

A Masonic Minute

Meritocracy

“All preferment among Masons is grounded upon real worth and personal merit only, that so the lords may be well served, the brethren not put to shame, nor the royal Craft despised.”

The Charges of a Freemason – Of Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices

Each year at the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge the registered delegates (Masters, Wardens, and Past Masters) democratically elect by secret ballot the various officers of Grand Lodge to positions of added responsibility. During April the Grand Secretary will send to each lodge the list of nominees with a brief description of their previous Masonic experience. It is important that the Secretary of the Lodge makes this available to the three principal officers and all the Past Masters.

Several academic studies attest to the fact that democratic elections had their origin in the early Masonic Lodges.¹ In the democratic process, a heavy responsibility rests upon the enfranchised to be well informed in order to choose wisely. However, as a gentleman's society, candidates do not indulge in overt campaigning or 'politicking' but offer themselves for the consideration of the Brethren. Although unwritten, these established rules, based upon propriety and the concept that all preferment is by merit and ability have long been observed by gentlemen's agreement. Thus, by definition, we are a 'meritocracy.' How then do the voting delegates make a valid and informed choice in the ballot box?

It is generally agreed world-wide that finding, attracting, choosing, and electing competent and confident leaders is the real challenge facing Freemasonry as we move through the twenty-first century. This is true for our Lodges, Districts, and particularly Grand Lodge. In such a vast jurisdiction it is difficult, if not impossible, to be personally acquainted with the experience and leadership potential of all the nominees. Too often geography forces us to depend upon the "meet and greet" social occasions or how many times a candidate shows up in the district.

“Leadership is more than shaking hands.”

How then does one evaluate the experience, life skills, capability and potential of a candidate to contribute to the advancement of the Craft? On a personal note ... Many years ago when, as Junior Warden in my lodge, I first attended the Annual Communication as a voting delegate, I devised this rule of thumb. Although I had not the remotest notion of ever becoming Grand Master, with the ballot in hand, I asked myself, if I were Grand Master, which of these candidates would I want to be on my team and assist in implementing my vision for Grand Lodge? What knowledge,

¹ See Dr. Margaret Jacob

experience, life skill and aptitude do these individuals have to contribute to the greater good of the Craft?

Many dedicated Brethren go about their assigned tasks as Chairmen, Team Leaders or Committee Members quietly and effectively. These men are the reliable 'working tools' of Grand Lodge, devising, creating and implementing programs to assist lodges to engage and serve the best interest of their members by enhancing the fraternal environment. They personify the concept that 'Masonry is the science of service.'

An article in McLean's Magazine, quoting Professor Sandra Robinson, University of British Columbia, contained this informative statement: "*We need people who have good leadership skills, even if they don't want to be leaders. They could actually be the introverts.*"² The article went on to list the characteristics of a good leader in this context.

- Humility – Collaborators: emphasis on 'we' rather than 'me.'
- A strong sense of responsibility
- A meticulous attention to detail
- An ambivalence about recognition³

All of which raises a more deep-seated and pressing issue. Over the years, our recorded history proves that this Grand Lodge has had the benefit of many outstanding leaders. But while we may learn from the past, we cannot live in it. Our future obviously depends upon the young men we are initiating today and the leadership skills they have or are able to acquire. Leadership training, not only in our rites and ceremonies but also in our traditions, customs and usages must be a priority. This takes time, concerted effort and cannot be achieved overnight. But only then will we have candidates truly qualified for and deserving of preferment.

Take advantage of every opportunity to evaluate the candidates – all candidates meetings, CVs posted on the Grand Lodge web site, meet the candidates on Tuesday night at the Royal York. Then, being better informed, Vote for the good of the Order.

RSJD April 2015

² Ken McQueen, McLean's 23 June 2013

³ David Zweig: *Invisibles: The Power of Anonymous Work in an Age of Relentless Self-Promotion*