

It's About Time for Dreams to Exceed Memories!

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A Presentation to The Rubicon Masonic Society's 2015 Masonic Education Series. November 18, 2015, Lexington, Kentucky, Spindletop Hall.

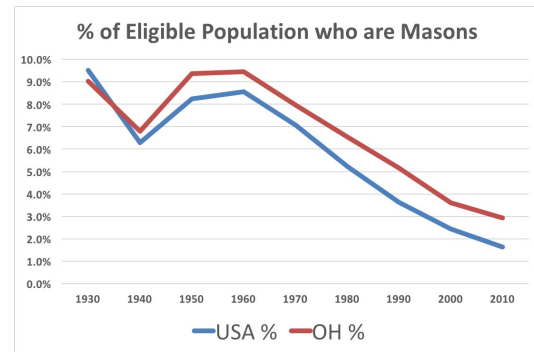
Introduction

Three Key Statistics

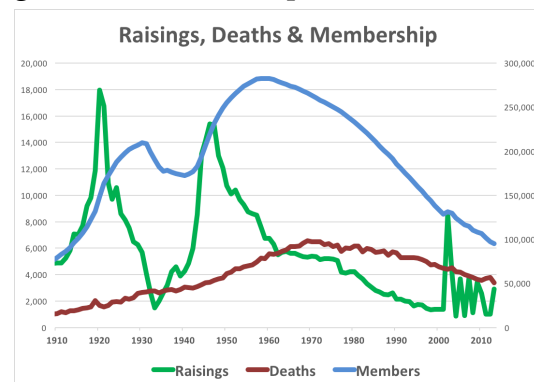
Analyzing membership data going back to 1900, three important truths emerge about the state of Freemasonry today: Freemasonry has lost its ability to effectively influence our society; our decline began a generation earlier than commonly acknowledged; and one-day classes are creating a revolving door in membership.

Imagine a time when almost 10%¹ of men eligible to be Freemasons were Freemasons. It almost seems surreal to us now, but this was our reality in 1930 when, as reported by the Masonic Service Association, almost 3.3 million² men were Masons. Today, barely 1.5%³ of eligible men

are Masons, which has resulted in the marginalization of Freemasonry as an effective civic institution.



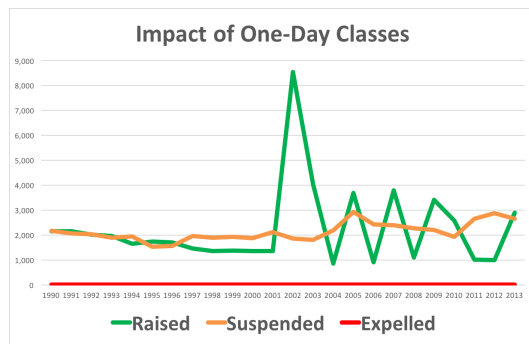
Looking at membership statistics for Ohio, which is the second largest Masonic jurisdiction in the United States after Pennsylvania, and a good bellwether for membership trends nationally, it is clear that while our total membership peaked in 1959, our decline began back in 1946, the year that the total number of new Master Masons raised annually peaked.⁴ Over the next decade, the number of Master Masons raised fell by 64%, until, beginning in 1962, annual losses to death began exceeding annual gains in membership.



I think that the explanation, at least in part, can be found in our failure to live up to Freemasonry's core values

of justice, tolerance, and brotherhood during the Civil Rights era. It was not the Baby Boomers who first turned away from Freemasonry; *it was their parents*, the Silent Generation, who began to shun an organization that did not walk its talk about the brotherhood of man.

And finally, while one-day classes did succeed in bringing a parade of new candidates into Freemasonry, these gains were soon followed by a dramatic 23% increase in the number of suspensions for non-payment of dues.

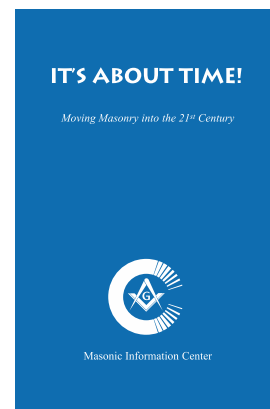


What may come as a surprise to some who complain that we fail to guard the West Gate is the fact that expulsions for unMasonic conduct are flat. In fact, when compared to the historical average since 1900, expulsions have decreased by more than 60%. The hard truth is that we have been so obsessed with guarding the West Gate’s entrance that we forgot about the need to *guard its exit*.

It’s About Time!

Ten years ago, at the request of the 2004 Conference of Grand Masters in North America, the Masonic Information Committee of the Masonic Service Association published a pamphlet titled *IT’S ABOUT TIME! - Moving Masonry into the 21st Century*.⁵ Observing that “Freemasonry is at its lowest membership level in at least 80 years”,⁶ the report listed several excuses commonly blamed for our decline, but in the end concluded that “Membership loss is not the major problem . . . [but] merely a symptom of the problem.”⁷ The problem is that Freemasonry fails to offer “something of great interest” to young men today to “attract” their time and money. “This can only mean that Masons have simply not kept pace with our changing lifestyles”⁸ as “any organization wishing to attract members must offer something of great interest to even be considered worthwhile.”⁹

In the face of this brutal truth, the Task Force sounded a “fraternal call to action” that gave the report its title: “It is about time we brought our actions in line with our



aspirations.”¹⁰ They then asked the “tough question:” “Who are we as a fraternal organization within the context of the 21st Century?”¹¹ Noting that “When memories exceed dreams, the end is near,”¹² *It’s About Time* concluded that the “time has come for us to take full responsibility for our sad state of affairs”,¹³ and “**We have not a moment to lose.**”¹⁴ A decade has passed since this report was published.

