

Opportunities in Masonry

Hope Lodge No. 114 – February 21, 2012

There is no question that “you will get more out of Masonry than you put into it,” a comment that could be made about membership in many organizations. However you must give of yourself if you are to enjoy the benefits and opportunities provided by the Fraternity of Masonry. You may recall a statement to the effect that “It possesses great and invaluable privileges; but in order to secure those privileges to worthy men and ---.” Some of those privileges are the opportunities that I’m referring to in this paper.

The opportunities of forming new friendships by visiting within the district, the jurisdiction and outside of our jurisdiction, developing leadership and management skills, ease in speaking in public; exercising of the grey matter and taking a second look at one’s inward self have helped my personal growth. This partial list, points out a few of the many privileges provided by Masonry. There are indeed many other skill sets that we, as Masons, can exercise as members of the craft.

In 1962 when I joined Maple Leaf Lodge No. 119 in Bath, I was pleasantly surprised to find out how many of the members were neighbours and friends that I already knew. Shortly thereafter Cathy and I moved to Seaforth, Ontario to practice Veterinary Medicine. At that time I needed a lodge to pass me to the Second Degree and raise me to the Third Degree so that I could proceed in Masonry. It didn’t take long to find the lodge secretary of Britannia Lodge and after attending the first meeting I found that many of our clients were also my brethren. The wearing of the square and compasses has introduced me to many wonderful people.

Two years later we moved to Napanee near Bath to practice. Then I had the opportunity to progress through the chairs and serve as the Worshipful Master of Maple Leaf Lodge. Later I moved to the Colborne area and after a few years joined the Scottish Rite in Peterborough opening up a whole new group of friends. More recently I affiliated with Colborne Lodge and again I have found a great group of Masons in Ontario District. While travelling outside of our jurisdiction I have visited Masonic Lodges in St. John’s Newfoundland, Winnipeg Manitoba, and in Invercargill New Zealand. Each time that I have pushed myself to make a visit, either at home or away, I have either renewed friendships or made new friendships and on each occasion it has been a learning and rewarding experience.

Progressing through the chairs in a Masonic lodge is an opportunity to try management and leadership skills. The chances today to improve our leadership skills have diminished due to the amalgamation of a large number of 3 person school boards of small communities into the present mega sized school boards covering large districts, and similarly with the amalgamation of municipal governments into much larger units. Today I would suggest that more than ever we need to provide opportunities for leadership training. Masonry is a safe and friendly environment to try out one’s ideas on how to manage and/or lead. To take full advantage of the chair progression in a lodge one should first obtain knowledge about leadership, management and public speaking. Grand Lodge also provides a College in Masonry course at very little cost.

The testing of your ideas of management and/or leadership skills in the workplace can be high risk should they happen to go wrong. In a Masonic environment you are among friends who will, if asked, provide you with assistance. In the Lodge's supportive environment you can practice and polish your skills, receive constructive criticism and honest advice, and push yourself out of your comfort zone with confidence. Find a brother whom you highly respect and who has been through the experience and ask them to mentor your progress.

Speaking in public can be a terrifying experience for many. For some, just the thought of getting up in front of a group of people to speak can release large quantities of adrenaline, set the heart beating like a trip hammer and trigger the feeling of panic. In Masonry you have the opportunity to speak off the cuff during the regular meetings or in committee meetings and at the same time to use memorized portions of the ritual while the lodge is at work. Here as with the testing of management and leadership skills you are with friends from whom you can obtain feedback. I would strongly recommend that in preparation for progressing to the Worshipful Master's chair that a brother take a course in public or effective speaking

We are told that exercising of the brain can reduce the risk of or at least, hold off, the onset of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. There are of course many things that we can do to exercise the brain. Memory work is an excellent method of helping to keep the brain active. It will also be of benefit to the Worshipful Master and the lodge if you have memorized another piece of work ready to go. Getting up extra parts of the work gives you a real feeling of accomplishment.

Probably one of the most important opportunities that Masonry offers is encouragement to have a look at our inward self and find meaning to life. Victor Frankl wrote that "Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see meaning in his life." Masonry assists in this search with the lectures and charges that are so meaningful and beautifully written. They are written in a rhythm and like music are most enjoyable to hear, over and over again.

Tresner states in reference to circumambulation of the lodge that "For the Entered Apprentice, it symbolizes the journey of his life as well as a day of his life, and represents his dedication to the spiritual aspect of humanity and his determination to have the spiritual aspect of his personality take ascendancy over his animal nature."

There are indeed many experiences in Masonry. I have referred to only a few of them in this paper. The developing of various skills is much like that of building a muscle; they must be exercised to develop. Masonry provides us with opportunities however we must be prepared to seize the time to develop our skills and experience the unique opportunities found only in Masonry.

Further Light – Jim Tresner
The Work – Grand Lodge

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