

Leadership for Lodge Officers

by Worshipful Jon Shelton

I think it is safe to say that in our business and social life, and also as Freemasons, we have seen examples of both good and poor leadership. We know that good leadership is important to business and military organizations, because even the power of the pay check or the power of the chain of command is not sufficient to move men to do their very best. Leadership is equally essential in a volunteer organization, like Freemasonry, if the membership is to be motivated and inspired.

The problem is that leadership itself is not always well understood. In fact, it is often confused with management, and while there is some overlap, they are not the same thing. Management focuses on organizational and bureaucratic skills. Leadership focuses more on interpersonal skills.

In this talk, I want to address what I think are some of the personal attributes you must cultivate in order to be a good leader, and then discuss some of the skills or traits of the leader.

We should start by asking: *What is leadership?*

It is the art of influencing and directing people so as to obtain their trust, respect, confidence, and loyal cooperation.

Some of us are born with greater instinctive leadership skills than others, but everyone can improve his skills by observation, experience, and emulation.

I think there are eight essential qualities of a good leader.

- The first is **integrity**. This must be the foundation of all your words and actions. Never sacrifice your credibility; once lost, it is virtually impossible to regain.
- The second is **self-discipline**. If you cannot govern yourself, you will not be able to govern others.
- The third is **energy and enthusiasm**. If you are not excited and motivated, it is hard to instill this feeling in others.
- The fourth is **initiative and determination**. Leadership is difficult and decisions are hard, but don't allow yourself to be paralyzed. Take the initiative. Figure out what needs to be done, do it, and have the fortitude to see it through.
- The fifth is **justness**. You must act fairly with your Brethren and fellow officers on all occasions.
- The sixth is **firmness and kindness**. You must be decisive and resolute if you are to make progress, but you should not be overbearing and heavy-handed. You need to treat your Brethren and fellow officers with kindness and courtesy.
- The seventh is **courage**. You have to have the moral courage to do what is right when it is not convenient, and even when it is unpopular.
- The eighth is **imagination**. You must have a vision, decide what is possible, determine what is important, and develop a strategy.

The net of all of this is that the leader has to set the example. It is not enough to know the principles of leadership, you must exhibit them.

In addition to these eight essential qualities of a good leader, there are eight additional leadership skills or traits that need to be cultivated.

The first of these is **bearing or command presence**. This is the way in which you carry yourself, and is the product of dignity, sharpness in appearance and action, firm and unhurried speech, and self-confidence. What this means in practice is that the ritual and business part of a stated communication should be carried out with professional bearing. The rest of the meeting can be more informal and fun. It is an art to be able to alternate between the two. You need to show your command presence when the inevitable curve balls come your way at meetings. Remember to be adaptable, exercise patience, and maintain your bearing. You also need to show your command presence when mistakes are made. Being human, you and your officers will make mistakes when conducting the ritual and conferring the degrees. But remember to stay the course and drive on. The important thing is to impress the visitors and the candidates, and provide them with an outstanding and enlightening experience.

The second is **communication**, which is the ability to speak, write, and teach. If you need practice in these areas, take the initiative to practice them whenever you can. One way is to give a presentation to the Lodge. You will be in the East soon enough, but it is better to practice now. As Worshipful Master, maintain close communication with your Wardens. Work as a team, and remember that part of your job is to train them to take your place.

The third is **loyalty downward**. This means taking care of your people, both your junior officers and the Brethren. As the leader, your job is to remove the obstacles in their way, and put them in a position to

succeed. Make sure they have the training and the tools they need, and back them to the hilt. When men believe you've got their back, they will work hard for you.

Part of this skill is to delegate as much as possible. Tell your officers and committee chairs what results you want, but not how to do it. Only give them guidance as they need it, and never micromanage. Delegating means decentralizing authority. Although, as the Worshipful Master, you have the overall responsibility, you should give your team all the authority and discretion they can handle.

