

Food for Thought

I was initiated into freemasonry twenty years ago becoming a member of a Lodge at the Oldham Masonic Hall, my early experiences were quite overwhelming thrust into the company of mainly older gentlemen strait laced and matter of fact, it took several meetings before I started to relax and feel comfortable in their company. I didn't understand the importance of practice nights, the significance of learning ritual, addressing brethren at the social board with their correct titles the responsibility of collecting money for the raffles the meals and so on, in other words as I said before it was overwhelming.

After one meeting at the social board when we had finished the meal the WM was promoting forthcoming events after which he decided to reprimand the junior brethren about the attendance on practice nights, it was a scathing attack which I thought was totally unnecessary, unprofessional and embarrassing for the young brethren involved, myself included, at that point I thought this is an hobby a recreational pastime not a job, that's me finished, I went home with every intention of resigning and walking away from freemasonry, luckily one of the senior brethren rang me the night after and had a long conversation with me explaining the value of the practice nights, the feeling of elation when you are reciting ritual and getting it right, when you arrive home and reflect on the night's proceedings knowing your contribution has been worthwhile and of course the respect for each other and above all the virtue of being charitable. I realised then that yes this is much more than a hobby but to get the benefits out of it you have to put some effort in and from that moment on I have enjoyed every minute of my time in the fraternity.

I sit at home sometimes reflecting on that night thinking I could be going through life without the benefits of the last twenty years, thinking about the confidence freemasonry has given me by being able to stand up and address people and sing, how many times have you been to a wedding a funeral, a christening or a war memorial when the priest as said please join me in singing Hymn number --- and you look round and there are only a handful of people singing, I'm one of them because freemasonry has given me that confidence. I also reflect on my moral compass re-set to think about people outside my family, right and wrong, being more reasonable and charitable all these things instilled in me over my masonic career, I don't think I was the roughest ashlar when I joined but I'm certainly much smoother now.

Is there anything we can do? Could we coordinate the intake of new members by involving several lodges within certain areas, as an example in my area we have Middleton, Shaw and Rochdale could we appoint a dedicated secretary or the district secretary to receive the numbers of new applicants from each lodge from their hall in one year and share that with the other halls, let's assume that in 2020 to 2021 three people applied to join Middleton, three applied to join Shaw and four applied to join Rochdale, each lodge would then notify the relevant secretary in their hall, who would then coordinate with the other two halls and try and dedicate a month in 2021-2022 to try and have them all initiated into their own lodge in that year. Once they have been initiated instead of going to their lodge practice they could all meet with say several volunteers from the different lodges they have joined and carry out a mock initiation so they all appreciate what they have been through, but also various parts of the lodge room can be explained and the positions, followed by a Q and A session in other words an induction. They could also have a night where they sit down and have a mock social board not necessary having a meal but going through the toasts how to address the various officers, the Grand officers the Provincial Grand officers the WM and so on. They could also rotate around the social board being JW, SW, WM and Past Master understanding the protocol of each position, I think this would be a great advantage for when they eventually take on a position where they have to, maybe ad lib, a ditty, a vocal contribution or even orate a speech, I know this

sounds radical but I'm sure a strong bond would be made between these new members which would encourage them to visit each other's lodges when they have eventually settled into their own. This process would only need to last for several practice's, but it would give new members a real insight into freemasonry, we could call it the lodge of introduction or induction.

I would like to point out that I am not looking for perfection at our meetings but trying to come up with a formula whereby new members can join and feel comfortable by understanding what's expected of them in their first few months, and to give them a boost to their confidence and if nothing else ignite a discussion or debate within freemasonry on how we can improve and retain new members.

I wish you all good health and prosperity in these very trying times.

Derek Andrews

Horton Lodge 8528