

MIDDLE CHAMBER TALKS
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SHORT TALK
NO. 2

10 STEPS TO
QUALITY
MEMBERSHIP
GROWTH

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Step 1: The Value Equation

Prior to discussing a method for successful membership expansion, the first step for a Lodge's leadership is to consider (and address) the value one's Lodge offers its members and prospects. This is typically a great but hardly insurmountable start point.

Failing membership has been topic of conversation at Masonic Lodges and Grand Lodges for the past 60 years.

Step 2: "Cold Call" from a prospective candidate

There are two general ways prospective members will approach a Lodge, one being an unsolicited call or email, and it's not unusual for a prospect to email a Lodge about becoming a member.

The practice employed is to have an experienced and well versed member meet that prospect for coffee.

The time needed to do this is well used. Questions should generally be about why the prospect is interested in Masonry and his general understanding about the Fraternity. These questions have to be completely fleshed out.

It has been found that prospects who have a clear reason for wanting to become a Mason end up staying active.

Step 2A: Candidate recommended from an existing member

Often a Brother will bring a friend (sometimes a relative) to Lodge to consider membership. Like a "cold call" prospect, the practice employed must still be to have experienced and well versed members meet that prospect to discuss his general interest in Masonry.

Questions must still be about why the prospect is interested in the Fraternity and his general understanding about Masonry. These questions have to be fleshed out.

This is often the path many new prospects travel on towards membership. It's actually trickier than a "cold call" because the recommending

brother's ego becomes a factor if the prospect is not yet suitable for membership.

Step 3: Typical 1st step recommendations

One recommendation off the bat is to NOT offer prospects a petition after a first meeting, regardless of whether that meeting is at the Lodge.

It seems that having a prospect attend at least three Lodge meetings to meet various brothers (and those brothers getting to know the prospect) is effective. Those meetings allow a prospect to become familiar with a Lodge's culture, and it begins the "tethering" process which critically plays into retention for those who go on to become members. Brothers who feel connected to their brethren tend to remain active.

During that initial conversation with a prospect, there are some points that should be considered if the prospect seems suitable.

1st Step Recommendations (continued)

It's been found that having prospects read (and then discuss) certain readings are helpful in setting realistic expectations about membership. This helps cement a prospect's ideas about why he wants to become a Freemason.

It's been found that membership retention is weak for those without a solid set of reasons about why one seeks membership.

One additional point to make is that brothers meeting with a prospect need to be well versed in Masonry and generally well rounded individuals.

Step 4: The Home Investigation

The home investigation is critical in the determination about a prospect's suitability to become a Mason.

The committee must be comprised of well-versed brethren who are comfortable conducting business-meeting type interviews.

It's helpful to frame out the investigation as being part of the vetting process.

While it's the last step before balloting and sometimes seen as innocuous, the home investigation is critical.

At the outset, the committee members explain why they are in the candidates' home. This lends a genuine seriousness to the talks, and it's been found that this makes the meeting meaningful to the candidate.

Before any GL questions are posed, the discussion should center on "why" the candidate wants to be a Freemason. If a satisfactory answer is not offered, the committee must consider the "you're not ready" scenario.

Step 4 (continued): Setting the tone

"Would you want to hire this person to work for you?"

Few people like to ask the "hard questions" but it cannot be stressed enough that the home investigation has to be considered in the context of a hiring. The committee has to ask itself, "*are we likely to help or hinder the reputation of the Fraternity with the addition of this candidate?*"

Once the investigation starts then typical questions asked in a home investigation

Why do you want to become a Mason?

What do you perceive your strengths and weaknesses to be? (this allows for a discussion about spiritual alchemy and personal improvement)

Why join Freemasonry as opposed to an organization like the Elks or Big Brothers/Big Sisters?

Why choose our particular Lodge to join?

It's been evident that the home investigation digging down into various subjects makes the process much more meaningful to the candidate and it generates a sense of intrinsic value to becoming a Mason. Press on generis and concise answers such as "I want to do charity work"

Step 5: Ready...or not

When a candidate has successfully prepared for membership, it's apparent. Still, the investigation committee must discuss the interview and sense of whether to sign off on the candidate for balloting.

There are times when the investigation concludes that the candidate is not ready to become a Mason.

It's normal to explain that the investigation committee is acting as a fiduciary on behalf of the Lodge's membership and that the outcome of a ballot is not a given, meaning no guarantee about the vote result.

Step 6: When the answer is "he's not ready, yet"

When a candidate does not appear ready for membership, it's incumbent on the committee to communicate that.

Sometimes, that communication may take place during the investigation.

Other times, the head of the committee may contact the top line signer of the petition.

Step 7: Admitting members who are not ready weakens the gene pool

Admitting the unprepared to a Lodge is a huge disservice to the Fraternity.

Ultimately, admitting the unprepared is equivalent to allowing poor hiring practices in your company. Eventually, the consequence can be "business failure."

Hard choices are not really that hard. They require a modicum of courage to do the right thing.

Step 8: Contacting the candidate after the Lodge vote

It's important to communicate the outcome of the ballot to the candidate as soon as possible. Assuming an affirmative vote on the candidate, it's been evident that contact and activity before the 1st degree helps cement a necessary tethering to the Lodge.

Having a candidate-elect come to Lodge and participate where possible is strongly suggested.

Step 9: "So now you are a Mason..."

There's no getting around the fact that new members stay active if they become part of the Lodge's fabric ASAP.

Having a well versed mentor for a newly made Mason has been shown to materially boost retention.

The mentoring program is a critical part of a Lodge program that positively impacts a new Mason's future activity.

Step 10: "So now you are a Master Mason..."

It is very important that after a brother is raised to the 3rd degree that he still be actively mentored. If this is not done, then the risk is that he may feel less connected to the Lodge and slowly fade-away. Regular get-togethers that are social in nature help cement Lodge bonds.

A Note on Proactive Membership Growth

There is a discussion to be had about adopting proactive membership growth. While "recruiting" is not a practice encouraged by the Grand Lodge of the State of New Jersey, there is something to be said about encouraging worthy men to learn more about the practices and precepts of the fraternity. This should not be confused with indiscriminate practices such as setting up a booth at town fairs or the like, but rather proactively inspiring men who positively add to the ranks of Freemasons. Informally, it's been found that this method yields high quality and active members, and it's also worth noting that the process typically takes somewhere between 1-2 years, if done properly.