

# Where's Your Manners?

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*During the Seven Years War there were at least 29 military Masonic lodges attached to various regiments within the British army, and King George demanded that American colonists train and fight alongside British soldiers. Military lodges were those which were exclusively composed of soldiers and were as mobile as the troops. These lodges were chartered by the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland, and Scotland.*

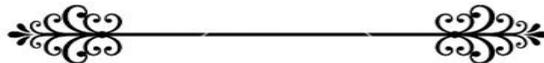
*Although the majority of the rank-and-file militia from the colonies were of far lower economic status than the elite members of the English-chartered Masonic lodges, they were welcomed into the British military lodges. The net effect was the dissemination of Masonry's teachings among the working class, bringing Enlightenment philosophy to less literate colonists.*

*These were people who had had no opportunity to study the writings of philosophers and other thinkers, but found themselves enflamed and inspired by the concepts of liberty and equal rights and the fundamentals of self-responsibility espoused by Freemasonry.*

*Freemasonry's introduction into the colonies in this fashion offered important ancillary benefits when it came to formalizing more than protocol. Training in good manners and decorum and social graces led to a sense of personal dignity and status, while camaraderie served as an antidote to the loneliness and isolation brought on by the wars. It is clear that at one time, Masonry incorporated lessons in basic manners as well as teaching the personal responsibility that accompanies respectful, gentlemanly conduct.*

*This conduct was expected in lodge and to be carried over into men's personal lives.*

**Stephen Bullock, Revolutionary Brotherhood:  
Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order**



**D**id your mother ever tell you to “mind your manners?” Did you ever have anyone tell you what manners you are supposed to mind? Are you mindful of them?

Should you correct someone who has bad manners? You'll want to stop and ask yourself these questions if you plan to become, or think you are a Freemason.

You can learn to understand the meaning of the three degrees of Masonry and interpret them accordingly. You can become a spellbinding ritualist. You can, once a Master Mason tell everyone in the world about your membership, wear lapel pins, and place Masonic decals all over your car if

you choose. You can read, diligently study Masonic history and philosophies, and genuinely integrate the principles of the Craft into your daily life, thus make great strides in advancing your Masonic knowledge as charged when you were initiated as an Entered Apprentice. However, if you do not have and practice fundamental manners, follow prescribed protocol and genuinely understand the importance of etiquette in Freemasonry, much less society in general, you are not going to be much of a Mason.

At the root of our Masonic foundation is *civility*. Without it, Freemasonry is far from the Craft, much less fraternity, it is intended to be. Men who practice only parts of our Masonic system - especially those who leave out the civility, manners and adherence to protocol parts, are merely members of the institution.

Can you think of a time in your life - no, instead ask this: can you think of a time in history that good manners were inappropriate? Of course not. There may a time you think good manners were not required, which is also difficult to believe, but there is no time that good manners are inappropriate. And remember: good manners involve more than "please" and "thank you."

We size up people by appearance, the words they speak, and their manners. Yes, even Freemasons do that whether we want to acknowledge it or not. We strive to practice the great principle of tolerance, and sometimes even Masons think it's supposed to mean we are tolerant of all things that are inappropriate that a brother might do aside from trespassing against our rules and regulations. Well, failing to use good manners and adhere to our protocols and etiquette is a trespass against the fraternity.

Tolerance in Freemasonry refers to opinion, not a man's dress or his manner of practice of the Craft, at least as long as that practice is within the confines of our respective Constitutions.

We more often than not think tolerance has to do only with being accepting of another man's religious or political beliefs, when in fact it has to do with being accepting of other men, regardless of their opinion on any matter - at least those matters that are within the Constitutions that govern us as Masons and the obligations we take.

Should we be tolerant of ill-mannered men? Should we be tolerant of men who fail to regularly exercise the prescribed protocol and etiquette of our Craft? Are we not also charged with the responsibility to "whisper wise counsel" to a brother when it is appropriate?

Masons aren't told to police other Masons in all ways, but they are instructed to judge with candor, admonish with friendship and reprehend with justice when it comes to a violation or trespass. We can and should certainly do the same when it comes to a lack of manners.



Now, we would all like to think that the West Gate is guarded so effectively that men without manners are never permitted to knock on the door. After all, an ill-mannered candidate would not be duly and truly prepared in the correct sense of that term should he come into the Craft practicing uncivilized behavior. That would be a sign he was far from understanding the solemnity of the great and important undertaking on which he was about to embark.

Does it still happen? Yes.

Can it be corrected? Yes.

Should we always make a focused effort to correct it early and consistently? Yes.

