

# THINKING ABOUT FREEMASONRY

- \* TO PROCRASTINATE OR NOT TO PROCRASTINATE
- \* ARE YOU A CURATOR OF THE CRAFT?
- \* THINK TANKS?
- \* LOGS OF EFFORT

John W. Bizzack, PM, Lexington Lodge 1, Fellow and PM, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, BF, FPS

March 2026

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Is it worth fighting the natural urge to procrastinate?

Many psychologists argue that it is worth fighting that urge even though the tendency to procrastinate is a natural, common human response, rooted in how our brains handle emotion, rewards, and long-term goals. Procrastination appears linked to evolved impulsivity, emotional avoidance, and “present bias,” rather than simple laziness.

In plain language, we often procrastinate because our brains overvalue immediate comfort and rewards compared with distant consequences. Difficult or uncertain tasks trigger uncomfortable emotions (anxiety, self-doubt, fear of failure), so we avoid the task to regulate our mood in the short term. Impulsivity and poor goal-management have a genetic and cognitive basis, making some people naturally more prone to delay.<sup>1</sup>

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*Passive procrastination*—driven by avoidance or *low conscientiousness*<sup>2</sup>—erodes self-regulation, spikes stress, and stalls long-term goals like Masonic self-improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Gustavson, Daniel E., and Michael J. T. Kane. “Is Procrastination Related to Impulsivity? A Multivariate Genetic Analysis.” *Psychological Science*, vol. 25, no. 6, 2014, pp. 1178–1188. National Center for Biotechnology Information, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4185275/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4185275/). Klein, Elliot T. “Why Do Humans Procrastinate? A Neuroscientist Explains.” Brown University Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 16 Apr. 2019, [carney.brown.edu/news/2019-04-16/procrastinate-explain](https://carney.brown.edu/news/2019-04-16/procrastinate-explain). Steel, Piers. “The Nature of Procrastination: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-Regulatory Failure.” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 133, no. 1, 2007, pp. 65–94. Summary discussed in “Why Wait? The Science Behind Procrastination,” *Association for Psychological Science Observer*, 28 Mar. 2013, [www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/why-wait-the-science-behind-procrastination](http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/why-wait-the-science-behind-procrastination). [4]

<sup>2</sup> Low conscientiousness is a personality trait marked by living in the moment over planning, tolerate messiness, resist rigid schedules, expectations, and struggle with follow-through, being easygoing, spontaneous, disorganized, impulsive, and less driven by long-term goals or self-discipline—often leading to procrastination on structured tasks where they falter where persistence matters. (Brent W Roberts, et al. “A Meta-Analysis of Conscientiousness- and Extraversion-Related Job Performance Criteria.” *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2005, pp. 101-135.)

Conversely, *active procrastination* harnesses deliberate delays to prioritize essentials and enable subconscious incubation for deeper insights into tasks. Such procrastinators generate 28 percent more novel ideas through incubation, unlike those who rush to mediocrity at the last minute.<sup>3</sup>

Low conscientiousness strongly drives procrastination because individuals low in this trait lack impulse control, organization, and a sense of duty, making them prone to delaying tasks despite knowing the costs. They prioritize short-term comfort or distractions over long-term planning, often avoiding effortful work due to weak self-discipline and poor follow-through on commitments.<sup>4</sup> Less conscientious individuals hamper organized Freemasonry by fostering unreliable membership, mediocre leadership, and in many cases, stalled lodge vitality amid declining numbers.<sup>5</sup>

Key impacts of low conscientiousness include:

**Social loafing:** undisciplined members exert less effort ("Ringelmann Effect" <sup>6</sup>), assuming others cover—leading to poor attendance, unfinished committees, and apathetic degree work. Nominal participation: Easygoing impulsivity skips self-study, diluting "daily advancement."<sup>7</sup>

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**Weak leadership:** Spontaneous types resist planning/schedules, yielding uninspired Wardens/Masters perpetuate stagnation.<sup>8</sup>