The Lesson of Kodak

The challenge of finding long-term sustainability is not unique to Freemasonry. There are lots of examples in the corporate world of companies that fell from greatness, as well as churches, charities, and scores of other fraternal groups. No one is immune. Take Kodak for example. Kodak was the Apple Computer of its day. It built a successful business model on innovating new technology, and grew into a giant corporation, earning huge profits that generated substantial cash to invest in continued innovation. Its little yellow canister was as recognizable then as the Apple logo is today. And then mighty Kodak fell.

Why? It would be easy to blame digital photography. And while it is true that “there are few corporate blunders as staggering as Kodak’s missed opportunities in digital

photography”,¹⁵ digital photography didn’t bring Kodak down; Kodak brought itself down by failing to recognize and adapt to its changing environment.

The irony is that the world’s first digital camera was invented in 1975 by an engineer working for Kodak.¹⁶ The digital revolution was not a surprise, and Kodak had ample opportunity to leverage its vast resources to dominate digital technology just as it dominated film. But Kodak mistakenly thought that its core business was film processing when in reality it was empowering photographers to capture images. Photography wasn’t going away, but how photographers wanted to capture images was changing. Unfortunately, almost unbelievably, Kodak, the company that created commercial photography and was founded on a tradition of innovation, missed the boat entirely.

How the Mighty Fall

In *How The Mighty Fall*,¹⁷ Author Jim Collins seeks to uncover how seemingly invincible companies like Kodak can stumble and fall so spectacularly. He examined a number of fallen companies, and based on his research, found that failing organizations pass through five stages of decline.

It begins with the hubris of

success¹⁸, when a company is still growing, but is led by arrogant leaders who come to view success as an entitlement. What the company does becomes more important than why, and it loses the thirst for learning and innovation.

Next comes the undisciplined pursuit of more¹⁹, where big is confused with great. Often the “more” does not ignite passion, does not fit with the company’s core values, is not what the organization is best at, and does not continue to drive the organization’s resource engine. Bureaucracy and stifling rules displace an ethic of freedom and responsibility. Succession of power becomes problematic as egotistical leaders fail to groom capable successors. Talent begins to depart.

Denial²⁰ comes next, when leadership amplifies the positive and tries to explain away the negative, ignoring the warning signs of trouble ahead. Healthy team dynamics erode, management becomes dictatorial, and internal politics become more important than a unified commitment to execute. Leaders blame external factors for setbacks rather than accept responsibility.

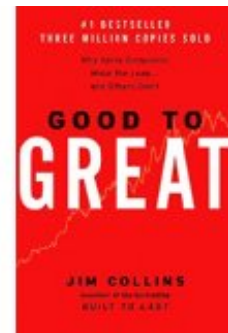
But soon the decline becomes too great to ignore, and now management begins desperately grasping for salvation²¹ by searching for silver bullets. Ill-conceived quick

fix programs cause radical disruptions to culture, and initial gains are soon followed by disappointment.

Confusion and cynicism set in as leadership fails to live up to the core values for which the organization once stood. Stage 5—Death²²—soon follows.

Unfortunately, many U.S. grand lodges now find themselves deep in the 4th stage of decline, desperately grasping for salvation. As lamented in *It’s About Time*, and *Voting With*

Their Feet,²³ by Worshipful Brother S. Brent Morris, and *What Are We Trying To Save*,²⁴ by Right Worshipful



Brother Thomas W. Jackson, and literally hundreds of others books, papers, and blogs, the leadership structure in too many grand lodges has become an arrogant and self-perpetuating bureaucracy that overburdens and constricts lodges with nitpicking regulations that drain away enthusiasm. Public relations campaigns, billboards, and one-day classes have predictably failed to be the hoped-for silver bullets to reverse the decline, as the increasing number of dimits and suspensions for non-payment of dues show that “clearly, Masons were not satisfactorily

addressing the ways of keeping our members involved and enthusiastic about Masonry.”²⁵

Fortunately, Stage 5 and death is not inevitable. Mr. Collins wrote an additional chapter titled *WELL-FOUNDED HOPE*.²⁶ In this optimistic chapter, he highlighted a number of companies that emerged from Stage 4 to renewed success and vitality by returning to the discipline of sound management practices and rigorous strategic thinking.²⁷

The Good to Great Framework of Jim Collins

In his best-selling books *Good to Great*²⁸ and *Built to Last*,²⁹ Collins shows organizations how to implement the discipline of sound management practices and rigorous strategic thinking by following a framework that brings together Disciplined People, Thought, and Action to first build a great organization, and then how to sustain that greatness over time.

Disciplined People

Beginning with Disciplined People, Collins focuses on **Level 5 leaders** “who are ambitious first and foremost for the cause” and who have a “fierce resolve to do whatever it takes to make good on that

ambition.” A Level 5 leader displays “a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”³⁰ Level 5 leaders “look out the window” to give credit when things go well and “look in the mirror” to accept responsibility “when things go poorly.”³¹ Egocentric leaders do the exact opposite. Above all else, Level 5 leaders want to see the organization be “even more successful in the next generation,”³² and choose Level 5 leaders as their successors.

