

Managing Change

All of us need to examine our current behavior and see how well we are equipped to handle the future. Retirement, a change in careers, a change in marital status or “empty nesting” all cause change in our lives and for some of us this change is unsettling, to say the least.

Most leaders looking at their organization’s role in the 21st century and beyond have decided that they must revisit their charter and mission to determine if the organization will be relevant in the years ahead. For most that means change and change can often mean look out!

Going it alone is tough

There are few organizations where one individual has been able to effect all of the changes of the type your lodge or Masonic organization may be facing. Clearly, change appears easier when the effort is shared by a team. So it makes good sense to learn how to get people on your team and on your side.

Where to begin the process

We must first understand that this is going to be a more difficult process if your lodge has been resistant to change. And many have been! If your lodge exhibits all or most of these characteristics, you may need to plan carefully for change.

- *The majority of active members are very elderly*
- *The lodge resists most new ideas*
- *There is some conflict between younger and older members*
- *The lodge is much the same as it was 5 to 8 years ago*
- *Membership in the lodge is declining steadily*
- *You have difficulty attracting younger members or retaining the interest of those you have*
- *You have difficulty involving the lodge with youth programs and events*
- *Members insist that events be the same at every meeting*
- *The lodge has become increasingly removed from the community*
- *Family events are not well attended by younger families*

Be willing to change or else

Why change? The members of most organizations ask that question all too frequently. Sears’ leaders asked that question nearly a decade ago and came within a hair’s breath of not making it to the 21st century because they had not paid attention to changes in who was doing the shopping in America. “Come see the softer side of Sears” was part of their answer aimed at attracting women into the store.

The railroads asked the question “why change?” in the middle 50’s and nearly got sidetracked into oblivion. Amtrak was their

public-conscious solution.

And, in the classic case of the 20th century, Detroit refused to listen to Edward Demming who was telling America automobile manufacturers that the American people wanted cars that would not only look good but run well. When they failed to listen to his prediction for the future, he took his ideas to Japan and for the next decade the Japanese owned the American car market.

So you think you’re looking at change?

Clearly, you are not only going to have to consider change in your role as the leader, but you’re also going to need to get people on your side.



The following organizations face enormous changes - many every day! Imagine how ready they must be for change and how they get employees who can live with constant change.

- *IBM and Microsoft bring to market 25 new products every day!*
- *Ford typically makes 23 changes in the new model car*
- *Boeing has put all aircraft drawings on a computer because manuals could not keep up with the pace of change*
- *AT&T changes more than 123,000 numbers every day*
- *The Girl Scout and Boy Scout manuals have changed every 10 years*

While all this change was happening all around us, dues for most lodges have remained nearly the same for 40 years.

Where do Changes Come From?

Usually forces for change come from outside the organization. These outside forces can be events, planned or unplanned occasions, the views of one or more influential men or, as is unfortunately often the case, the bad news an organization can receive in the press. Information the Masonic Renewal Committee of North America has been publishing about changes lodges must consider should inspire change.

In Masonry, some Grand Jurisdictions as well as Michigan, have begun to offer one-day classes as an alternative because nonmembers told them they needed to consider this option. Lodges are offering more involvement in the community and with the family, not because the members said this was correct, but because nonmembers and others in the community have said these are important considerations for the lodge to review.

Why Change?

Let’s consider first things first. Change what? Masons say all too frequently, “It was good enough for my father and his father, so what’s wrong with the way it is?”

What do the membership records for your lodge show? Here are some facts about most lodges. Are these realities strong enough

to create change?

- Membership is down 50% from 40 years ago.
- Membership is declining by nearly 3.5% each year and will continue to do so.
- Deaths and demits exceed new initiates.
- The average age is 66.6 up from 62.5 five years ago.
- More than half of the members are over 66.
- Losses due to deaths will accelerate for several more years.
- Interest among younger men is almost nonexistent.
- Many new Masons do not proceed past the EA Degree.
- Most people do not know or understand what Freemasonry is all about.

If this list of problems is too long and overwhelming for you, don't worry. You will only have to make progress on several fronts for your efforts to be important.

Making decisions about what to change is one of the skills of the leader. The choices you make will probably affect your organization for years to come so you need to consider what to change very carefully.

When you look at change, what are you really doing?

Max DePree in his excellent book *Leadership is an Art* said it this way: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor."

What's the current reality of your lodge? Determining this, together with creating a powerful vision, will enable you to begin the change process in earnest. To create this current reality, imagine that you could view your lodge from space. By doing so, you could observe events without being emotionally involved in them. Auditors and consultants do this for organizations all the time, so give it a try. Be very careful that you do not become emotionally involved with your observations, or the change process will be all that more difficult.

Prioritizing your list

If your lodge is like most lodges, you will have quite a list of required changes. Clearly, there are too many items to tackle at one time. Go through your list of observations. Prioritize them by listing them in categories as A, B and C. Your A list will be the critical changes you will want to begin right away. Your C list can wait and your B list is somewhere in between. Some leaders prioritize them by years indicating which changes they expect to complete in year 1, year 2 and so on. Most Masonic leaders are only in a position as the leader for one year. Therefore, the A list is most important, making it imperative to involve the junior officers to ensure the B and C lists are part of their plans.

Change, Change, Change. Does Everything Have to Change?

Of course not. No organization has to change every aspect of its

products or customers. The process of re-engineering (a popular idea today) is usually focused upon several important changes at first. As progress is made, more and more changes are made as more and more problems are solved. In the lodge, many things do have to change. What many Masons who have been thinking about change, but who have not actually started the process say:

We don't need to change the ritual.

We don't need to change the fundamental tenets.

We don't need to change what Masons stand for.

It is correct; these need not change. But if you want to make your lodge more interesting and inviting, you should make sure the time devoted to each, and the demands you make upon your new members are also in keeping with their needs.

Change: It All Has to Do With Paradigms

We often ask ourselves why change is so difficult and why we are so resistant to change? Joel Barker, a futurist, claims to have the answer to why we so often overlook the changes that are needed or why change is so difficult. He claims it all has to do with *paradigms*.

Paradigms are rules or boundaries in our life that guide our decision making and problem solving. Change is more difficult, he claims, because we sometimes need to break the rules to make something different happen. Barker thinks these rules often keep us from seeing future opportunities for our organization. It's as though we have blinders on. He says that not long ago we all agreed:

Cheap gas forever

Japanese products will always be junk

Cable TV will never catch on

Computers are just a toy

And boy were we wrong!

You, too, can change the rules. Masons who resist change by saying "we've never done it that way" need to get out of the way of those who are making change happen.

The Skills Required for Managing Change

There are many ways in which change affects the lodge. And, as a leader there are specific skills to manage the change process. Five very good skills include:

- *Tackle the easiest changes first and make success happen.*
- *Build a team of advocates and set them to work on a problem.*
- *Do things that benefit members early in the process.*
- *Communicate carefully with your members.*
- *Build constituency with your newest members.*

For many new Masons, one important reason for joining was to be in an organization that was well led. They pointed out that too often the Master of the lodge is a wonderful Mason, but missing the skills of the enabled leader. To move the Fraternity into the 21st century, leaders of our Masonic organizations must learn that making decisions about what to change is one of the most important skills of a leader. The choices made will probably affect the organization for years to come.