Another part of this skill is to encourage teamwork. We are stronger when we work together than when we work separately – or worse yet – when we work at cross purposes. And, of course, ensure that your officers and the members of your team receive all the credit due them. You can never thank people enough for the good work they contribute.

The fourth leadership trait is **competence**. As the leader, you have to work hard to learn your business so others can see you know what you're doing. This will help you earn the confidence of your Brethren. It is a good idea to obtain your Warden's Certificate and take the Correspondence Courses as soon as possible, and get to know where to find answers in the Methodical Digest.

The fifth trait is **attitude**. As the leader, you need to have a "can-do" attitude. The mark of a leader is to do the best you can with what you have, and do it with confidence and enthusiasm.

The sixth trait is **devotion**. The Worshipful Master must be devoted to the Craft and its traditions, and must work to foster that attitude in his

officers and the members of his Lodge. The leader sets the example. If you take Freemasonry seriously, so will your Brethren.

The seventh trait deals with **orders or direction**. As Worshipful Master, you must issue and enforce orders. You do not want to give direction without careful consideration of the facts and circumstances, but once you understand the issue, you should not waiver or vacillate. You also should realize that issuing an order, as hard as that may be, is the easy part. The really hard part – but also the really important part of your responsibility – is to ensure that the order is carried out, either by your junior officers or by your committees.

And the eighth trait deals with **praise and reprimand**. The basic rule is to praise in public and reprimand in private. Make use of formal occasions, such as the stated communication, the district class, or other special events, to present a Brother with recognition. Don't criticize a Brother in front of others, take him aside, explain the problem, and when finished, end on a positive note with some compliments. Remember, at bottom we are all Brothers, and that is what is most important.

Let me conclude with a few final observations. The principles enunciated in this talk are important to all of the Brethren in a Lodge. We recognize that every Lodge already has Brethren who are not in line but who, nevertheless, are leaders who the Brethren look up to, admire, emulate, and follow. We know that it is necessary that the officers of the Lodge be good leaders, if the Lodge is to prosper. Also, we want those in the Lodge who may, in the future, wish to be in line to hone their leadership skills.

Always remember the power of example. As an officer you must keep in mind that the Masons in your Lodge will take their cue from you, so always conduct yourself as a Master Mason should. The good name and esprit de corps of the Craft are in your hands – you can make or break it.

Never overlook our traditions or our ritual. We are justly proud of our traditions, which have taken centuries to establish. Take care to be courteous to all your Brethren, and to show respect to the senior officers and Past Masters. It is greatly appreciated and shows good discipline. Never be afraid to be seen as a hard charger. Look sharp, act sharp, and carry yourself as an officer. Execute the ritual with precision and feeling.

Remember, our objective is harmony, cooperation, and teamwork, with all of the Brethren pursuing their work on behalf of the Lodge and Freemasonry with enthusiasm. This is best achieved with good leadership, and good leadership is achieved by cultivating in your character the *virtue and honor* expected of a Lodge officer. At the end of the day, if the officers and Brethren of your Lodge are successful, then you are a successful leader.

Our Lodges and districts are what we make of them, so let each of us do everything in our power to increase the prestige and reputation of our gentle Craft. Remember, a Lodge with good leadership will be a successful Lodge, in terms of its reputation, membership development, educational opportunities, and community service. The destiny of Freemasonry in Virginia depends upon us.

[Note: The author is indebted to the following reference for providing a basic outline for this leadership talk: "The Marine Officers Guide, Third Edition, 1967, US Naval Institute, Annapolis, MD, Gen. Gerald C. Thomas (USMC, Ret.), Colonel Robert D. Heintz, Jr. (USMC Ret.), and Rear Admiral Arthur A. Ageton, (USN, Ret.)." This reference provided critical insight from Marine leaders (especially those coming out of World War II) which was integrated with the authors own experience in the US Army, industry, and as Master of his Lodge.]