Disciplined People means **First Who . . . Then What**. The familiar metaphor for this is *Getting the right people on the bus*, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the key seats *before* deciding where to drive the bus.³³

Disciplined Thought

Disciplined Thought means **Confronting the Brutal Facts** about your reality, whatever they are, while at the same time retaining an unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties³⁴. Great companies build a culture where the truth is heard by leading with questions instead of answers, and encouraging robust dialogue and debate.

The key to Disciplined Thought is that “greatness comes about by a series of good decisions consistent with a simple model—*the Hedgehog*

Concept. The Hedgehog Concept is an operating model that reflects understanding of three intersecting circles: what you can be best in the world at, what you are deeply passionate about, and what best drives your economic or resource engine³⁵.”

Disciplined Action

A *Culture of Discipline* means people have *responsibilities* instead of jobs. Disciplined people guided by disciplined thought taking disciplined action—“operating with freedom within a framework of responsibilities—this is the cornerstone of a culture that creates greatness.”³⁶

A *Culture of Discipline* aligns people with action by: *Indoctrination*, which is the process by which new members are socialized into the group; *Tightness of Fit*, which means that only the best people who are passionately aligned with the organization’s vision and goals are accepted into the group, while those that don’t measure up are rejected like a virus; and *Elitism*, where members of the group share a profound sense of belonging to something special, and exhibit extreme loyalty to the organization and camaraderie with each other.³⁷

Once aligned, people join together and push *The Flywheel*. “In

building greatness, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment. Rather, the process resembles relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel in one direction, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond.”³⁸

“The opposite of the Flywheel Effect is the Doom Loop, which is where an organization’s leadership genuinely wants to effect change” but “instead of turning the flywheel” they fall into a “Doom Loop: Disappointing results lead to reaction without understanding, which leads to a new direction—a new leader, a new program—which leads to no momentum, which leads to [more] disappointing results.”³⁹ It’s a steady, downward spiral that drains the spirit out of the organization.

In contrast, the Flywheel Effect works because “more than anything else, real people in real organizations want to be part of a winning team. They want to contribute to producing real results. They want to feel the excitement and the satisfaction of being part of something that just flat-out works. When people begin to feel the magic of momentum—when they begin to see tangible results and can feel the flywheel start to build speed—that’s when they line up,

throw their shoulders to the wheel, and push.”⁴⁰

Building Greatness to Last

“Truly great organizations prosper through multiple generations of leaders, the exact opposite of being built around a single great leader, great idea or specific program.”⁴¹

Collins calls this principle ***Clock Building Not Time Telling***, where leaders who are completely dedicated to the cause are driven to build greatness that lasts.

Building Greatness to Last is all about learning to ***Preserve the Core and Stimulate Progress***. “Enduring great organizations are characterized by a fundamental duality. On one hand, they have a set of timeless core values and a core reason for being that remain constant over a long period of time. On the other hand, they have a relentless drive for change and progress.”⁴²

Core Values are “the organization’s essential and enduring tenets, not to be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency.”⁴³ ***Core Purpose*** is “the set of fundamental reasons” for an organization’s existence.⁴⁴ Taken together, these concepts “plant a fixed stake in the ground: This is who we are; this is what we stand for; this is what we’re all about.”⁴⁵ It explains why an organization’s mission and

vision matter to the world. “***Core Ideology***”⁴⁶ is so fundamental to the institution that it changes seldom if ever.”⁴⁷

“But it is essential to not confuse core ideology with noncore practices.”⁴⁸ While preserving the core, organizations must also relentlessly ***stimulate progress***. This may seem like a contradiction, but the key learning is that in adapting, great organizations that know their core ideology have a firm grasp on what not to change, which liberates them to aggressively stimulate progress without fear. The key question is not *should* we change, but *what* should we change. It’s all about knowing the difference between what is sacred, and what is not; between your core ideology that should never change, and operating practices, strategies, tactics, processes, and the like that should be always open for change; between, quite simply, “what we stand for” and “how we do things.”⁴⁹

A great way to stimulate progress is to declare a BHAG, which is an organization’s bold mission—or Big Hairy Audacious Goal.⁵⁰ A BHAG is what you want to accomplish 10 to 30 years in the future (e.g. to land a man on the moon and return him safely before the end of the



decade). A true BHAG is clear and compelling, serves as a unifying focal point of effort, and acts as a catalyst for team spirit. It has a clear finish line, so the organization can know when it has achieved the goal and can move on to the next one.⁵¹

Applying the Good to Great Framework to Freemasonry

Since his books were first published, many companies have implemented this Good to Great framework to build, and in some cases rebuild, their corporate model, but is this framework relevant to Freemasonry? When asked about the applicability of his books to non-profit organizations, Jim Collins said that “we must reject the idea—well-intentioned, but dead wrong—that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become “more like a business.” Most businesses—like most of anything else in life—fall somewhere between mediocre and good. Few are great. When you compare great companies with good ones, many widely practiced business norms turn out to correlate with mediocrity, not greatness.”⁵²

So, then, why would we want to import the practices of mediocrity into the social sectors? The simple

truth is that “most businesses also have a desperate need for greater discipline. “A culture of discipline is not a principle of business; it is a principle of greatness.”⁵³ The critical distinction is not between business and social, but between good and great.

