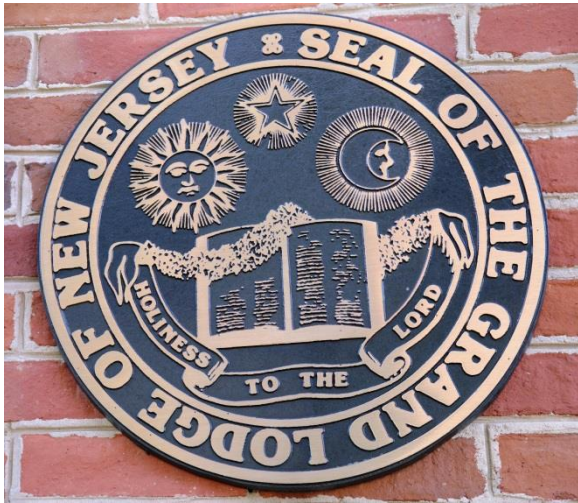


MIDDLE CHAMBER TALKS

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SHORT TALK

NO. 3

HOW TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS MEETING

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Step 1: Don't Make Meetings a Bore

No brother ever comes to Lodge excited for a business meeting. There are 101 different things a brother can do with his time than sit in Lodge discussing bills, hearing announcements he already read about in the trestleboard or saw on Facebook, or listening to the Worshipful Master and Secretary prattle on endlessly back and forth like a Wimbledon tennis match. Business meetings are necessary to run a well-controlled Lodge, but the business of a Lodge should be to put on quality programming. **A well run business meeting should last no more than 20 minutes.**

Step 2: Courtesies of the East

Brethren have worked hard during their masonic careers, devoting much time, love, and labor to the Craft. Brethren who have earned titles of Worshipful Brother, Right Worshipful, and Distinguished White Apron, should be acknowledged by the Worshipful Master from the East, as proper respect to these brethren. The same applies to sitting Worshipful Masters visiting from other Lodges. Guests, should also be acknowledged, and made welcome. However, nothing can ruin the mood more than a Worshipful Master who forgets to mention a brother or messes up their name or title. The Tyler, prior to Lodge, should have written down for the Worshipful Master the name and rank of every visitor and distinguished brother. The time to take attendance is not while giving the greeting.

Step 3: Set a Proper Agenda

The Secretary should prepare an agenda with the Worshipful Master so they are both speaking from the same page. The agenda should be shared with the Treasurer, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden. For the most part, few surprises should arise in Lodge during the business meeting. A typical agenda includes (i) Minutes

(ii) Treasurer's Report (iii) Bills (iv) Communications (v) Petitions (vi) Committee Reports (vii) Balloting (viii) Old Business (ix) New Business (x) Sickness and Distress. How many times have you sat in Lodge and heard the Worshipful Master ask, "Brother Secretary, do we have any petitions?" only to have the Secretary respond, "None, Worshipful Master". A well prepared Worshipful Master, would already have known this beforehand, so why ask the question. Some of these questions should also be addressed to the members present, not just the secretary. A business meeting is not ritual. If only four of the above 10 items are required to be addressed, then only address the four items required.

Step 4: Don't Waste Precious Time Reading Long Winded Minutes

The old commercial used to say, "When E. F. Hutton speaks, everyone listens." Well the last time Grand Lodge membership rolls were checked, E. F. Hutton was not the Secretary of any Lodge. The reading of minutes is time filler for Lodges that have no programs. Minutes when read in the lodge, must be concise and to the point without jeopardizing their quality. Paraphrasing the minutes while preserving the accuracy and content is acceptable. A better alternative is to have the Minutes disseminated to the brethren via email before the meeting. If reading the minutes takes more than 2 minutes of the brethren's time, then it is suggested that copies of the minutes be made available on the Secretary's desk for the brethren's review.

Step 5: Have a Concise Treasurer's Report

Every brother has the right to inspect the Treasurer's books, but few do. Along with the dissemination of the Secretary's minutes via email, there should be included a detailed Treasurer's report that includes the opening balance, details on each receipt and

disbursement for the period (i.e. the cash register) and the closing balance. In Lodge, the Treasurer should report the opening balance, total receipts and disbursements for the period, and closing balance.