**Organizational Decline:** traits like messiness/disorganization compound Freemasonry's post-1960s slide: unpolished

<sup>3</sup> Jihae Shin, and Adam M. Grant. "When Putting Work Off Pays Off: The Curvilinear Relationship between Procrastination and Creativity." *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2021, pp. 772-798. Liu Zhou, et al. "When Procrastination Pays Off: Role of Knowledge Sharing Ability and Task Engagement." *PLOS ONE*, vol. 18, no. 9, 13 Sept. 2023, e0291408.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Schweigerová, and Zuzana Slavkovská, "Procrastination and Self-Concept in More/Less Conscientious Students." *INPACT 2021: Psychological Applications and Trends*, edited by Clara Margaça, inPACT, 2021, [inpsychologyconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021inpact034.pdf](https://inpsychologyconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021inpact034.pdf), accessed February 2026. Sun Young Park, and Namhee Lee. "Association Between Personality Traits and Procrastination and the Mediating Effect of Emotional Intelligence." *Primary Care Companion to CNS Disorders*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2023, doi:10.4088/PCC.22m03489.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret C Jacob, "Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe." Oxford UP, 1991. (Supports loafing/unreliability critiques via historical organizational decline patterns.) Albert Pike, "Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry." Supreme Council of the Thirty-Third Degree, 1871. (Chapter on discipline warns against impulsive, undisciplined membership weakening symbolic work.) Peter Stewart, "Some Important Features of Doing Masonic Research." *The Skirret: A Masonic Research Society Journal*, 2005. [skirret.com/papers/stewart-research.html](https://www.skirret.com/papers/stewart-research.html). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026. "Rethinking Masonry." *The Square Magazine*, 2021, [www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202108rethinking-masonry/](https://www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202108rethinking-masonry/). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026. (Critiques "ignorant" and "parrot" Masons lacking study discipline.) Low Conscientiousness in Organizations sources: Oh In-Sue, et al. "A Century of Research on Conscientiousness at Work." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 116, no. 46, 12 Nov. 2019, [www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1908430116](https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1908430116).

This meta-analysis of over 100 years of data confirms low conscientiousness correlates with poorer occupational performance, particularly in predictable environments, as it undermines goal-directed behavior and reliability. Jian-Qing Duan, et al. "How Does Conscientiousness Relate to Employee Creativity? The Role of Perceived Time Pressure and Trust in Leader." *PMC*, 12 Feb. 2025, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11851407/](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11851407/). The study demonstrates that highly conscientious employees show reduced creativity under low trust or high pressure, implying low-conscientiousness individuals contribute differently but still exhibit organizational effects like lower initiative in structured roles. Michael P. Wilmot and Denis A. Ones.

"The Double-Edged Sword of Conscientiousness." *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 186, Jan. 2022, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S019188692100595X](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S019188692100595X). Accessed 24 Feb. 2026.

This research highlights low conscientiousness's mixed effects in workplaces, including reduced flourishing and higher cynicism, though it enables flexibility in dynamic settings.

<sup>6</sup> *IBID*, also see John W. Bizzack, "Masonic Loafing: Do Many Hands Really Make Light Work?" *The Craftsman.org*, accessed January 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Bizzack.

<sup>8</sup> *IBID*.

ashlars do not attract/retain quality candidates, mirroring moral relativism's cultural shift against disciplined virtue.<sup>9</sup>

## CURATORS OF THE CRAFT AND THINK TANKS

We find that persistence matters in curbing chronic and passive procrastination,<sup>10</sup> just as it subdues the passions that Masons declare they seek to control. This lack of persistence appears in official records and countless Masonic writings since the mid-1800s, revealing that not all generations have produced, much less served, as true curators of the Craft.<sup>11</sup>

Members and leaders in Freemasonry have stood at a decisive threshold for generations: either they serve as curators of the Craft's inherited light, or they drift into mere membership that consumes its benefits without preserving its substance.

To be a curator is to understand that offices and titles are not ornaments of status but burdens of stewardship, charged with guarding the entrance to the Fraternity, the Lodge's moral tone, and the integrity of the symbols so that initiation remains transformative rather than merely ceremonial.

When members and leaders cease to function as curators, the Craft is quietly repurposed into a social club that uses Masonic language but no longer practices Masonic work. Authority then shifts from moral wisdom to personal preference, from "guarding the method" to managing conveniences, and the Lodge's labor devolves from building inner character to maintaining outer appearances.<sup>12</sup> Members and leaders who are curators treat the historical aim and intent of Masonry as a trust and owed, undiminished and thoughtfully interpreted, for those who have yet to knock at the door.

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<sup>9</sup> John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble, Limited Edition, *Men of Good Timber: As Goes Society, So Goes Freemasonry*, BSF Foundation and The Rubicon Masonic Society, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Brent W. Roberts, et al. "A Meta-Analysis of Conscientiousness- and Extraversion-Related Job Performance Criteria." *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2005, pp. 101-135.

<sup>11</sup> When applied to Freemasons with a seriousness of purpose, "curator" evokes a profound custodial role, rooted in the Latin *curare* ("to care for"), designating one who actively safeguards, interprets, and transmits an entrusted cultural or symbolic heritage without alteration or diminishment.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, R. Montana, "Masonic Blue Lodge Leadership Development: The Master and Wardens as Servant and Transformational Leaders." NVGL Short Lecture Series, no. 40, 2024.

[static1.squarespace.com/static/633de83a7a3be671caa006ca/t/67a959c42d6a7f6e114bf01e/1739151812600/NVGL\\_Short\\_lecture40\\_Masonic\\_Blue\\_Lodge\\_Leadership\\_Development.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/633de83a7a3be671caa006ca/t/67a959c42d6a7f6e114bf01e/1739151812600/NVGL_Short_lecture40_Masonic_Blue_Lodge_Leadership_Development.pdf), accessed January 2025.

