trust; we should only recommend those to participate in our privileges who we have strong reason to believe that, by a similar fidelity he will reflect honor on our Ancient Craft. Many jurisdictions, including our own, have adopted the “Six Steps to Initiation” program in some form and extent; I have encouraged our lodges to adopt this program in a form that best fits their unique circumstances. Get to know a prospective candidate. Invite him to lodge meals and activities, and get to know him and his family. Require him to demonstrate, in some form, a commitment to learn the work. Ask him to memorize a short paragraph or two, write a short paper about a subject he is knowledgeable about. Or perhaps, have him read something monitorial and the write a summary of what it means to him. These things will only whet his interest and feed his appetite. This may take six months or longer, however the candidate now has made an investment; he has demonstrated interest and commitment, and has a better understanding of what we expect of him. Also, you have had time to get to know him. When you sign his petition, you will have strong reasons for doing so, and you will be upholding your obligations when you recommend him.

Providing a worthwhile experience

Many lodges have taken steps to make their meetings less tedious, and more meaningful. Business meetings across all organizations are necessary, but are often dull. Delegating issues to appropriate committees, and have them bring reports and recommendations before the lodge is good leadership and shortens discussion concerning the more tedious nature of business of the lodge. Committees not only can

make lodge meetings more efficient, but involve the brothers and this provides another means of inclusion and involvement. Additionally, these are opportunities to begin developing leadership within lodges.

In all meetings, the Master should uphold proper Masonic decorum and protocol, and limit superfluous discussion (Brothers should be recognized by the East before speaking). That said, good and meaningful ritual work demonstrates pride, is inspirational to the new brother, and inspires all the brothers to work at contributing to good work. Lodges that provide some form of education at their meetings attract more brothers. Moreover, having informal gatherings, either in the dining room, someone's home, or elsewhere, is an opportunity for educational discussions and are equally important to fellowship and inclusion. There should always be time for fellowship either before or after all meetings.

What came you here to do?

Or, what came you here seeking? Ah, now there is the question! What is our new brother seeking? What do we all seek in our Masonic experience? When you submitted your petition did you know then and do you know now what you were seeking? Think about that! These are serious questions worth of some contemplation. And now when we go to lodge what do we seek? I venture you have never given much thought to these questions, but it might be useful to determine the answers? So, let me put still another question before you; do you enjoy watching the news? How do you feel about all the controversy? Do you appreciate all the contention and negativism in social media and among our political leaders? If you answered that you are bothered and/or distressed by this negativism, what came you to lodge seeking? I venture that you came seeking "Friendship, Morality, and Brotherly Love", and that you came seeking fellowship, peace, and harmony. Moreover, I venture our new brothers came seeking that same Brotherly Love and affection. They come seeking a refuge from the profane world with all its conflict, dissention, and negativism. Yet, we being human have allowed the ills of our society to creep into our "Sacred Retreats". We have let disparaging and negative comments about other brothers, lodges, clubs, and temples to become a part of our conversations, not only in lodge but elsewhere as well.

My Brothers, I believe we can do more for membership retention and attracting good men by being leaders in respect and civility, by refusing to take part in the contention and conflict that has so infected our society. Be strong my Brothers, live by your convictions, live by your obligations as a Mason, be civil and respectful to all! Society needs relief from the distress of our contentious world, our lodges need to be sanctuaries. We need to be leaders, and we need to be a positive influence in civility and respect! Be leaders, and do good unto all!

In Peace, Love, and Harmony,

M.W. John K. Bishop
Grand Master

Grand Lodge of Alaska