

Putting the Cards on the Table

Generally speaking, if you want to know what is going on with most other people, just think about what is happening in your own world. We are all pretty much the same, so about 80% of the problems you are having are the same as others are having (money, children, health, time restraints, age, and so forth).

Like you and I, in all probability fewer than two out of ten lodge members reading this have attended lodge within the last three years. This is not going to change, although I don't think it will get much worse.

The Grand Lodge of New York has 61 districts that comprise 39,751 members. If we assume for the sake of argument that each district has about the same number of members, this comes out at 652 members per district. As fewer than 20% of members attend lodge, the average district has 130 members carrying the entire load. If there are 10 lodges in a district, the average lodge does not have enough members turning out to meetings to even fill the chairs. These numbers need to be refined, but even if the number of attending members doubled, there would still not be enough to run an efficient lodge (i.e., just 26 members average turnout).

What we need to come to grips with is that names on a lodge roster are simply that, besides payment of dues. It is the number of members who attend lodge and do the necessary work that counts.

The bottom line on all this is that there must be at least 650 members "on the roster" to run a lodge. This provides 130 members to cycle through the chairs, put on degrees and attend to all the other lodge functions. Keep in mind that there will always be sickness and absences for other reasons, so one will never have a full complement of "available" members.

Although difficult to do, it appears every Grand Lodge should regroup so that every lodge has at least 650 members on their roster. The alternative is lodge officer burnout and lodges becoming defunct.

Many eminent brethren have provided suggestion on increasing lodge attendance, but the writing is on the wall; one will not likely get more than 20% of lodge member out to meetings no matter what is done, and only a portion of that number will want to, or be able to, take on responsibilities.

Resorting to "laments" that members are just not responsible anymore and things like that is of no use, and is incorrect to begin with. What has happened is, times have changed, and so have our priorities. Age is also a factor, and we have let things "slide" to the point where the average Mason is about 69 years old. This means that about half of us are getting very low on "energy."

If we cannot "regroup" as suggested, then the least we should do is remove the degree work from individual lodges (have district degree teams). This should, of course, be on a voluntary basis. This work is too important to allow it to be inefficiently performed or untimely—those new members are our future. Let's make certain they want to become a part of the 20%.

This paper essentially puts all the cards "on the table." It's time to see exactly where we are, decide our strategy, and redeal.