Are there objections to this common sense? Yes.

The objections usually come from those who think they already have manners, but don't.

Considered this: is it mannerly to do any of the following?

- Talk in lodge?
- Pass notes in lodge?
- Read your texts and emails in lodge?
- Take or make a phone call in lodge?
- Chew tobacco in lodge – and spit?
- Clip your fingernails during ritual?
- Chew ice from your cup in lodge?
- Pick your teeth in lodge?
- Sleep in lodge?
- Walk between the altar and the Master in lodge?
- Fail to give the sign of the degree in a non-perfunctory manner when called upon by the Master?
- Walk around during lodge?
- Enter lodge without an apron?
- Use profanity when speaking before brothers in lodge?
- Dress in a disrespectful or insolent manner in lodge?
- Chew, blow bubbles, and snap gum in lodge?
- Interrupt during ritual?
- Fail to obey the gavel in lodge?
- Take off your shoes in lodge?
- Horseplay or engage in rowdy behavior during lodge?
- Slouch in your chair as if you were preparing for a long nap?

Does behavior like this happen in *all* lodges? No. Has behavior like this ever happened in lodge? Yes. Should they occur at all? No. Is it bad manners when they do occur? Yes. Who is responsible for correcting it? *Every brother*, but particularly the Master who is responsible for giving instruction during the lodge should this conduct occur.

Obviously, this list can be extended tenfold, but the point should be clear. Everything on this particular list ties back in to manners. Doing anything on this list in lodge is a breach of good manners and shows either an unawareness of appropriate Masonic protocol, or demonstrates a flagrant disregard for proper etiquette in lodge.

With civility underpinning our core ideologies in Masonry, how did we ever drift so far from what was once a fraternity that held high the values of basic manners and the art of being a gentleman?

We could examine this question in detail and add hundreds of pages to this paper, but that is not the intent. We know society has changed and with those changes there is less of a premium placed on manners today than has been in the past.



We could explore all the sociological reasons and look at parenting styles, or lack thereof, and add our schools to the list along with growing technology that contributes to watering down our language and abilities to have meaningful face-to-face communications. We could even point a finger to Hollywood, books and pop culture and not be too far off the mark. If we really want to look further into those things that lead to a decline in manners and etiquette, all we have to do is take an honest look at social media like Facebook and

Twitter. Their explosion in popularity, thus encouragement of hypervisibility has gone beyond reconnecting with old high school friends, renewing acquaintances, and posting photos to share with grandparents. Social media ushered in an age of digital narcissism for many, and contributes to lax and slipshod writing, and a diminished ability for eloquent expression.

The intent of this paper is to point out that men who come into the fraternity today are expected to recognize what being a gentleman entails, and to practice all aspects of being a gentleman in and outside lodge. If they don't recognize the importance, and still get past the West Gate, then gentlemanly conduct needs to be taught directly and through example. The use of good manners needs to be demanded *and* enforced.

Although our reasons for becoming Masons are varied, self-improvement is, or is supposed to be, one of those key reasons we seek Masonry. So, if a candidate is voted on to receive the three degrees of Masonry, should we not attempt to assure he fully understands he is expected to behave and act in a gentlemanly manner at the very start of the process – and to continue to improve those skills as he travels on his Masonic journey? If, for some strange reason he doesn't understand it, should we be instructing him?

If you are a gentleman, you might wish to consider sharing this paper with a brother who is not, or one who may be struggling to become more mannerly and a gentleman. If, following an honest self-inspection, you determine there is room for improvement with your own manners and

knowledge of the reasons they are of such importance, then you are on the road to not only self-improvement, but also making outstanding daily advancement in your Masonic knowledge.

## **If You Need Some Reasons**

If you need reasons to be a gentleman and practice manners, here's two of the most basic:

1. It demonstrates respect.
2. It makes people likeable.

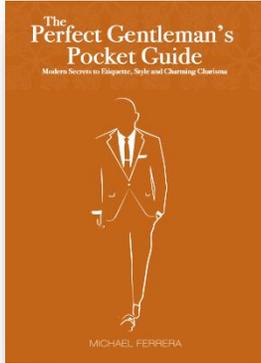
Need more? Okay, here are nine more to chew on. They are simple and not just for Masons.