“Every institution has its unique set of irrational and difficult constraints, yet some make a leap while others facing the same environmental challenges do not. This is perhaps the single most important point in all of *Good to Great*. Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline.”⁵⁴ So yes, Jim Collins and *Good to Great* are relevant to Freemasonry.

Practicing Freemasonry

So who are we as Freemasons? What is important to us? What come we here to do? How should we define our core ideology? Should we form a committee of past masters to fill in the blanks? No. It’s actually easier than you might think because you already know the answers. And you will know that you know because Core ideology resonates in your heart, head, and gut.

I believe that as long as we zealously guard our West Gate, admitting only those who are worthy

and well-qualified, of good report and well recommended, Freemasonry will always be blessed with Disciplined People.

Even now, Disciplined Masons are calling on our leadership to confront the brutal facts that the world has changed, and reject the mistaken belief that we cannot. We are deeply passionate about making good men better; we are the best in the world at promoting a universal system of morality; and lodges drive our resource engine.

Freemasonry has all the elements necessary to build a culture of discipline. We ensure tightness of fit through the ballot box; we indoctrinate new members through an intense and transformative initiatic and education process; and the rigor of our candidate investigation process along with the secrecy of our ceremonies set Freemasonry apart as an elite institution. Who among you upon being raised did not immediately feel part of an elite brotherhood that was larger than yourself?

Noting that author John Robinson once observed that "The problem with Freemasonry is that it does not practice Freemasonry anymore" Brother Jackson lamented "And how can we when the vast majority of our Members do not even know what to practice."⁵⁵ Core ideology defines

what it means to "practice Freemasonry," and every Freemason should be able to explain Freemasonry's core ideology without hesitation.

Our core values come straight from the Entered Apprentice degree and are illuminated by the working tools of a Master Mason. By **temperance**, we learn to subdue our passions as the Level reminds us that we are traveling upon the level of time that, like all things in nature, passes equally for all men. With **fortitude**, we wield the Common Gavel to divest our heart and conscience of all the vices and superfluities of life. By the Plumb, we stand uprightly for **justice**, conducting ourselves with integrity and honesty. And on the Square, with **prudence** we understand that we share our destiny with all men, and that the *Square of Virtue* must be our rule and guide for living in harmony with our fellow creatures. And finally, with the Trowel, we create **unity** by spreading the cement of brotherly love and affection, uniting all of us, regardless of race, nationality, or creed, into one sacred band. Would anyone question that these are our Core Values?

We can express Freemasonry's core purpose with a single word: **Enlightenment**. Freemasonry promotes a universal system of

morality that prepares good men to craft better communities. The *Square & Compasses* enlighten us to square our actions with all mankind and teach us to circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds. The square symbolizes the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," while the compasses remind us of Aristotle's admonition of moderation.

On every candidate's first admission to a lodge of Entered Apprentices, he is informed that the three great tenets of a Mason's profession—our strategic anchors—are Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. Freemasonry's mission comes right out of the Old Charges: to become the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remained at a perpetual Distance.⁵⁶ Its value proposition can be summed up in the one-word answer to the question posed to every candidate when he first kneels at the altar of Freemasonry: "what do you most desire?" And finally, Freemasonry's brand promise is that it is the oldest and only fraternity in the world that transcends the divisiveness of sectarian religion and partisan politics to build a more ethical, inclusive, and virtuous society.

Why Freemasonry Matters

The value of practicing Freemasonry is critical to the successful establishment of a democratic republic. Our Founding Fathers—many of whom were Freemasons—knew that the success of our Republic depended on citizens of virtue. Freemasonry, then and now, serves as a school for developing virtuous citizens. As a premier civic association, it creates bonds among people, teaches them the virtue of participatory engagement, and leads them back into the public square to appreciate the relationship between the individual and the common interest. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed as he traveled through America, the American custom to assemble in civic associations, as protected by the First Amendment to our Constitution, serves as a necessary guarantee against tyranny, especially against the tyranny of the majority.⁵⁷ This is why Freemasonry matters to everyone, whether or not they are members of the Craft!

The ultimate aim for Freemasonry—its envisioned future for all mankind, is to create an enlightened society of virtuous citizens working together to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and

our Posterity. Our Masonic Founding Fathers started by building the world's first democratic republic founded on virtue. It is our noble purpose as Freemasons to carry on with their work!

We can now respond to Brother Jackson's lament with clarity and confidence. Who are we? What is important to us? What came we here to do? We are the world's oldest fraternity. By promoting a Universal Code of Morality, we prepare *Good Men* to craft *Better Communities*. This is what it means to practice Freemasonry!

