

Membership Retention  
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Ten Master Masons: Author Unknown

Ten Master Masons, happy, doing fine;  
One listened to a rumor, then there were nine.

Nine Master Masons, faithful, never late;  
One didn't like the "Master," then there were eight.

Eight Master Masons, on their way to heaven;  
One joined too many clubs, then there were seven.

Seven Master Masons, life dealt some hard licks;  
One grew discouraged, then there were six.

Six Master Masons, all very much alive;  
One lost his interest, then there were five.

Five Master Masons, wishing there were more;  
Got into a great dispute, then there were four.

Four Master Masons, busy as could be;  
One didn't like the programs, then there were three.

Three Master Masons, was one of them you?  
One grew tired of all the work, then there were two.

Two Master Masons with so much to be done;  
One said "What's the use," then there was one.

One Master Mason, found a brother -- true!  
Brought him to the Lodge, then there were two.

Two Master Masons didn't find work a bore;  
Each brought another, then there were four.

Four Master Masons saved their Lodge's fate;  
By showing others kindness, then there were eight.

Eight Master Masons, loving their Lodges bright sheen;  
Talked so much about it, they soon counted sixteen.

Sixteen Master Masons, to their obligations true;  
Were pleased when their number went to thirty-two.

So we can't put our troubles at the Lodge's door;  
It's our fault for harming the Lodge we adore.

Don't fuss about the programs or the "Master" in the East;  
Keep your obligation by serving even the very least.

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Let's start with a few questions to ponder about what we have just heard. Make note of the answers and observations you make when you think about these questions.

What did the first group of Masons do that destroyed their Lodge?

What did the second group of Masons do that built their Lodge?

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Here are some questions to think about as you consider your Lodge.

Why did you join Freemasonry?

What were you looking for?

What did you expect would come from your involvement in Freemasonry?

Why do you think the men who joined Freemasonry come to our doors?

Why do you think our forefathers created Speculative Freemasonry?

Keep track of your thoughts about your responses.

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Men are creatures of our heritage both our social heritage and our biological heritage. We carry in our DNA certain qualities that shape everything we do. These include the need to form relationships; to collaborate; to cooperate; and to reduce our fears through knowledge and understanding. Freemasonry provides a structure that allows us to develop and form the kind of relationship that meets these needs. Freemasonry does this by its very design.

First, brings men into our order through initiation. Initiation is an experience where a person is fundamentally changed, transformed, made new, and awakened to the possibilities that lie before him. It provides an opportunity for brothers to discover the elements of Truth that are contained in the lessons presented to us by Freemasonry. They are presented through our ceremonies, symbols, lectures, and experiences. A true initiation inspires Brothers to act on the lessons that are

learned making those lessons part of who we are and influence the decisions we make on a daily basis.

All of this occurs within the context of a relationship, a relationship that is based on our shared experiences as Speculative Freemasons. We need to be aware of this relationship, the connections between ourselves, and the essential teachings Speculative Freemasonry as we look at the challenges of maintaining active membership.

We are here today to discuss membership RETENTION, not recruitment. We need to recognize that recruiting members without addressing the nature of the Masonic experience is like bailing a sinking ship with a sieve. We need to improve our Lodge experiences before we actively seek new members. Otherwise, they will leave as fast as or faster than they come in.

Retention of members as active participants in our Lodges requires that we first meet their expectations for what constitutes a good Masonic Experience. Let's reflect on the first question I asked you earlier. What were you looking for when you joined Freemasonry?

Every man entering the West gate has expectations. Retention requires that we meet their needs as men to engage in relationships that are mutually rewarding and fulfilling. It requires that we fulfill our purpose as an organization. This includes keeping the promises of making good men better, providing light, opportunities for trustworthy relationships, and teaching about the lessons of Speculative Freemasonry. Lastly, it means valuing a Brother's time by having meetings, events, and activities that are seen as a good use of time.

This relationship between Man and Lodge begins long before a Brother sets foot in a Lodge room. It begins with his first contact with a Mason and his inquiry about Freemasonry. This is the real beginning of the connection between Man and Lodge that is at the core of our Fraternity. We are told in several places in our Masonic rituals that a single cord is strong, a two-fold cord is stronger, and that a three-fold cord is stronger still.

The same holds true for connections between people. A connection with one brother makes coming to a meeting an option. A connection with two makes coming to that meeting easier. And a connection with many brothers of the Lodge makes attendance an imperative as his absence will surely be noticed.

We need to consider the settings where we spend time with our Brothers. If all we know of a brother is what we see between the opening and the closing of a meeting, we know very little of him and his life. However, if we spend time in social situations, working together on community projects, discussing the lessons of

Freemasonry, and enjoying family time together, we build a cord of many strands that will be far stronger.

What are some things we can do to form stronger connections between the enquirer and the Brothers of the Lodge before the night of initiation? Make note of your thoughts and the possibilities that exist.

As a man approaches Speculative Freemasonry, the first formal step in forging this relationship is the ritual of initiation. To be meaningful, the initiation should be a powerful, emotionally moving experience that reaches into the soul to stir strong feelings. Excellence in ritual requires practice as a Lodge, not just as individuals. We need to work together to present a seamless presentation where one Brother knows what the other Brothers will be doing as the ritual progresses.

