

A ROAD TO SUCCESS

MORE LIGHT in MASONRY (VI): COMMUNICATION - A ROAD TO SUCCESS by ALLEN E. ROBERTS

Often we hear, "Let's get to the nitty gritty," or, "Let's get to the nuts and bolts." Excellent advice. If two people are on the same "wave length," there is no problem in following this advice.

We must determine, though, what the "nitty" is before we can get to the "gritty". We can't fasten the bolt with the nut until it's put through the hole. Finding the right hole can take time, knowledge, searching, and often a lot of fumbling. Putting on the nut becomes fairly simple once the hole is found.

It takes communication, non-verbal, to find the proper slot for the bolt. It can take differing forms of communication to find the "nitty gritty." With meaningful communication many difficult problems can be solved and tasks performed efficiently.

Poor communication is responsible for many business failures. It also accounts for much fraternal apathy and lack of interest. One wonders how many lodges have had to surrender their charters because of little or no communication, or how many lodges have poor attendance because of a lack of communication. Many Worshipful Masters deplore the small group of Masons who turn out for Masonic funerals. Later they learn that many members would have been present if they had known about the funeral.

Recently I spoke in a lodge with fewer than fifty members. Over two hundred were jammed into the lodge room. A couple of weeks earlier I had spoken in a lodge with six hundred members. Twenty-eight, including visitors, were lost in the large room. What made the difference?

The small lodge had sent out an attractive bulletin. It was worded in such a way that everyone believed the greatest Masonic speaker would address them. The bulletin was an "attention-getter". The larger lodge had sent out a postcard asking the members to attend a stated meeting. But it didn't tell them why they should.

One of the former duties of the Tiler was to notify the members of special meetings of the lodge. That was before the days of the popularity of Brother Henry Ford's horseless buggy. In those bygone days many country lodges met on or close to the full moon. This enabled the men, or their horses, to find their way safely over rural lanes. Those were the days when the Masonic lodge was the center of attraction for men fortunate enough to be Master Masons.

Brother Ford and his Model T changed the life-style of Americans. Man was no longer tied to a relatively small area of the country. His world was enlarged. So was his knowledge, his work habits, his friends, his neighbors, and his leisure time. The Masonic lodge was no longer the only center of attraction for its members.

We all know what the automobile has done for the world. Without it and its by-products the economy would take a nose dive. This truism is now understood and accepted by most people. But it wasn't always so. People had to be convinced that they should buy the early noisy contraptions. Today, millions are spent to persuade buyers that one car is better than another car.

A product that no one knows about is useless. An idea that is not discussed is wasted. A program that the members know nothing about is squandered. For the leadership not to keep its followers fully informed about the organization is a golden opportunity thrown away.

Many of our lodges have a large percentage of their members living beyond commuting distance. But those distant Brethren have a right to know what their lodge is doing, plans on doing, and has done. They support their lodge, even if it's only through paying their dues. They cannot be present frequently, but they are still loyal members. Their lodge should recognize this loyalty by not ignoring them.

All this means that there must be written communication between the lodge and its members. Here's a partial list of the PURPOSES of a LODGE PUBLICATION:

- To inform the members of the lodge's objectives, plans, problems, and programs
- To show how the member is vital to the success of the lodge
- To help create well-informed Master Masons
- To recognize the achievements of the members in Freemasonry and the community
- To provide Masonic social intercourse for members and their families

To accomplish the foregoing there are many techniques that can be employed. The money available must be considered, but it should not be the prime consideration. Every dollar spent will be returned over and over again in renewed interest in the lodge. This will be evidenced in numerous ways. Dues will be paid more promptly, attendance will increase, and out-of-town members will be heard from frequently. And that will be only the beginning of the benefits.

Large companies use magazine-type publications three to one over newspaper and bulletin types. They can charge the cost to profit and loss for tax purposes; the lodge must absorb the cost. It, too, should consider the profit and loss aspect. It can be determined whether or not the benefits derived (or desired) exceed the unwanted considerations. If they are greater, there is a profit; if not, the project should be abandoned because there is a loss.

A lodge publication doesn't have to be elaborate to be effective. One of the better ones that I have seen over the years was simply and inexpensively done. It was a legal sized piece of light blue paper (8 «" by 14"), divided into eight columns (four on the front and four on the back), and printed on an offset press. It was typed by the editor's secretary on white paper, then photocopied onto a metal master. The photographs, cartoons, and other drawings were made to fit a column, then pasted in before the plate was made.

I say this was one of "the better ones" because it was neatly produced and contained more valuable Masonic information than many publications of much greater cost and size. The Worshipful Master had a column in which he discussed his plans. The Educational Officer had as much space as he needed to convey his message. There was always a column headed: "In the Opinion of the Editor . . ." There were Masonic messages from outstanding Masonic writers. There were news items about what other members were doing. There were occasional photographs and in almost every issue there was a cartoon.