Brian Washington, "A Prince Hall Masonic Tradition: Leader and Character Development." *Journal of the Hidden Heritage of European History*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2024, pp. 1-20, [jhhe.sempervifoundation.org/pdfs/v8n1/06\\_Washington.pdf](https://jhhe.sempervifoundation.org/pdfs/v8n1/06_Washington.pdf), accessed October 2024. "Leadership and Freemasonry." *The Square Magazine*, 9 Sept. 2022, [www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202209leadership-and-freemasonry/](https://www.thesquaremagazine.com/mag/article/202209leadership-and-freemasonry/), accessed June 2024.

Grand Secretary Address: "Stewardship May Be Our Greatest Responsibility to the Craft." *Voice of Freemasonry*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2013, pp. 6-7, [www.dcgrandlodge.org/uploads/6/9/5/4/6954862/voice2013-vol30no1-web.pdf](https://www.dcgrandlodge.org/uploads/6/9/5/4/6954862/voice2013-vol30no1-web.pdf). [3] Stewardship demands planning for excellence and renewal, guarding tradition from neglect that repurposes the Craft into irrelevance.

How can organized Freemasonry produce more curators instead of just members, to safeguard its rituals, symbols, and moral transformative power against erosion into social routine?

How do we more effectively address the passive procrastinator or the man who has no time to learn and devote to Masonry? We cannot honestly claim that such men were never or are not still part of the membership.

Will we procrastinate by continuing to kick that can down the road or will the current or next generation find its way to the long-standing solution?

*How can organized Freemasonry produce more curators instead of just members, to safeguard its rituals, symbols, and moral transformative power against erosion into social routine?*

The solution has always been before us: the consistent and even practice of guarding the West Gate. Yes, that

sounds simple and most Lodges believe they already do that. However, what is consistent and an even practice in one Lodge is not always the same for another Lodge. Sure, we have qualification standards, but we also have a very uneven perspective on the definition of a good man. This brings to mind a quote from prolific English writer, journalist, philosopher, G.K. Chesterton: “The word ‘good’ has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man.”<sup>13</sup> Evidence to support the contention that Lodges evenly apply a definition of a good man in our Fraternity, at least beyond basic qualifiers for admission, is not cooperating.

In mid-2025, during a discussion with a group of Masons, an idea emerged: organized Freemasonry could benefit from a dedicated think tank.<sup>14</sup> The proposal ignited immediate dialogue—some argued that Grand Lodges were already Masonic think tanks; others suggested the Conference of Grand Masters, Grand Secretaries, and appendant bodies were think tanks. Several hailed research lodges as useful think tanks for the Fraternity.<sup>15</sup> Again, evidence to support those assertions is not cooperating.

Interestingly, no one suggested that Masonic Lodges have or currently fulfill this role—an odd silence, given that Lodges remain the Fraternity’s true entry point, where Masonry must be taught, rough edges of process refined, learned Masons are supposed to be produced, and living example set. In short, it is Blue Lodges that are accountable to execute transformative practices and the Fraternity’s true engine that feeds all other groups that surround the Institution. Once that point was made and discussed, there was agreement that Blue Lodges are the real laboratory of Freemasonry.

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<sup>13</sup> The quote appears in G.K. Chesterton’s travelogue *Irish Impressions*, published in 1919 by Edwin Mellen Press (or earlier editions via Methuen & Co.). In it, he uses the grandmother-shooting analogy to illustrate the semantic ambiguity of “good”—technical skill versus moral virtue—a recurring Chestertonian jab at modern belief.

<sup>14</sup> A think tank researches complex issues, produces reports and data-driven recommendations, and influences policy through events, media engagement, and direct advising to leaders. (James G. McGann, James G. “Think Tanks: A Social Good for the Global Community.” Brookings Institution, 27 July 2016, [www.brookings.edu/articles/think-tanks-a-social-good-for-the-global-community/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/think-tanks-a-social-good-for-the-global-community/). [10])

Think tanks conduct interdisciplinary research, convene experts via conferences, and publish actionable reports to inform governments and shape public policy debates. Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002. They produce studies and briefs, host workshops, and engage media/policymakers to bridge theory and practice, prioritizing solutions over academic abstraction, Britannica Editors. “Think Tank.” Encyclopedia Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 3 Nov. 2025, [www.britannica.com/topic/think-tank](http://www.britannica.com/topic/think-tank), accessed January 2025. James G. McGann, Robert Kent, *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, Transaction Publishers. ISBN 978-1-4128-3989-1, January 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See Bibliography

