

A PLAN FOR ACTION

MORE LIGHT in MASONRY (II) A PLAN FOR ACTION by Allen E. Roberts

Why does one Lodge grow and another stand still? Why is one Lodge active while another stagnates? Why does one Lodge have an overflow attendance, and another can't find enough men to confer a degree?

The reason, Ted Gray determined, was effective planning. With it there is no limit to the growth of a Lodge or any organization; without it there can be but failure.

Why must a Lodge plan? For two reasons: because it is successful, or because it is unsuccessful! This sounds like a contradiction. Actually, it isn't.

If the Lodge is successful, it must plan to keep its members from becoming overly content. Contentment tends to breed acceptance of things as they are; happy and comfortable people prefer to stay in the "rut" they now enjoy. When this is permitted to take place, the rut can become so deep it will be difficult to get out of it. If the Lodge is not successful, effective planning can reverse the trend away from stagnation.

The first step in effective planning is to become familiar with all the conditions affecting the Lodge. This means taking a hard, cool, and perhaps unpleasant look at the over-all picture. It means there must be some deep-down soul-searching. It means change. It means readjustment. It means we must face reality. All of which threatens complacency and apathy.

Ted Gray faced the facts and determined to do something to help His Lodge grow. So, he drove over to Leslie Wilson's home.

"Les, I want to try something that hasn't been done in our Lodge before," said the Worshipful Master.

"Why tell me about it, Ted? You know I haven't been interested in the Lodge for years."

"That's one reason I'm talking to you, Les. I know why you haven't done anything for the Lodge for a long time. You got fed up with the do-nothing attitude of the officers and Past Masters. I want that to change, and I believe you're the man to make it change."

"I'm willing to listen, but I'm making no promises," said Leslie. "What do you have in mind?"

"You know Morris Newton even better than I do. You know that he's aggressive and intelligent. What you may not know is that he has petitioned our Lodge. I want him to get started on the right foot. I don't want to make just another member of him. I want him to become a Master Mason in every sense of the word."

Leslie grinned. "You must have been reading some of the stuff I've been writing. You're using some of my terminology."

"Now you know another reason I've come to you," laughed the Worshipful Master. "Yep. I've been reading your stuff, as you call it. I've learned that you have too much to offer Freemasonry to let it slip away. With a man like you in our Lodge, we'd be nuts not to use you."

"I just might be willing to be used. Keep talking."

"You know more about this Order than I'll ever know. It's your knowledge about Masonry that I want to tap. And we'll start with Morris Newton and see what happens."

What the Worshipful Master wanted to do is not new. It is as old as time itself. He wanted to use the man-to-man, or mouth-to-ear approach to teach a man what Freemasonry is all about. This Master had learned that there can be no dedication without education.

After Ted had left Leslie, he called Morris Newton. He asked Morris when it would be convenient to visit his home and talk with him and Mrs. Newton. At the appointed hour Leslie and Ted arrived at the Newtons.

After the preliminary greetings were out of the way, Ted said, "We have dropped by to let you ask any questions either of you may have concerning this step you are about to take. We want to take the mystery about Freemasonry out of your minds. I'm sure you've heard that Masonry is a secret organization, because that's what too many people think. It isn't a secret organization. We do have a couple of secrets, however. If we didn't, there would be no way to know whether or not a man had actually been made a Mason."

"May I ask a question?" asked Mrs. Newton.

"We wish you would," said the Master. "That's the reason we asked Morris to select a time that would be convenient to you both."

"I've heard that once a man gets into Masonry, he puts that first, above his home, his family, and his church," said Mrs. Newton. "If that's true, I would rather not have Morris in it."

Ted nodded to Leslie who told her, "If that happened to be the truth, I wouldn't blame you. Actually, Masonry's teachings should prevent that from happening. No Master Mason can be true to the lessons taught in the Lodge and not be a better husband, father, and churchman. Now, you will note that I didn't say Christian, because a man doesn't have to be a Christian to be a Mason, but he does have to believe in God. Freemasonry has just one purpose-to make good men better men. That means better in his home, his work, his religion. Better in every respect."

"That sounds interesting," said Morris, "but I know one or two Masons who aren't too ethical in their business dealings. How do you account for that?"

"Unfortunately," replied Ted, "not all Masons are good men. Not all of them live up to the teachings of the Order. Perhaps that's because we've been negligent and haven't passed along to

them what we should have. We haven't taught them what they ought to know. Actually, that's why we're here. We want to correct some of the errors of the past. We want to start you in the right direction."

Leslie added, "We should make it clear that not all good men are Masons. Then, too, some men who have entered Freemasonry wouldn't have, if they'd known what Freemasonry actually is before they petitioned. That's another reason we are here. We want you to know what Freemasonry is and is not. Then, if you still want to become one of us, the chances are excellent that you will make an exceptional Mason."

"I don't know about the `exceptional' part, but the rest makes sense," said Morris, and his wife nodded her agreement.

For the next two hours the Newtons asked questions and were told more than any petitioner of the Lodge had ever been told before. They learned that the principles of Freemasonry taught today had withstood the test of time; the Fraternity was over two hundred years old. That, while it has its social moments, it is a way of life that a man can philosophically follow. Its moral codes, its teachings, its tenets, its philosophies put brotherhood into action wherever they are practiced.

Morris Newton was convinced that he wanted to be a Mason. Ted and Leslie were convinced that Morris Newton would make an excellent Master Mason. It was now up to them to make certain that the lessons he would be taught would make a lasting and favorable impression on his mind.