The "News" was mailed to every member and to every lodge within a twenty-five mile radius. Consequently, visitors at times were more plentiful than members. This speaks well for the publication-the average attendance of members was always over thirty percent! They attended because they knew in advance it was worthwhile to leave the reclining chair and television. They were going to enjoy a Masonic experience.

Two contests were run by the "News" during its first year. One invited the ladies to write on "Why I'm Glad My Husband is a Mason." The members could write on any Masonic subject that struck their fancy. At the end of the year, prizes were awarded publicly to the winners. The contest was continued for several years.

A publication must first attract the potential reader; then it must hold his attention. Every lodge has men with imagination, with creative ability, who will take the time necessary to help an editor with a well-rounded publication. Examples of excellent publications can be found everywhere. A little initiative can make yours different and better than any other Masonic publication. Keep it Masonic in nature. Strive for clear, concise, understandable writing. Use sharp photographs. Keep the cartoon and humor within Masonic bounds.

Comedy is an essential means of communication. Often we can get our points across better with humor than any other way. For several years the Grand Lodge of Virginia, through its Education Committee, did this during its Annual Communication. It presented a skit called "The Lodge of Confusion." It portrayed the mistakes commonly made in lodges throughout the Jurisdiction, exaggerating them only slightly. Many an officer confessed that he learned the right way to act from laughing with the cast during Grand Lodge.

A danger signal should be hoisted here. Comedy should have a serious purpose. Farces should be vehicles for sound common sense. We rely upon clowns (like Brother Red Skelton), cartoonists, and song writers to give us insights that will help us form worth-while opinions. We must use comedy wisely. An example of the judicious use of comedy, or satire, to help form public opinion is that of the great humorist, Brother Will Rogers, one of the most influential voices of his day.

Surveys show that the lack of communication, or the wrong kind, is the weakest link in exemplifying "the principles of leadership". You will recall that these are planning, goal setting, organizing, staffing, communicating, and controlling. Without meaningful communication no goal can be reached, and probably won't even be set. There can be little or no planning without information being passed along to those below or above us. No organization can long prosper without effective communication.

In Key to Freemasonry's Growth (1) we read: "Communication, to put it simply, is conveying information from one person or group to another person or group. It sounds easy, but in actual practice it has proven one of the greatest barriers to the success of many organizations. It is a difficult process. Communication does fall apart and goals come tumbling down."

Conrad Hahn, in the film Breaking Barriers to Communication (2) said: "Why does communication fall apart? The behavioral scientists believe they have the answer. They believe that the greatest barrier to meaningful communication is HUMAN NATURE." Aristotle, born 384 B. C., believed the same thing. He declared that to communicate effectively a person must be able to understand human character and behavior in their various forms; he must reason logically; he must understand emotions.

A modern day Professor of Communication Arts, David K. Berlo, follows the Aristotelean theory in this not so simple definition of the not so simple art of communication: "Our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent, to affect others, our physical environment, and ourselves; to become a determining agent; to have a vote in how things are. In short, we communicate to influence - to affect with intent."

"To make it even shorter," said Brother Hahn, "we communicate to change, or affect, human behavior. There is really no other reason for communicating. And here we have the greatest barrier to meaningful communication - HUMAN NATURE".

He went on to list these six BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION:

- Human Nature
- Organizational Realities
- Assumptions
- Prejudice
- Fear
- Low Trust

Each of these barriers is related to human nature. So, it is most important to remember that Freemasons are in the "people business".

About ORGANIZATIONAL REALITIES Brother Hahn said: "In any organization where one man, or a small group of men, runs the show, there will be little or no communication. Ideas for improvement will be stifled, ignored, or sometimes belittled. Consequently, ideas will not be suggested. And without ideas no organization can grow. 'Take it or leave it' plans, iron-clad rules and regulations, prevent creativity, because upward and downward communication cannot function when freedom of expression is discouraged."

This is the principal reason I strongly suggested in Part IV of this series that Teamwork is important; that Teams replace the traditional committee structure.

ASSUMPTIONS cause us to make mistakes in judgment, for we assume that our words mean the same to others as they do to us. We tend to forget that all of us look at life through restricted windows. Our vision is narrowed by our environment, our associates, our work, our organizations.

PREJUDICE causes us to see things that don't exist. It helps us to shrug off things we don't like and to accept the things we do. The truth has trouble existing where prejudice lives.

FEAR of reprisals, fear of sarcasm, fear of ridicule, fear of criticism will keep ideas locked in the mind of a timid person. No one who is afraid can function effectively. Fear also breeds LOW TRUST. And where there is low trust there are likely to be more barriers to communication than have been discussed here.

Brother Hahn tells us how to break barriers to communication: "By putting ourselves in the other fellow's shoes. By understanding and accepting human nature. By understanding that the facts, actions, thoughts, knowledge, and emotions of others differ from ours. By realizing that no two human beings have ever been exposed to and molded by exactly the same experiences."

