

# Dressing for Success

W/B David V. Cassesa

Ray A. Smith, a fashion expert, published an article on June 21, 2016 in the *Wall Street Journal* called “Why Dressing for Success Leads to Success.” In the article, Mr. Smith puts together a compelling argument based on scientific studies that suggest that dressing up for work in a suit or blazer not only increases productivity, but (more pertinent to Freemasonry) also increases confidence.

“Using several measures, including simulated business meetings at which subjects wore formal and more casual clothing, the studies offer indications that wearing nicer clothes may raise one’s confidence level, affect how others perceive the wearer, and in some cases, even boost the level of one’s abstract thinking, the type in which leaders and executives engage.”

Thomas W. Jackson, Past Grand Secretary of Pennsylvania, and Executive Secretary of the World Conference of Masonic Grand Lodges points out that North American Freemasonry no longer appeals to the “Professional Man.” Rt. Worshipful Bro. Jackson is quick to add the caveat that the term “Professional Man” was not a slight to a person’s vocation, but rather a “Professional Man” is a person who attempts to engage in activities with great competence. In the case of Freemasonry, we are supposed to be symbols of excellence. We are supposed to be striving for perfection. Why would we willingly choose, not to dress as nicely, or professionally as possible?

In the Lodge, plumbers, pipefitters, lawyers and doctors are all equal. We are all deemed to be of excellent character. At least that is assumed as such, as we were all given petitions, and were allowed past the West gate to enter a Lodge. We as Masons are supposed to be the elite. We say we are good men, striving for self-improvement by learning the life’s philosophy of Masonry. Wouldn’t the easiest step to self-improvement be outward appearance?

When a newly obligated brother is first brought into the light, amongst the elite men of his jurisdiction, wouldn’t common sense suggest the men be dressed well? Many Lodges are missing that “WOW” factor. As in, “WOW, these guys take this ritual seriously” and “WOW, I must be important, these guys put on their best clothes for me” and “WOW, this isn’t your typical Moose, or Elks Lodge.”

Let’s review a little history. The Golden Age of Fraternalism began in the latter third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued through the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the American Civil War, organizations with various goals arose such as The Knights of Pythias, The Oddfellows, Woodmen of the World, etc. Most of these fraternities brought together a broad range of social

classes under the fraternal banner. Many of these organizations were formed specifically as mutual aid societies.

The ultimate decline of most of the fraternities of this time was a result of the Great Depression. The Progressive and New Deal welfare programs formed lessened the need for fraternal aide. Government paternalism gradually came to replace fraternalism.

Freemasonry, fortunately, was not an organization whose main goal was the sale of insurance, or charity. Freemasonry, as I have already stated, is a living philosophy. Fraternities that were more economically focused didn't survive, but Masonry lived long enough to see unprecedented growth after WWII.

The growth can be partly attributed to returning soldiers, missing the bonds they had fostered during wartime. Growth can also be attributed to a time of great economic success in the United States. Laborers and executives were able to share a fraternal bond at Lodge, and often times, I'm certain, there was unprecedented mentoring between brothers. If a gentleman was attending lodge, possibly with his boss, or future boss, did he dress like he crawled out of a mine shaft, or did he change into a suit?

I frequently hear the argument, "This is the way my Lodge has always dressed", or "We are a casual Lodge." Paintings and photographs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and up through the 1960s reflect that Masons regularly dressed well for Lodge functions. Unfortunately, Freemasonry, like many social institutions, gave way to the casual atmosphere of the 1970s. Rather than reflecting our values and principles, our Lodges became a reflection of society at large. Casual dress codes were quickly accompanied by a casual approach to ritual and education, each of which are essential to Freemasonry. Freemasonry is not now, and never has been, intended for casual practice.

The decline of appropriate dress for Lodge and the emergence of the "Casual Lodge" reflects an overall decline in our society's level of civility, and one can see a direct correlation between the steady decline in membership and the rise of the "casual lodge." Again, rather than being true to our mission of "making good men better," we have followed the path of least resistance to the general detriment of all. The best that we can hope for from a casual approach to Freemasonry is to "make good men ordinary." That's hardly a laudable pursuit.

I am not discouraged with the dwindling numbers of Freemasons. I'm optimistic. We can take this opportunity to change the public perception of Freemasonry. We can be recognized as those finely dressed "professional men," and community leaders to whom the younger generation looks up. We should look like somebody who would make a good mentor. It is time to stop looking only at the great Freemasons of the past -- George Washington, Harry Truman and John Wayne. It's tired. It's embarrassing, and, frankly, it's sad. Freemasonry didn't die with Gerald Ford. It's time we start looking to the future. Mentor new Masons, lead by example, and foster the next great pillars of our society.

The old saying that “you only get one chance to make a first impression” is true.

Take the time and effort to look your best and you’ll start on good footing – dressing down to what might be fashionable in your lodge only creates barriers when you are looking to rise to the top.



Presented by David V. Cassesa, member, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Committee on Education, 2017-2018. Bro. Cassesa is a member and Past Master of Robert Burns Lodge No. 163, as well as William O. Ware Lodge of Research.