Why Grand Lodges Exist

The same discipline can be applied to grand lodges. Just as any company that seeks to develop from good to great must start with Disciplined People, getting the right people on the Grand Bus is the essential first step for grand lodges as well. And that relies on grand lodge officers embracing the Level 5 leadership principle of "extreme personal humility with intense professional will".⁵⁸ Brother Jackson told us last March that "our leadership has simply failed to retain the vision of our purpose" and suffers from "limited vision" and "an ego driven need for self-aggrandizement."⁵⁹ And this was nothing new, as nearly 20 years ago,

he said the same thing in the article *What Are We Trying To Save?*

"We are confronted today with monumental problems concerning our integrity as an institution. Many of the problems are originating outside the Craft, but, regrettably, most originate from within. Those from within should be more readily solvable but we as leaders must be willing to sacrifice our egos for the welfare of the Craft. We must be willing to surrender personal ambition for the sake of the future of Freemasonry."⁶⁰

Brother Jackson was calling for Level 5 leadership in grand lodges before Collins first published *Good to Great!*

The brutal facts are lodges are failing, and more bureaucratic rules, edicts, and mandates are not going to help. The brutal fact that Freemasonry is declining is bad enough, but worse is the loss of Freemasonry's enlightening influence in the civic forum, which has been left a barren public square that is increasingly ignorant, intolerant, and hostile.

But as dire as the picture seems, grand lodges can enjoy "renewed success and vitality by returning to the discipline of sound management

practices and rigorous strategic thinking.”⁶¹ Grand lodges need only return to their historic roots and rediscover their Hedgehog: to be deeply passionate about blue lodges, the best in the world at chartering new lodges, and appreciative that lodges are Freemasonry’s resource engine.

By creating a culture of discipline driven by responsibilities rather than jobs, where lodges are entrusted with the freedom to work within a framework of responsibility, together, with grand lodges officers, we can begin pushing on the flywheel, building momentum, lodge by lodge. Programs developed from the bottom up in partnership with subordinate lodges, rather than mandated from the top down, will enjoy buy-in, which will go a long way towards ensuring success.

Grand lodge officers who lead by valuing service and accountability to their subordinate lodges will establish credibility and earn fierce loyalty and respect in return. Elections that are fair and open will eliminate the perception that grand lodge officers are a self-serving and self-perpetuating bureaucracy of elites. By collaborating with its subordinate lodges, and by encouraging collaboration among sister lodges, we can discover and share bright spots of success that are being developed in

individual lodges. A Masonic code that is simple, straight-forward, and short will provide the framework of responsibility that encourages rather than stifles entrepreneurial spirit. And finally, it will be those grand lodges that embrace, rather than fear, their changing world and meet it head on with a dynamic drive for innovation that will pave the way for success in the 21st Century.

The core purpose for every grand lodge—since the very first—is simple: propagation; the continual, relentless expansion of Freemasonry. Anchored by the Landmarks of Freemasonry, its Lodges, and the eternal quest for Light, the grand lodge mission is simply to charter and support Masonic lodges within its jurisdiction, something which only it can do. And the value of this mission is self-evident: by expanding the privilege and authority to make Masons to more lodges, grand lodge can pursue the visionary BHAG to raise no less than 10% of the eligible candidates within its jurisdiction to the sublime degree of a Master Mason.

Now some will protest that 10% is an unrealistic goal, and that we must choose either quantity **OR** quality. I reject this defeatist viewpoint, and absolutely believe that we **can have both** quantity **AND** quality. I think that it is a little arrogant to believe

that in 1930, 10% of eligible candidates were qualified to be Freemasons, but today less than 1% are similarly qualified. The naked truth is, that for Freemasonry to accomplish its mission, we **must** represent a significant proportion of society as we once did.

Freemasonry must be about more than donning black ties and delivering erudite research papers; Freemasonry must also actively work to prepare good men to craft better communities. And it takes more than just a few good men to accomplish this purpose. The reality is, there are millions of potential worthy candidates out there, and our future depends on our willingness to return to our historic tradition of aggressively chartering new lodges to serve them, which is exactly why our ancient brethren formed the Premier Grand Lodge in the first place!

Innovation

At the Rubicon Society dinner last March, Brother Jackson remarked that while he was “not issuing a condemnation against our present day leadership” for our “ongoing deterioration,” that “it is, however, essential that our present day leadership comprehend that it is their responsibility to reverse that deterioration.”⁶² Visionary leadership

is nothing more than aligning strategies, tactics, policies, operating practices, cultural norms, processes, structures, and methods with our core purpose and core values.⁶³ The key learning from the *Good to Great* framework is that to maintain alignment, we must continuously adapt to a changing world by being willing to modify our noncore practices. Yes, we must always preserve our core, but in so doing we must never fail to also stimulate progress.⁶⁴ It is the second part of this equation—stimulating progress—that differentiates growing organizations from aging ones. And the difference turns on **Innovation!**

People in growing organizations assume that you can do anything.⁶⁵ They view a half empty glass as a challenge to do whatever it takes to fill it up to the brim. People charged with responsibility for success often lack authority, but nevertheless forge ahead with entrepreneurial zeal. People advance in growing organizations based on their merit and contribution.

In stark contrast, the default setting for people in aging organizations is to assume that you can't do anything without explicit permission. Results exceed expectations because expectations are low. Advancement is based on personality, time served, and who you

know. Those in authority aren't responsible for the organization's success, nor held accountable for its failings. How things are done is more important than what and why.

We can blame William Preston for Freemasonry's bias against innovation. In the course of a dispute within the Premier Grand Lodge, Preston altered the Landmark "No alteration or innovation in the body of Masonry shall be made without the consent of the grand lodge first had and obtained" to simply "You admit that it is not in the power of any man, or body of men [which would include grand lodges], to make alteration or innovation in the body of Masonry." And so out of spat within the very first grand lodge a bias against all future alterations was introduced into the body of Freemasonry that persists to this day.⁶⁶

In spite of Preston's *innovative* Landmark to the contrary, change and innovation had been hallmarks of Freemasonry from its inception, which was the source of its sustained vitality. It is bitterly ironic that a fraternity founded on Enlightenment philosophy to liberate society from dogma and orthodoxy is now itself a prisoner of its own dogma and orthodoxy.