If we will take this into consideration, the major source of difficulty in communicating will be eliminated. If we will practice EMPATHY - this is the art of putting ourselves in the other fellow's place - we'll be able to communicate with anyone in a meaningful way. The Constructive Leader will practice empathy. He'll study human behavior and put his understanding to work for the good of the organization.

The film lists the following ways of BREAKING BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION:

- Discard the "Crutch"
- Talk About Ideas
- Utilize Non-verbal Communication
- Use Examples
- Danger - I Assumed!
- Don't Prejudge
- Learn to Listen
- Welcome Feedback

Too often we use "organizational realities" as a "crutch" or an excuse to do nothing. This is a favorite of the Obstructive Leader. The Constructive Leader will see in the policies and rules of the

Lodge and Grand Lodge an opportunity to use them as guides rather than obstacles. The good leader won't lean on a "crutch" of any kind.

Ideas that are locked in the mind are of no value to anyone. It is said that for every idea that has been put into practice there have been ten people who thought about it. The trouble is, they only thought about it. So talk about ideas. Discuss them with others. Work with them. You'll be amazed at how much you can accomplish.

Non-verbal communication is used hundreds of times daily. At times this can work wonders. Brother Benjamin Franklin proved it. He wanted to see the streets of Philadelphia lighted, but he knew the city fathers would howl about the expense. Instead of trying to persuade them verbally, he simply hung a beautiful lantern on a long bracket in front of his home. People carefully picking their way along the streets at night came out of the dark into the well-lighted area in front of Franklin's home. Soon most of his neighbors placed lights in front of their homes. It wasn't long before the entire city awoke to the value of street lighting. Franklin achieved his goal. He had overcome organizational realities through non-verbal communication-and by using an example. Don't be afraid to use examples.

We can overcome the barrier of assumptions, even though assumptions must always be with us. We can use them in the right way. For instance: we must always assume that the receiver won't get our message unless we make it clear. We'll make it clear if we'll remember that MEANINGS ARE IN PEOPLE - NOT IN WORDS. Then, too, we must stop transferring OUR motives to the other fellow; we must not draw conclusions until all the facts are in; we must avoid making snap judgments. And we must always remember that the two most dangerous words in our language are - I ASSUMED!

Prejudice will disappear if we'll stop prejudging, if we'll remember that preconceived judgments are caused by past experience or teachings. These are too often based on insufficient knowledge. They probably don't fit present circumstances anyway. We should give the other fellow credit for having dreams and aspirations, and learn what they are, because then we will learn to appreciate him more.

Where there is fear there is always low trust. Where these exist there can be no growth. Both can be eliminated by bringing the causes out into the open. Gossip contributes to fear, low trust, and all the other barriers to communication. Truth is the only way to stop gossip. Truth is considered a "divine attribute" in Freemasonry, so gossip should be unknown among us.

Listening is one of the most difficult, yet most important, skills in communication. It is too often neglected. And we must learn to "listen" with our eyes as well as our ears. Meanings are frequently conveyed by actions rather than by words, so the eyes can "hear" much that the ear will miss.

To obtain feedback - information communicated upward, downward, and sideways - to our superiors, our subordinates, and our equals - we must learn to listen well. Feedback is the only way to determine how well, or badly, we are doing in accomplishing our objectives or goals. The Constructive Leader seeks and welcomes feedback; the Obstructive Leader wants no part of it. The amount of feedback present tells what kind of communication exists. Where the atmosphere is

trusting, where men don't fear their superiors, where there are good listeners, there is feedback that accomplishes growth.

Obviously there can be no Constructive Leadership unless there is meaningful communication. Without such communication we cannot put into practice the ideas in the first five Short Talks of this series, nor those that will follow. Here we've merely touched upon the subject, but the key points have been covered. The "Leader's Guide" for the film, *Breaking Barriers to Communication*, sums up the thoughts brought out in the film and this series as follows:

"Leadership is an absolute necessity if Freemasonry is to grow. To obtain this leadership, education and dedication to the principles of Freemasonry are necessary. Constructive Leaders must be able to recognize the barriers to communication that exist. Then they must practice removing those barriers. They will then be able to grow men into the leaders that the Organization must have.

"We must learn to empathize - to put ourselves in the other fellow's shoes - to talk about ideas, to be creative, to welcome feedback - constructive criticism. We must learn to be better listeners to make us better communicators.

"We must remember that words are merely symbols and mean only what WE think they mean. We must not assume that they mean the same to the other fellow as they do to us. MEANINGS ARE IN PEOPLE. Those meanings have been put in their minds through lifelong association, real and imagined."

Communication - is it important? Yes! It's the most important aspect of being an excellent leader.

1. From the book for Masonic leaders, *Key to Freemasonry's Growth*, by Allen E. Roberts, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Richmond. Va.
2. *Breaking Barriers to Communication*, a Masonic Leadership Training Film, featuring M. W. Conrad Hahn, produced for Macoy. Quotations from the script have been used in this Short Talk Bulletin by permission of Macoy.