

Thomas Lodge *TRIFLE BOARD* Newsletter

During a particularly boring commuter train ride this past week, I was witness to the efforts of a young and eager Brother Mason as he intended to explain what masonry “really” was, to a fellow rider. The enthusiasm displayed was able to cover his feeble arguments, and as he struggled to explain it occurred to me that we really don’t properly prepare our Brethren to face this kind of presentation with convincing, solid, intelligent arguments.

Over time we have talked ourselves into believing that every member of our Lodge is a true ambassador for the fraternity, and that he should be able to handle this task properly, willingly and effortlessly. The sad truth is that not all members are good salespeople, most are unprepared and not that eager to enter this stressful and challenging arena, and also, that enthusiasm alone is a poor match for today’s better informed public who demands a short, simple and understandable 90 second “info-bite” in order to stir and maintain their interest.

The often utilized arguments that it is a fraternal organization dedicated to wonderful charities, of ancient tradition and loaded with good deeds does little to separate masonry from the other so called animal lodges (lions, elks, etc.) and most charitable organizations as the red cross, cancer and lung associations etc., therefore not providing a sensible and motivational itch big enough to allow the individual to become intellectually aroused.

A “system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols” sounds great to us but doesn’t do much to enlighten the uninitiated; that it is not a religion and that it does not engage in devious and sinister activities do not necessarily convince either. So what must we do? How do we tackle this issue? Why on earth should a complete stranger feel compelled to look into our craft unless we provide him with ample reasons, excite his curiosity and peak his interest

Walter Wilmshurst’s “Meaning of Masonry” published in 1927, in the very first chapter sheds the following earth shattering statement: “ The most one can hope to do is to offer a few hints or clues, which those who so desire may develop for themselves in the privacy of their own thought. For in the last resource no one can communicate the deeper things in Masonry to another. We know that even the elementary and superficial secrets of the Order must not be communicated to unqualified persons...”

How go about it you might be thinking? The very simple answer to the conundrum is a system discovered many moons ago by observant and studious folk and applied industrially by some successful entrepreneurs and merchandisers like soap distributors, vacuum cleaner companies etc: figure a way to “peak” their curiosity, don’t give away the “secrets” right away and “hook” them into researching, reading, anticipating (mouth watering at the sizzle and aroma of a promised steak dinner) and eventually attending a “orientation” meeting where they will be “closed” by a pro. From plastic kitchen ware and cleaning agents to magical phone and real estate systems we have all at one time or another have been convinced by a friend to attend a special one time only opportunity, a only comes around once, or “you will later kick yourself for not having made this particular meeting”, etc etc etc.during which these elements were put to the test.

Freemasonry was not conceived as a charitable organization, regardless of what some may think. But developing the intellect and shaping the character were paramount on our forefathers minds. On the other hand, you don’t really think that the 1717 group that launched modern Freemasonry, who for the most part were physicists, mathematicians, historians and musicians, physicians and philosophers distinguished members of the well educated society had in mind the creation of a charitable organization, or perhaps a group to engage social issues and neighborhood activities, do you?

Becoming charitable is a natural consequence of developing into a more enlightened individual, intellectual growth must be perpetually pursued with relentless vigor and spiritual awareness should be our guiding beacon. The seven liberal arts and sciences from the middle chamber and the four cardinal virtues of the Master’s lecture in the EA degree put us on that road to enlightenment, the one Plato called in his Republic “becoming a philosopher king”.

Therefore don’t allow yourself to be convinced that ritual, charitable and community work are the reason for our existence; we nearly imperceptibly over time seem to have turned into another of

the indistinguishable fraternal organizations out there. Yes of course charity is a magnificent and rewarding activity, but keep in mind, it is not OUR main mission. By being less than careful and not guarding the west gate we have allowed undeserving individuals membership in our fraternity, Freemasonry as a consequence has drifted from its main objective of enlightenment and betterment and has fallen by permitting laziness, poor reading habits, lack of developmental motivation and complacency allowing members to fall, for the most part, into a routine of ritual and charitable work, undistinguishable amongst many other groups. We constantly amaze ourselves by wondering why younger people don't want to join our fraternity; please, honestly ask yourself: have we truly given them good reasons to ?

Those knocking at our door lately are looking for a combination of integrity, spiritual sanctuary, guidance and most of all pride and respect from an organization that has earned the right to claim such noble tenets. The mystery shroud developed through the years peaks their interest, the chivalric background tickles their curiosity, and the selectiveness of the initiatic process is found by most to be reassuring and appealing. Keeping all this in mind we should present our "case" with studied care, executing a carefully laid out plan in order to increase our chances. (practice your presentation with brother Lodge members, get input and adopt suggested techniques) Remember: peak their curiosity, don't give away secrets, hook into research/reading, invite to a orientation, leave the closing to the pro's , in other words: sell the sizzle, not the steak. It works. The future of our beloved craft truly rests in the hands of the incoming younger crowd, pay attention and listen to them, it is up to you, the individual "mentor" to shape and foster them along.

PS: and for goodness sake, stop trying to convince everyone you come in contact with that they must join our fraternity, not everyone is a qualified prospect, not everyone deserves to be called a Brother and be invited to be part of our family. And the over-used argument that we are a fraternal organization dedicated to charitable work might sound irresistible and motivational to you, but it could conceivably sound boring, uninteresting and unoriginal to your listener...  
...remember the sizzle.