Take a moment and reflect on what was happening in Freemasonry when James Anderson published the

Constitutions of the Free-Masons in 1723 that for the first time laid out the fraternity's history, charges, and regulations. Before, then, Freemasonry had no formal structure, no governing body, no accepted ritual, no list of recognized lodges, not even set meeting times or places. Then, suddenly, on June 24, 1717, it had all of these things.⁶⁷

Over a short period of time, how things were done in English Freemasonry changed dramatically. Why? Because the Craft in the early 18th century was dying out, and it likely would have died out 300 years ago had not men like Anderson confronted the brutal facts of their day and reformed Freemasonry for a new generation.

I do not believe that these men expected us to stop where they left off. The ability of Freemasonry to adapt explains why Freemasonry is the world's oldest fraternity! They correctly understood that Freemasonry is a dynamic and progressive science, not a static and dead tradition, and we have let them down by not carrying on their work. Great organizations change *before* they have to!

Returning to the example of Kodak's fall, what was missing from Kodak was an entrepreneurial spirit for innovation. Like Freemasonry,

Kodak was built on innovation, but “unlike its founder, George Eastman, who twice adopted disruptive photographic technology, Kodak’s management in the 80’s and 90’s were unwilling to consider digital technology—technology developed by Kodak’s own engineers—as a replacement for film. This limited Kodak to a fundamentally flawed path”⁶⁸ that ultimately led to bankruptcy.

Why? “The answer lies in the quality of management.” Kodak went through one short-tenured CEO after another on its way down. “The short tenure of each CEO made working towards a distant goal of industry leadership in the fast evolving technology of digital imaging rather difficult.”⁶⁹ Complacency also played its part.”⁷⁰

A former employee writing about his experience at Kodak noted that while Kodak had “great, smart people” they were entrenched “in doing things the way they had always been done. There’s something to be said for tradition and strong company values, but not when culture becomes a barrier to success.”⁷¹

The Governing Structure of Grand Lodges

What differentiates organizations that cheat death from those that don’t isn’t a visionary leader; it’s a

culture and structure that nourishes, develops, and promotes visionary leadership and entrepreneurial spirit throughout the organization. We don’t need to reform Freemasonry to prosper; ***we need to reform the governing structure of its grand lodges.***

“Grand Lodges today are multi-million dollar operations, but they lack the managerial and organizational continuity they need to thrive. The foremost management theory today holds that decision making and authority should be delegated to the lowest possible level where local managers best understand the immediate needs of the organization. What if we elected Grand Masters to five year or longer terms? What if a Grand Master could start a program, nurture it, and see it to established and accepted in his jurisdiction? What if Lodges were given the flexibility and responsibility to make decisions for themselves? And what if Masons were encouraged and rewarded to form and participate in new Lodges?”⁷²

These are just a few great ideas, and I cannot claim credit for a single one of them. That was a direct quote from the article *Voting With Their Feet* published 16 years ago by S. Brent Morris. Sadly, I am not aware of a single grand lodge that has embraced a single one of his

suggestions.

In order to implement any of the ideas suggested by Brother Morris, grand lodges would have to return to a decentralized organizational model in which individual lodges are primary. Again quoting Morris:

“Most Masonic bodies have massively centralized authority, greater than that found in almost any other voluntary associations. Masonic presiding officers, both by tradition and by regulation, have extreme discretion in administering their enormous powers. Grand Lodges have this centralized authority, an executive officer who can rule by decree, and a network of District Deputy Grand Officers to enforce their rules and regulations. None of this makes it fun for local bodies.”⁷³

What Morris is describing is what the late Gordon MacKenzie called the “Giant Hairball” in his book *Orbiting the Giant Hairball: A Corporate Fool’s Guide to Surviving with Grace*.⁷⁴ MacKenzie describes a giant hairball as the collection of policies and procedures that have built up over time based on the lessons of past successes and failures, which form a “Gordian knot of Corporate Normalcy (i.e., conformity with the “accepted

model, pattern or standard” of the corporate mind set).⁷⁵ Every new policy is another hair; hairs are never taken away, only added.”⁷⁶

The fundamental weakness with the Hairball of Corporate Normalcy is that it “derives from and is dedicated to *past* realities and *past* successes. There is no room in the Hairball of Corporate Normalcy for original thinking or primary creativity. Resynthesizing past successes is the habit of the Hairball.”⁷⁷ If there is to be any hope for the future of Freemasonry, then we have to cut through the giant stifling hairball that we have wound around ourselves over decades so we can release the visionary leadership that I know is within each and every grand lodge.