## MISSED BY OVER 55 MILES

In *The Soul of the Craft*, American Protestant minister and a prominent Masonic author, Joseph Fort Newton writes about his classic 1915 book, *The Builders*, and the success of *The Builder Magazine* (1915-1930) of which he was the first editor-in-chief. He writes that if he had written the book, *The Builders*, later “it would be very different from what it is – more simple, more like a primer.”<sup>16</sup>

Newton also noted that his experience as an editor of *The Builder Magazine* shortly after the publication and wide success of his book. He believed that his involvement with the magazine taught him more than he thought the magazine was teaching the brethren. He wrote that he knew the magazine “had hold of a big idea [educating Masons], “but we had it by the wrong end.”<sup>17</sup>

*Newton later elaborates in writings about the solution to missing the mark – a solution that few lodges adopted – most likely because so few read about it although it has been in existence since 1927 and written about by other Masonic authors.*

The magazine drew a “goodly number of Masons who were students of Masonry, as readers and writers of the monthly publication and that was good” but in comparison with the number of Masons in America it meant little.<sup>18</sup> Newton goes on to note that, *The Builder Magazine* [with a subscription of around 20,000<sup>19</sup>] “did not touch the rank and file of the Craft, because, as I began to see that we overshot them by 55 miles, plus 300 yards, plus 17 inches.”<sup>20</sup> This hyperbolic precision underscores extreme overreach that Newton came to see, like an arrow missing a bullseye not by inches, but by an absurdly large measure.

Newton later elaborates in his writings about the solution that prevents missing the mark – a solution that few lodges adopted – most likely because so few read about it although it has been in existence since 1927 and written about by other Masonic authors. He notes that such solution is “neither impossible nor impractical” and if we - members, Lodge and Grand Lodge leadership – “really meant business in the matter of Masonic education” it would be done and those admitted in the future would “know more about what Masonry is, what it means, and to do with it.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Fort Newton, *The Soul of the Craft*, Dollar Masonic Library, Masonic Education Commission, Masonic Temple, Detroit, MI, 1927.

<sup>17</sup> IBID.

<sup>18</sup> IBID.

<sup>19</sup> The membership in American Lodges during the period in which Newton refers was close to three million by 1922, then as high as 3,295,872 by 1928 (Masonic Service Association, Membership, <https://msana.com/publications>, accessed, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> IBID.

<sup>21</sup> IBID.

Newton's solution was to make room for well-invested time to properly discuss, train, and instruct candidates closely on the three degrees as they advanced through each degree, not later, as had been the practiced in most American lodges prior to 1928, and certainly since. Moreover, he recommended that it be done "in an atmosphere in which not only the facts but the spirit, the 'feel' of Masonry can be communicated" – meaning in the Lodge.<sup>22</sup> The failure to heed such possible and practice advice, was fuel for passive procrastinators in the Fraternity, and shaped fewer worthy curators of the Craft that could have been otherwise produced.

## WHAT KEEPS MEN ENGAGED?

In his inimitable way, Newton also tells us the answer to the question, *what keeps men engaged in Masonry?* He tells us that it is not the moral law it is supposed to teach, using old and simple symbols of high ideals and homely duties, turning truths into tools for the building of men, shaping rough stones into polished pillars. No. While these are "gracious and wise laying the foundation of brotherly life and manly character," Newton explains that for the Mason with a seriousness of purpose, adding wisdom to youth and beauty to old age," is the answer.<sup>23</sup>

*Newton, like a number of Masonic authors before him and many since, remind us that there is more to Masonry than the mass of its membership grasp.*

He goes on to state that the great secret Masonry has to tell – the one truth most worth noting, is Masons (and humanity as a whole) that true strength comes from spiritual understanding: overcoming fear through faith, living purposefully, and recognizing that the soul is eternal. This awareness transforms how we face life and death—it replaces fear with dignity, meaning, and peace.<sup>24</sup> Newton, like a number of Masonic authors before him and many since, remind us that there is more to Masonry than the mass of its membership grasp. To begin to grasp what is

missing, one must actually think about Freemasonry, but first he must learn more about it so he can do something with it.

## CLOSE

Thinking about Freemasonry—its principles, tenets, and the obligations each Mason voluntarily assumes—it is not designed to be a hobby, tailored for convenience, or molded into whatever each member may wish it to be. It is always worth repeating that for Freemasonry to mean anything to a man, and for him to mean anything to it, he must devote time to it. He must think about it, study it, and it is the responsibility and duty of his Lodge to inspire and encourage him to do so—if, that is, we really mean business when it comes to producing authentic curators of the Craft and, as Newton wrote, we really mean business about Masonic education.

Like a fire: Freemasonry must be fed with logs of effort, or it dims to cold ash. Poor seed, poor harvest.

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<sup>22</sup> IBID.

<sup>23</sup> IBID.

<sup>24</sup> IBID.

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