



The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia



Committee on Masonic Education

DEO Presentation Program Paper

LEADERSHIP AND ITS WORTH TO MASONS

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You all know the importance of the ritual, or you would not be here at this ritual school. You are to be applauded for taking the time to be here and for making the effort to improve your ritual excellence. There is no question in my mind that the more polished the ritual, the better the impression we leave with the candidate and, in fact, the more we inspire our Brethren at our meetings to improve themselves in Masonry.

But despite all of our efforts, in too many Lodges we find that our Masters have not received the training that would help them to provide the kind of leadership that inspires the Brethren, creates enthusiasm, and moves the Lodge forward.

The well-trained Master observes the old wisdom of measuring twice and cutting once, and spending far more time sharpening the saw than actually doing the sawing. By this, I mean he takes the time to prepare, to anticipate the unexpected, and to have in place contingency plans.

But all too often, this is not the case. How many times have you been in Lodge when the hour was fast approaching for the meeting to begin and watched the Worshipful Master or Senior Warden still trying to line up Brethren to fill certain stations or positions? How many times have you seen the meeting open with the chairs filled by Masons with little experience and often no preparation? And how many times have you seen candidates improperly prepared?

As far as providing leadership and inspiring the Brethren, how many times have you seen Brethren sit silently and pretend not to hear the Warden or Master's plea to assist. Sometimes, it almost comes down to begging a Brother on the sidelines to do something. This is what happens in Lodges where there is a leadership gap – where neither the Worshipful Master nor the Past Masters are working closely enough together and neither is doing enough to develop the next generation of Masonic leaders.

This was not the case in the past, when many of the Masons who became Worshipful Master were men of reputation in the community, who commanded the respect of the Brethren and were able to enlist their support on behalf of the Lodge. The ritual was taken very seriously, the Lodge was full, the meetings and activities well attended, and there was an eagerness to participate in all aspects of the work of the Lodge.

We are still attracting quality men to our ranks, but we need to pay more attention to mentoring these men. They need to be encouraged and trained. If we fail to do so, many of them will drift away, but if we take the time and make the effort, our time and effort will be repaid with interest. We will have Brethren to turn to when a Chair is vacant or a position needs to be filled.

As the Masonic leaders in our district, we must pay more attention to proficiency – not only proficiency in the ritual, but proficiency in serving as Worshipful Master. Thus, while we should continue to encourage every candidate to return the catechisms, we should be equally zealous in promoting leadership training, so our Worshipful Masters have all of the tools they need to be effective in the East.

The Worshipful Master is supposed to set the Craft to work and give them good and wholesome guidance and instruction. But this can scarcely be done when the Worshipful Master lacks the imagination and vision to do so, has little experience outside his own Lodge, and has no handle on what he needs to do to make each meeting a rich and meaningful experience for the Brethren.

Our challenge, therefore, is to work with the Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Education to improve our officer training, so each Lodge has a five-year strategic and membership plan, so all of the Lodge officers are working together with common goals, and that serious efforts are being made to revive interest and increase attendance at Lodge functions.

If we pay attention to grooming our Lodge officers, we will also be increasing the number of Brethren who are excited and engaged in their Lodge, and this in turn will lead to Lodges that are healthy and growing.

There are three key points to take away from these remarks. First, we need to pay serious attention to who we nominate for the position of Junior Deacon. If we have a weak link here, the Lodge will be weak for years to come. Second, we need to nurture our new officers on their path toward the East.

Simply hoping a Brother will absorb what he needs to know, does not cut it. However, if we give him the proper instructions along the way, work on his weaknesses, and help him build upon his strengths, the Lodge will have strong leadership. Third, and finally, we need to pay attention to image and demeanor. Inside the Lodge, the Brethren take their cue from the Master. If he is sharp, they will be sharp. If he sets high standards and expects more from the Brethren, they will rise to the occasion. This demeanor is equally important outside the Lodge. We are ambassadors of Freemasonry, and those we meet and interact with often will form their opinion of our institution by our behavior.

In sum, we have a responsibility to our Craft and can go a long way to keeping it healthy, if we simply live up to its high principles and take the time to teach the new Mason what our Fraternity is all about.