Again quoting Brother Morris:

“Some of the most urgent changes are administrative, but they strike at the heart of our Masonic culture as it has evolved over centuries. Our rewards structure is predicated upon presiding, and no one wants to reduce rewards. There is no reason why accepted management techniques cannot be used in Masonry, nor any reason why control cannot be returned to local Lodges. If we are not willing to put changes to a vote in our Grand Lodges, then

our members will continue to vote with their feet and move their Masonic energies to more rewarding activities. And if we could conduct post-election polls, we'd probably find a lot of these voters saying, "I love Masonry. It's Grand Lodges I can't stand."⁷⁸

Ouch! That is a pretty damning indictment! Some will hear these words and despair, concluding that real change is impossible. Others will explode with fury, outraged to have their authority challenged. I hear these words and dare to hope. I believe that grand lodges can learn and apply the *Good to Great* principles to envision, energize, enable, and empower lodges to reform, rebuild, and re-establish Freemasonry in every jurisdiction across the United States!

Autonomy: The Missing Element

Quoting Brother Morris one last time:

"Masonry is declining in membership as are nearly all other voluntary associations. Our members continue to be enthusiastic about the Masonic experience, just not in Lodges. There is hope for the Craft if we can focus our members' enthusiasm back at the main body of Masonry, but

this will require difficult changes."⁷⁹

Peter Drucker reputedly said that the best and most dedicated people are ultimately volunteers, for they have the opportunity to do something else with their lives. You are here tonight because you are passionate about Freemasonry and chose to be here. So what does grand lodge leadership need to do to inspire our members, who we must remember are volunteers? It is not enough, and in fact, it is insulting to have our leadership chide us to be more enthusiastic. ***It is their job to drive enthusiasm!***

How? In *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, author Daniel Pink explains that "the secret to high performance and satisfaction in today's world is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world."⁸⁰

Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose. Freemasonry has two of these three elements of *Drive* firmly in place. By promoting a Universal system of morality, we satisfy our yearning to serve a purpose larger than ourselves. By preparing good men to build better communities, we pursue Mastery—the urge to get better and better at something that matters. The glaringly missing element is

Autonomy.

The desire for autonomy is why my brothers and I formed Caliburn Lodge. We set out to attract younger candidates who were not petitioning established lodges by offering a more intimate, inspiring, and convivial fraternal experience designed for members who needed to balance the competing obligations of young families and demanding careers with Freemasonry. Today, we are one of the few Masonic lodges in Ohio with an average age under 50.

Starting a new lodge freed us to craft our own unique culture founded on fellowship, festive boards, and fun. Some changes were trivial, like limiting meetings to once a month and opening lodge at an earlier hour to better accommodate the needs of our members. Other changes, like dividing lectures into smaller parts that were more accessible to learn and deliver by our younger members, horrified and upset “traditionalist” old-timers from other lodges, as did our desire to group candidates into classes and postpone delivering lectures until after we conferred the first section of each degree on the entire group, so we only had to deliver each degree lecture once per year.

Spreading out the degrees and lectures over several months avoided overwhelming candidates and

members alike with too much ritual packed into one evening. We eliminated the velocity panic common in other lodges by taking up to a year to raise Master Masons. We found that progressing candidates through the degrees together encouraged the formation of a strong bond through a shared experience. By the end of the year, the level of their collective excitement when they were finally on the threshold of being raised was palpable.

Even though we were derided as being a lodge for “part-time” Masons, we persevered with ferocious determination, and little by little, pushed Caliburn’s flywheel, building momentum, gaining traction, pursuing our core purpose to Build the Masonic Lodge for the 21st Century. We found success and happiness following this path, but it is important to note that this is only one example of many possible successful formats for a lodge. No one style is the cookie-cutter right answer; each lodge needs to find its own path to success.

Unfortunately, some of our practices were ultimately considered too unorthodox, and in obedience to our oath, we conformed to our strict Masonic Code, which, in my opinion, unnecessarily limits our autonomy—that all-important missing element for motivation and *drive*. Ohio’s

Masonic Code is a case study in micro-management run amuck.

Meanwhile, as our subordinate lodges are denied the autonomy to design programs that best suit their needs and culture, in 2002, our grand lodge adopted a dramatic change in the pursuit of short-term financial gain: the one-day class. In my opinion, the one-day class is a colossal mistake, not because it changes a tradition, but because it compromises the fundamental core purpose that our ritual is designed to serve in the pursuit of a short-term financial gain. Ritual is not an end, it is a means to an end. The point of ritual is to indoctrinate new candidates into our culture, to make them Freemasons, and you cannot do that by attempting to turn hundreds of poor, blind candidates into Masons (and in some cases, 32^o Masons) in the span of a few hours.

Imagine two squads of marine recruits, where one squad went through a grueling 12-week boot camp, while the other “earned” their stripes in a single afternoon watching a training video. Now imagine what would happen if you were to pit these two squads against each other. It would be no contest! You can make neither a Marine nor a Freemason in one day.

One-day classes are a desperate grasp for salvation that betray an

astounding willingness to compromise on our core principles in the pursuit of short-term financial gain. Silver bullets and quick fixes that compromise core ideology are *the hallmark* of an organization deep in Stage 4 of *How the Mighty Fall*. The next stage is death.

Observant Grand Lodges

Freemasonry needs to regain its entrepreneurial spirit, and I believe that the single greatest obstacle to this goal is the dysfunctional manner by which we elect and empower grand masters. In Ohio, we have the appearance of an election, but it is a charade. The incoming grand master hand picks the junior grand deacon, who, automatically progresses through the chairs, and eight years later is chosen as grand master by virtue of an uncontested election. Younger Master Masons today see this practice for what it is; a farce, but sadly, there is no effort to remedy this practice because “*it’s our tradition.*” The result is that our grand lodge officers lose the essential credibility they need to lead effectively.

