

2007-2008 MASTER'S REPORT

The television flickers to life and immediately your eyes are drawn to a well-proportioned female who is wearing a tight fitting leotard, a headband indicates that she has obviously worked up a sweat; and she says, "The competition is tough out there!" OR "No pain, No gain!" OR something that will incite us to join the health spa being advertised. Another message that strikes me is, "if you want it, you've got to work at it." Then there is the sports hero, male or female, sweating the color of the Gatorade he or she just swallowed OR the Nike motto, "Just do it!"

Well, fifteen years ago, I was fortunate enough to attend the Conference of Grand Masters in Alexandria, Virginia. Just about every Grand Jurisdiction represented had the same, by-now-not-so-unique, problem of declining membership. During those three very busy days, we were inundated with a number of "quick fixes" for this problem, so much so, that I've had nightmares about some of them. And then I tied my Masonic learnings to my prior profession, and I have discovered the true answer.

First, let me digress to my profession which is known by a number of names (probably because someone once discovered that it is indeed difficult to hit a moving target), such as: information processing, data processing, computer systems engineering, computer programming or just plain scapegoat. (The latter is born of the admonition that "To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer.") In this fine and not so ancient profession, we have developed the propensity to solve problems with "quick fix." I guesstimate that when I was an active programmer, systems analyst or even project manager, I spent 40 to 80 percent of my career trying to fix the quick fix, either by re-engineering the system that has been "quick fixed" into a coma OR by developing a new system to replace one that has been "quick fixed" to death. So although it kept the bread on the table, I am NOT enamored of "quick fixes."

Then I thought about what we as masons are taught in the third degree: time, patience and perseverance accomplish all things and I applied them to this year. You see, we may not have made a giant step forward for Freemasonry in general or St. John's in particular, but we did make a move, ever so hesitating, in the right direction.

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How did we do this you may well ask, I do? First, we had a meal before every regular meeting. What did we lose? A few dollars, which were well covered in our budget. What did we gain? A few new folks came out, a few attended more than once, but that doesn't mean a grand increase in our total attendance. Really we gained a camaraderie and fellowship that breaking bread together creates. Was it worth the cost (after all, that is the big question in life now-a-days)? I defer to the Master Card commercial: chicken cacciatore for 20 - \$65; Caesar Salad for 20 - \$45; foccacia bread for 20 - \$16; breaking bread with your Brothers – PRICELESS.

We added "The First Annual Great Chili Cook off". What did we lose? A couple of tickets to 2 events and a \$75 gift certificate to the Hunter's Den. What did we gain? A heck of a lot of fun!!! Again, the friendship and fellowship of all who attended. Awakened taste buds. Great comments even to this day. Was it worth the cost? Hey, brothers are still talking about it and a couple have already mentioned new recipes they would like to try. I have even been given a "raw recipe" to bring. So, you tell me, what was the program started by the immediate Past Grand Master? How about this Grand Master? (And they get a heck of a lot more publicity than we do!)

We tried another fund raising avenue with shirts, hats, aprons, bibs, etc. What did we lose? ABSOLUTELY ZERO. What have we gained? About \$2 average per shirt, \$1 on each additional item. Was it worth it? Sure, our other avenues for fund raising aren't as well attended. Perhaps, it is less frequently attended because it is the same thing, perhaps.

We also tried a new method for raising funds for the Masonic Home. Every Mason has to realize that, in the Blue Lodge, we have one and only one charity, and that is the Masonic Home. It is our duty to raise funds for it or donate to it. We have tried the donation path. We have tried the incentives to increase donations path. Both were successful, but both depleted funds. This year we held a raffle of a Masonic Afghan. What did we lose? \$75. What did we gain? Well, we had a heated competition among our brethren and Brother Tom Stiles declared he was out to win it. The winner was Pat Hartsell after buying 2 tickets. Was it worth it? Absolutely. The afghan was covered in the budget and was far less than we spent the last two years out in donations or incentives. We had a lot of fun.

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We added “the Master’s Hat award”. What did it cost? \$100 for the year. What did we gain? A little fun, a lot of kidding and some smiling faces. Was it worth it? I can’t tell, you will have to tell me.

We supercharged our website. What did it cost? A lot of time for Senior Warden David Parker. Some extra time for me. What did we gain? At one point, Dave told me we were the second or third highest hit rate for those looking for St. John. Was it worth it? I think so; I don’t know if Dave thinks so (he put in a lot more effort than I did). But, I would like to continue to add messages during the summer and post information as I can come across it. I also have access to Bob Rinehart’s addresses when he was Grand Master. Unfortunately, they are not in an electronic form and will require some work to get them ship-shape, but I would like to get them posted to the website for all posterity. In addition, we learned from the speaker at the Jesse Green Priory Night of Enlightenment, that the George Washington National Masonic Memorial is planning to make great strides in digitizing records, proceedings, information, etc. because our “now” generations, the ones we need to draw our membership from, are so electronically oriented.

Bottomline. We were under budget overall in expenses. Grand Master’s visit cost less, Ladies at the Table was less cost than planned, no Past Master’s apron and banquet cost, reduced bank charges, podium for the east was repaired for 2 tickets to the Grand Master’s visit and several other areas did well. Income was a little higher than anticipated with 4 not 2 Entered Apprentices, a higher interest rate on investments at the beginning of the year, etc. Financially, we are sound.

What went wrong? Our big weakness at this point is in the officer line. We have fine dedicated officers willing to perform their duties; however, we do not have interest in progressing. Consequently, we are using up our Past Masters’ energies to continue to keep the Lodge alive and functioning. What we need are several dedicated men, willing to stick it out for several years to make it through the line. This will strengthen our corps of Past Masters giving us

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a larger rotation base for as long as we need to “recycle” Past Masters. For this problem, I do not have a quick solution. I hope and pray every evening that we can turn the trend around.

So, to conclude, I thank the officers and members for their support. I ask each and every one of you to pray for our Past Masters that they may stay healthy. For if they do not, we will have to close up shop. I ask that you continue to support our Lodge with your time and talents. Your presence is much appreciated. This little poem about *The Bridge Builder*¹ explains our duty as Masons and my duty as Worshipful Master:

The Bridge Builder

An old man going down a lone highway
Came in the evening cold and gray
To a chasm vast and deep and wide
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
That swollen stream held no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,
“You are wasting your strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again must pass this way;
You have crossed the chasm deep and wide--
Why build you this bridge at the eventide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head.
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said
“There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This swollen stream which was naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him.”

God bless Freemasonry and God Bless St. John's Lodge No. 2. **SO MOTE IT BE!**

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Fraternally submitted,

Herbert J Atkinson,
Past Grand Master,
Worshipful Master

¹ 1. Ferguson, Howard E., "The Bridge Builder", *The Edge*; Getting the Edge Company; Cleveland, OH; 1990; Page 8-1.