We need to be accurate, but more importantly, we need to understand what we are saying so this understanding can be communicated in the way we exemplify the work. It requires excellence in execution to convey to the initiate that we take our work seriously and expect the new Brothers to do the same. Such a presentation will convey to the initiate that we value the lessons of Freemasonry and treat the ritual with the reverence that reflects the power of these lessons. We teach him that we take our work seriously and expect him to do the same.

Next, we need to be inclusive giving every Brother in the Lodge a job or responsibility in the work of the Lodge as they contribute to its vitality. If you know that the Lodge is relying on you to contribute to the Masonic Experience, you are less likely to choose something else to do on that evening.

The second step at retention is to have meetings and events that are seen as a good use of time. Our Entered Apprentice degree says it perfectly. "We come to learn....." This means assuring that we teach Speculative Freemasonry in our Lodges. We should study our lectures, symbols, and the power of these lessons in our Lodges.

Our early authors tell us that meetings have the sole function of being a "sacred retreat" from the world at large allowing us to focus ourselves on teaching and, as our entered apprentice degree tells us, "improving ourselves in Freemasonry." Meetings that include such activities are generally seen as a good use of time, a wise investment in our Fraternity, a wise investment in our Lodges, and a wise investment in ourselves.

The styles of educational presentation will vary based on the skills of the presenter, the topics being discussed, and material being presented. Lectures made to the Brothers present information on an intellectual level. Such a method only has a limited impact. However, when we engage in a discussion, each of us shares what we know and, as a result leave the meeting knowing more than we did before we

started. This is because all of us know more than any of us. In short, good retention means doing our best to make each Masonic meeting or event something we leave saying “Damn, I am glad I came and can’t wait until the next one.”

The teaching of Speculative Freemasonry not only occurs in meetings, but also occurs as we formally train new Brothers in the basics of Speculative Freemasonry. Merely focusing on the minimum proficiency of our catechism is a grave disservice to everyone involved. First, it robs that brother from obtaining what he was seeking when he came through the west gate. Second, it conveys the impression that we do not live up to our values by saying it is not really important to learn or understand anything, only to get through the minimum proficiency.

A proper foundation of a Masonic Education requires the full use of the Grand Lodge of Ohio Apprenticeship Program and the Master Craftsman materials. In addition, all Lodges should be expected to provide additional training and education about Speculative Freemasonry including a detailed review of the ritual, lecture, and symbolism. We should assure ourselves that the new brother understands the “why” behind everything we do and its roots in Speculative Freemasonry. This is to be reflected in everything we do in our meetings, activities, social time, and service projects.

Retention also includes inspiring others to take what they are learning within the Lodge and applying it to everything they do in the world at large. The lessons of our Craft are of no use if they remain within the walls of the Lodge. We should look for stories of how Freemasonry shows itself every day in the world around us.

The last element of retention involves communication with your Brothers. If the most wonderful things are happening in your Lodge but no one knows about it, then it will have no real impact on the state of things in your Lodge. Ways of communication vary in form and effectiveness. Therefore, using a variety of methods is essential.

Communications can be delivered electronically through e-mail, Facebook pages, online groups, and other ways. The challenges we face when keeping in contact with Brothers includes maintaining accurate addresses, spam blocking, and members who do not have easy access to the internet. Old fashioned means including printed mail can work but has a cost involved with printing, mailing, and postage. You can also use phone calls can be made through a calling service where somewhat personalized “robo-call” is used to notify Brothers about events.

Each of these is easy but relatively impersonal and is often overlooked by those we are trying to reach. If I already have a strong connection with the brother, Lodge, or group, I will probably open the e-mail and pay attention to what is being shared with me. However, if I have little or no interest or awareness about the group that

is attempting to reach me, I will just hit “delete” and learn nothing about what is being shared with me.

A personal phone call, particularly from a brother who already has a connection with this brother, is likely to get a more positive response. It allows us to make a clear, personal contact with that Brother and share with him what we want him to know. It also allows us to learn from that brother what is on his mind and what we can do to strengthen his relationship with us. Better yet, a face to face meeting.

It is important that we recognize that communication must be a 2 way street. We need to share with this Brother what we want this him to know. More importantly, we need to listen to what that brother is telling us about what Freemasonry means to him. We need to learn about what he expects from his Lodge and what he is willing to invest in this relationship.

By staying true to our purpose as Speculative Freemasons, by attending to the needs of our Brothers, by recognizing that we have a mutual duty to form and maintain relationships with each other, we can retain the members we have and keep new Brothers active in our Lodges. The relationship between Brothers and their Lodges are the foundation of our ability to keep Freemasonry alive.

The specific steps noted above are the heart of membership retention. Each Lodge will have its own way of addressing these issues. What works for one Lodge may not work for another Lodge. However, the path is clear. We must build connections with men who approach Freemasonry. We should provide initiatic experiences to our newest Brothers that reflect the excellence to which we should aspire.

We should be true to our purpose as Speculative Freemasons and focus on meeting the expectations and needs of those in our Lodge. We should make each meeting a good use of time and include valuable experiences for all in attendance. We should keep in close communication with our brothers to keep them aware of what we have to offer and to provide them a clear pathway to improving themselves since we promised to make good men better, and help them to find ways to contribute to the life of the Lodge.

Lastly, we need to take action, not just offer lip service. Each Lodge should choose a few important actions, plan them thoroughly, execute them well, and enjoy the success of your labors. As we hear in the Master Mason Lecture, “time, patience, and perseverance will accomplish all things....” especially that part on perseverance.

I have one last question for you to consider.

What are you doing to make your Lodge better?