The organizational structure of grand lodges needs to change radically. The voting members of grand lodge—which should be the Masters and Wardens of the subordinate lodges, *and only* the Masters and Wardens of the

subordinate lodges, should choose from a field of nominated candidates who spent the prior year traveling the jurisdiction sharing their bold vision for leadership, seeking input from our members, and working to build credibility and respect with each and every lodge. Human nature requires that we hold men accountable for the exercise of their authority, and that they be subject to clear rules and limitations, and grand masters are no exception to the universal truth. And above all else, we desperately need continuity of leadership at the grand lodge level. Annual grand master's programs, complete with mottos and lapel pins, will never achieve long term success.

The first task that a courageous grand master who wants to put his grand lodge on the path from good to great can do is throw out their bloated Masonic Code and start over. If you read through Anderson's Constitutions, you find none of the oppressive structure and limitless power that grand lodge bureaucracies have arrogated to themselves today. We constructed our Masonic hairballs over time, rule by rule, hair by hair, and now we are choking on them. I recognize that it will take a remarkable grand master to implement change of this magnitude, but it can be done. If billion dollar corporations can escape doom loops,

then so to can Freemasonry. I call on our grand masters to observe our history, roots, and traditions . . . and lead ***Observant Grand Lodges*** back to greatness, so that Freemasonry can once again exert a meaningful influence to change the world.

Conclusion

Someone once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."⁸¹ Freemasonry can change the world, one good man at a time, by preparing him to make a difference in his community. That's how it happens. That is how we build a better world.

So my brothers, I charge you now to go out and change your lodge, and your grand lodge, and by your enlightened labor, your community and our world for the better. If you are, or some day find yourself to be a grand master, I challenge you to take this framework for moving from good to great to the Conference of Grand Masters in North America and advocate for change. Encourage your grand brethren to follow your example and implement the necessary radical changes to the organizational structure of their grand lodges as you have in yours. Show them your restated and

dramatically thinner Masonic Code, which elevates the importance of open, transparent, participatory, and meaningful elections, which in turn has resulted in both the improvement of the caliber of leadership at the grand lodge level as it has dramatically increased the level of loyalty and respect you and your officers enjoy from your subordinate lodges.

Share with them how instead of lurching from one grand master's program to the next year after year, you have instituted a governing council that develops and implements long-range strategic plans. Show them a grand lodge pushing on the flywheel, building on each year's successes in the following year. And show them how your grand lodge has solved the membership problem by chartering new lodges that are appealing to new candidates in new ways. Most importantly of all, show them your growing membership rolls! Sound impossible? Well my brothers, never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed Freemasons can change their grand

lodge; indeed, like our ancient brethren who formed the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717, it's the only thing that ever has.

In closing, recall now again Brother Jackson's challenge to us:

"Now we must decide what we want to be. If we want to recapture the vast influence we once had, if we want to again become a highly visible and respected organization in society, if we want to once again become the movers and shakers that helped shape the United States of America and the world, then we must change the road that we are traveling. Our future lies not in what we once were. Our future lies in each one of us and what we can be. My brothers, what do we want to be?"⁸²

Well my brothers, I think that it's about time that we answer this question with action, and in answering it, *it's about time* for our dreams to exceed our memories!

About the Author

Brother Graeter joined with 11 other Master Masons to form the first new lodge in Ohio in over 20 years. The Grand Lodge of Ohio granted a charter to Caliburn Lodge #785 on October 18, 2002. Brother Graeter went on to serve as that lodge's Worshipful Master in 2004, and continues to serve Caliburn as its Lodge Education Officer. Today, Caliburn Lodge is thriving with a growing membership of young professional men.



Brother Graeter served as Commander-in-Chief of Ohio Consistory, for the Valley of Cincinnati, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, and is an Honorary Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite for the Northern Masonic. He currently serves on the Valley's investment advisory committee. In 2003, he chaired the Valley's 150th Anniversary Committee that successfully scheduled a yearlong series of events celebrating the Valley's sesquicentennial.

Brother Graeter also served as the Chairman of the Masonic Education and Information Committee of the Grand Lodge of Ohio from June of 2002 until October of 2005. During his brief tenure, he sought to liberalize masonic education in Ohio and embrace the technology of the Internet.

In 2007, he published his essay [*Reform Freemasonry?*](#), where he concluded that we do not need to reform Freemasonry to satisfy a new generation, but rather how we govern ourselves.

In addition to his Masonic involvement, Brother Graeter is active in his community having served on several professional, social, and charitable boards. He is recently served as Chairman of the Board of Directors for Cincinnati Public Radio, Inc., which broadcasts WGUC, WVXU and WMUB. He is a member of the investment advisory committee for The Cure Starts Now Foundation, which is searching for a cure to pediatric brain cancer as a key to the cure for all cancers. He also serves as President of the Board of Directors for Ryland Lakes Country Club.

Richard A. Graeter resides with his wife and children in Cincinnati, Ohio. A graduate of Miami University in 1986, and the University of Cincinnati College of Law in 1989, he is president and CEO of Graeter's Manufacturing Company, a fourth generation family business renowned for making handcrafted artisanal ice cream since 1870.

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Endnotes

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