Ted stopped his car in front of Leslie's home. They were silent for a few moments; then Ted said, "Les, I want you to head up a team for me. I want this team to be a far reaching one, one that will lead the way toward improving every area of our Lodge. This will include the ritual, Masonic education in every sense of the word, improvements to our building, our furniture, our paraphernalia. To put it shortly and bluntly, I want your team to make immediate plans, short-range plans, and plans for five, ten, and twenty-five years from now."

Leslie looked at Ted as though one of them was crazy. Ted grinned, "Sounds like a big order, doesn't it? But with your background in management and Masonry, I've no doubt that you can do this, and more."

"Thanks, I think. But let me get a couple of things straight. First, I note you said you want me to head up a team. Don't you mean committee?"

"Absolutely not!" said Ted emphatically. "I used to think committees were the thing, but my experience with them hasn't been good. I find that committees tend to get nothing done. One man, the chairman, ends up making all the plans and doing all the work. I don't want that. I want participation. The more men we have thinking and working, the better the results will be."

Leslie nodded his head slowly. "I hadn't thought about committees in that light. But I see what you mean. However, one team isn't going to be able to accomplish all that you have outlined. It's going to take several to do the job."

"That's right, but I want you to coordinate the action. Get the best men you can find on the several teams. One caution, though. Don't select men who think alike. We don't want a bunch of 'yes men'. We want men who think for themselves, men who will give us the action we need."

After consulting potential leaders in different areas, it was determined that the leadership of the Lodge should take the time necessary to:

Define the problem, or problems:

It might be poor ritual; poor attendance; poor programs; poor reporting; too little or no instruction about Masonic activities, history, philosophy, symbolism, and so on.

Determine the type of training activity or program needed to solve each problem:

Weekly classes for ritual; personal contact of the membership; obtaining Masonic speakers, degree teams, Masonic plays; special instruction for the Lodge Secretary by the Grand Secretary.

Determine the training objectives:

Excellent degree and floor work; improved attendance; providing the membership of Freemasonry with knowledge of all phases.

Determine the content of the training programs:

Decide on the methods and techniques to be used:

Determine the material, supplies, and equipment needed:

Decide when, where, and how the training will be done:

Determine how much money the training will cost, making certain that it is adequate; then determine how to provide it.

By following this plan of action, without haste, we can make certain that adequate consideration is given to every aspect of what we want to accomplish. We won't be doing a piecemeal job just to say we are doing something.

There are many educational, or training, programs that have been proven successful. These will be outlined in future Short Talk Bulletins. One or more may serve your purposes. And you may find that you ought to blend two or more together to fulfill your requirements.

But the first step is to determine what can be done immediately to correct some of the errors of the past. Two of the most prevalent mistakes are poor ritual and the failure to instruct new members adequately. These can be corrected quickly.

A candidate's first impression of Freemasonry is derived from the way he receives his First Degree. As a rule, every Lodge has some good ritualists. These should be called together and a Ritual Team

formed. Together they should determine the best methods to use to improve the degree work and everything else concerning the ritual.

When Ted and Leslie called the ritualists of their Lodge together, the discussion was enlightening. For years the ritualists had wanted to do something, but they didn't know exactly what to do. After a lengthy discussion they decided to hold weekly classes of instruction. All the officers and members would be invited to participate. They would start out by going over the catechisms (lectures) of the three degrees. Each man would ask a question and another would answer it in rotation. Following this, the officers would practice opening and closing the Lodge, then work in one of the three degrees. Others would get special instruction in the various lectures and other ritualistic work. They would also invite the Grand Lecturer to work with them so that they would learn the ritual correctly.

Two of the three steps necessary to communicate Light in Masonry to a new member had been established by the Worshipful Master. The candidate would receive the First Degree in Masonry in a proficient manner. The importance of these steps cannot be overlooked. First impressions are too often lasting impressions. Psychologists claim that a man's adult life is often determined by the first six or seven years of his childhood. It is, therefore, not too much to believe that the first minutes of a man's Masonic life will determine his future progress in Masonry.

The third important step is the assignment of a coach, or mentor, to work with the candidate through every step of his journey into the mainstream of Freemasonry. This mentor must be a knowledgeable Mason. He must know the meaning behind the ritual and have a thorough background in the various facets of Freemasonry. This will mean special training programs. A man must first learn before he can teach.

Where a mentor program (called by differing names such as Big Brother and Intender) has been actively used, there have been good results. The mentor becomes the Masonic father of the candidate. He attends the meetings of the Lodge with the new Mason while he is advancing. He takes him to visit other Lodges. He is with him during social functions and in Masonic study groups. Where there are Masonic conferences that the candidate can attend, the mentor is with him.

Freemasonry is an organization of individuals. Every individual is different. Each has his likes and dislikes. Each has some talent that no other person can duplicate. A mentor plan recognizes this fact. And an individual works with an individual.

So, a training program for mentors - Masonic teachers - is a must. It should be set up using the outlines suggested in this essay and those in the first of the series. Future Bulletins in this series will cover this program in more detail. Such a program will take time and knowledge to develop, but the results will pay dividends for many years to come.

Two of the first three necessary steps, however, can be taken immediately. The first, indoctrination of the petitioner, requires a background of Freemasonry. Enough of this knowledge can be acquired quickly* so that the petitioner and his family can be told what Freemasonry is all about. This will assure the Lodge that it will be receiving into its ranks a man who truly wants to become a Master Mason.

The second step, excellent ritualistic work, can become a reality by following the plan developed by the Ritualistic Team in this article.

More Light in Masonry; who needs it? All of us. How can it be acquired? Through effective planning.