1. Manners suggest gratitude rather than entitlement.
2. Manners are even more important in a world that is neglecting them. Standing out from the crowd is a good thing. Making eye contact, shaking hands, giving proper deference, offering assistance, and putting your phone away at the dinner table are still appreciated, if sometimes neglected habits.
3. Manners may have changed, but people have not and being appreciated will never, ever go out of style. Do you really know anyone who likes to be unappreciated?
4. Someday, somewhere you may want something from someone. Manners and proper etiquette are like good will in the bank when you go to make a withdrawal. Wanting something in return is not a reason to use good manners, of course, but sometime in life you may need to call on another's kindness and it will help if you have been polite.
5. A great many adults have done some wonderful things for you. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and teachers have all given of themselves to improve your life. Do not disrespect them by failing to use good manners. The same applies to what Freemasonry has given you on your journey.
6. Manners are even more important in a world where relationships may never involve eye contact. We meet people online or by email every day. They will never see our faces or hear our voices. Our words will need to say who we are; choose them wisely.
7. Manners are something that people will remember about you, even if they do not remember what they remember.
8. Manners are tried and true methods of interacting with other people, making them feel good about themselves and at ease with you. This, in turn, makes you feel confident and good about yourself.
9. Practicing good manners earns respect and demonstrates self-respect.

Masons take pride in the concept of meeting "on the level." It is a noble principle that men can meet without prejudice because they are like-minded and believe in tolerance of each other's views. When we talk about equalizers though and those things that genuinely make men meet on the level, we have to return to talking about manners. Manners are the great equalizer.

## To Condone or Not to Condone

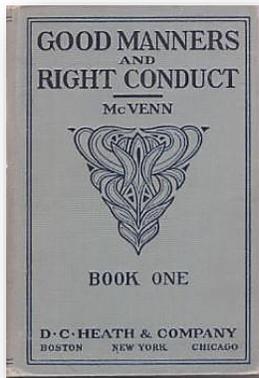
Bad manners or the lack of them is correctable. Sometimes peer pressure can be an effective modifier, but an exclusive reliance on this sort of hopeful osmosis is a poor choice over straightforward instruction and demonstration followed with insistence on the practice of good manners.



Since 2011, the Guide Books adopted by Lexington Lodge No. 1, and used in structured classes for all three degrees contains sections on Masonic

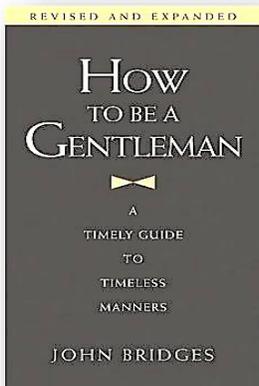
Etiquette. Every brother initiated since 2011 has received a copy and been given instruction on this essential part of the system of Freemasonry.

Moreover, any Mason with an observant eye can find appropriate examples of such correct behavior while in lodge. In addition, there are numerous books available about Masonic etiquette and general manners, as well and the older books are just as applicable as the contemporary publications on this particular subject. All any Mason needs to do is take time to read and educate themselves to the reasons we have a protocol, etiquette, and expectations of manners being practiced - and for members to behave as gentlemen.



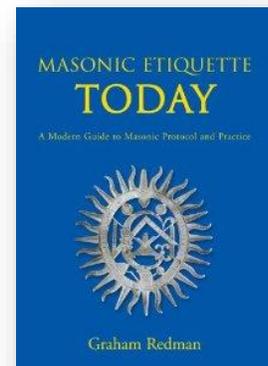
After reading this paper, and regardless of whether you are a new or veteran Mason, if you feel you have been lectured about your manners, then brother, you have missed the point.

The point is that civility is an indispensable part the system of Freemasonry and accentuates the proven philosophies we find in our core beliefs. There is no genuine civility without manners and consistent adherence to etiquette and protocol established to bring about that civility.



Your behavior as a Mason, in and out of lodge, determines your knowledge about Freemasonry more than the number of pins on your lapel or the proficiency in which you might deliver ritual. You are duly and truly prepared when you practice what our fraternity genuinely represents – not just a part here and there.

No Mason is exempt from the fundamental rules of civility. No Mason is exempt or released from the responsibility of behaving in any way other than as a gentleman in and outside of lodge. The primary objective of self-improvement is to strengthen yourself. Having and practicing good manners is an earnest and effective start.



Try a firm handshake and a broad smile. Encourage manners in brothers by first practicing them yourself. Contrary to the thinking of some people, the art of being a gentleman is not sleeping or dead, although it clearly naps more than it should.

Being a Freemasonry necessitates being a gentleman. Practicing the art of being that gentleman is a distinctive, laudable pursuit.

Now, in remembering that manners should always be kept in mind: *thank you for your attention, and for reading this paper.*

**John W. Bizzack, From *Taking Issues, An Anthology of About the Practices and State of Freemasonry in North America*, Autumn House Publishing, 2016.**