Step 6: Openly Read the Lodge's Bills

This is one of the most critical functions performed at the business meeting. The brethren have the right to know how the Lodge is spending their money. Each bill should be read and explained. Credit cards should have each charge explicitly announced. The brethren should be given an opportunity to question any of the invoices.

Step 7: A Word About Motions

Much like a well-run Vegas magician act, having a shill in the audience is always helpful. The Senior Warden should know in advance that he is expected to make the necessary motions during the meeting, with the Junior Warden seconding those motions, to accept the Secretary's minutes, Treasurer's report, to pay the bills subject to audit, and any other motions the Worshipful Master wants raised during the meeting, unless they have a reason not to agree with the motion or what is being proposed.

Step 8: Be Judicious with Communications

Other than a Grand Lodge communication which needs to be read in its entirety, unless the Secretary has a mellifluously sounding voice, there really is no need for the Secretary to read verbatim every communication received. He should read them before Lodge, so that during the business meeting he can paraphrase in a few sentences the gist of any communication. Any brother wishing additional information can visit the Secretary after Lodge.

Step 9: Petitions

Petitions for membership should be read in Lodge as proscribed by Grand Lodge. Prior to the meeting, the Worshipful Master should already have volunteers lined up for the investigation committee.

Step 10: Actually Have Committee Reports

As a matter of good corporate governance, different committees throughout the year should present to the brethren the results of what they have been diligently working on for the benefit of the Craft. Similar to the Secretary's minutes and Treasurer's report, a copy of the Committee Report should be sent out to the brethren in advance or shortly after the meeting, and the Committee provide a brief summary during Lodge, as well as being prepared to answer any questions. The Chairman (or a member) of a candidate's investigation committee should report his findings to the Lodge.

Step 11: Closely Follow Balloting Protocol

This is probably the one aspect of the business meeting that actually is Grand Lodge ritual. The Worshipful Master should remind the brethren, that there should be no talking during the balloting. This is not a tyled refreshment. Brethren should silently line up, vote, and sit back down. The same way a brother acts during any of the three degrees is how they should act during balloting.

Step 12: Old, New and Other

Open discussions around Old, New, or Other business is a forum for the brethren to discuss any open issues. While the Worshipful Master is opening the Lodge up for anyone to opine, he should nevertheless have an idea beforehand as to what will be discussed, so there are not any surprises.

Step 13: Programs

A business meeting is not a program. It is the responsibility of the Worshipful Master to ensure that the brethren receive Masonic Light. As part of his installation oath, the Worshipful Master swore that he will "not open or close the Lodge without giving the whole or a suitable part of the lecture appropriate thereto, or causing the same to be done". It is the Worshipful Master's obligation to share that Light. Programs may include degree work, a Table Lodge, a lecture, a presentation, or any other enlightening experience you think the brethren will enjoy. One suggestion to offer here is seeking out the assistance of well-informed brethren to speak at your Lodge (or members of appendant bodies). Reach out to your District Deputy Grand Master and see if you can book anyone from the elected line to come speak at your Lodge. A program should be educational, memorable, and something worth brethren spending their valuable time away from home to attend.

Step 14: Promote Fellowship

A successful and memorable Lodge night will rest primarily on three pillars. First, a well-oiled smooth running business meeting that deals directly with the issues required for a Lodge to deal with the administrative and financial needs of the Lodge. Second, provide an enlightening experience that feeds and nourishes the souls of the brethren with that heavenly manna of Masonic Light. Third, provide an evening of brotherly love and fellowship. Have a plan for something after Lodge, whether that be dessert, a light libation, a cigar, or anything that keeps the brethren gathered around the hearth of the Lodge continuing the discussion that spills over from the evening's program. The Lodge experience should be the highlight of every brother's week. It is something that they should look forward to with anticipation. As the saying goes, "always leave them wanting more".