



LODGE RESOURCE TEAM

Doing the Same Thing, Differently

“To change is difficult. Not to change is fatal.”

- William Pollard

Change is hard. That's not an original thought. My church is going through a difficult time, down to its last 28-30 active members and the sale of our building. We'll be going through “Holy closure” in a few months.

It's tragic, but it didn't have to be that way. We should have seen this a decade ago, if we'd paid attention to Sunday worship attendance, and the members we lost to other congregations. We could have connected with lost members and asked them why they made the choice to leave, and learned from that discussion to change future outcomes, but it was just as easy to blame them as having the “problem.”

It was slow drip, but a steady one that should have sparked change in our planning and future vision. It's too late for us now. The remaining members will find new homes and we'll deal with the disposition of assets we still own.

Change is hard. When I think of Masonic lodges, including my own, I see in many cases practices that are decades old and unproductive. They served a purpose once and could serve a purpose again but would need to be done in a different way. What nearly six years of working with lodges on Lodge Success has taught me, above all, is that change does not occur without effort. And the young tend to have less *time* but more *energy* to put into the effort.

We should listen to the younger members. That doesn't mean discounting the old, the traditional, but it does mean listening to the new and different and incorporating those sometimes subtle, sometimes remarkable changes into daily routines. In that way, everyone's opinion is at least heard, and everyone's opinion – along with the person giving it – is valued.

For example, my lodge building has the luxury of having a Royal Arch chapter, an Order of the Eastern Star chapter, and a Rainbow assembly. We used to do things together, like dinners which were open to the community and proceeds we would split. We would attend each other's functions out of respect and support. Everyone would pitch in. Now, we don't seem to do that anymore. It's just easier to stay within our respective organizations and not collaborate.

I would submit to you that it is an incorrect approach. Working together in the past brought exposure to each other's organizations, their challenges and values. Both the youth group and members of the OES helped with lodge dinners. The lodge helped with activities of the Eastern Star. The Royal Arch Chapter pitched in, too; several of the members of one organization were already members of the others. It offered stability. But in addition to lethargy brought on by an inward focus and reinforced by the habits of non-participation we developed with the COVID-19 pandemic years, we've drifted apart.

If you have the luxury of other organizations meeting in your lodge building, now is the time for you to have some sit-down meetings and discuss things openly about what you can do together. It's time to be intentional about getting together, building relationships, reinforcing each other and learning from each other again. And, it's time for an infusion of youthful thinking.

We need, as organizations, to be really listening to the needs, wants and interests of our younger members and new prospects. That can keep them interested in our activities, we learn from them, and they learn from us. And, everyone – because we listen to them – feels valued.

It may require **change** – there's that word again. Change may be hard, but *closing a lodge* because we won't invest in change that drives member retention, member growth and member participation is a lot harder. Each lodge has its own culture, its own heritage, and its own place in the community. But, keeping a lodge a viable entity requires work, more than older members like me can devote. Besides wanting to keep and attract new members to keep a lodge so that we can impart Masonic history, values and traditions, we also need new blood to perpetuate the lodge.

A common goal on which most everyone in lodge and appendant bodies can agree: connecting with the community. There is so much need out there – needs that we can address. We just need to know what those needs are, and something that's within our lodge's and chapter's ability to address. Let's combine forces and address those needs, all the while learning from each other and showing our communities what we stand for. If your lodge isn't already active in the community, changing that would be a change for the better.

If you are in a community that has other community-minded and engaged organizations, it is time to have conversations with them to determine if there are ways you can team together to address community needs.

So, if change is needed – and in most lodges that is the case – then we best expend the effort to change and incorporate the "new" to retain and attract new members. We don't need to sacrifice Masonic values and traditions to do so; just create space alongside them to add things of value that both existing and new members want to see as well.

Old and new can peacefully co-exist and even prosper, if we put forth the effort to make it so. Without change, we die. And I think that's something on which both old, newer and new members can agree they do **not** want to happen. Let's use the heritage, combined thinking and energy of each group and our members to help us all thrive.

