

Lodge Etiquette

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Preamble

As part of the ever increasingly busy lives we lead, it is easy to take the path of least resistance. The slippery slope from what starts as cutting corners, quickly becomes habit, and leads to the norm. This does not make it correct, just improper standards. Constant care must be exercised to ensure proper etiquette is maintained before, during, and after lodge meetings.

Forms of Address

All too often it has been heard in lodge that a brother is addressed as Wor. Smith or Rt. Wor. Smith. This is totally incorrect as the most important part of the address is Brother. If we lose the title of brother in our addresses to each other we have lost everything as it is the basis on which Masonry is predicated. The Master and Wardens must set the example for the rest of the lodge to follow, as it is their lead that the new members will follow. Further the officials of Grand Lodge have a distinct way of being addressed. For example in introducing the Grand Master or District Deputy Grand Master it should be:

The Most Worshipful the Grand Master or The Most Worshipful the Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother Smith or The Most Worshipful the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, Most Worshipful Brother Smith or The Right Worshipful District Deputy Grand Master of Phoenix District, Right Worshipful Brother Smith. This can be followed by, "on his official visit" or if not official visit then "on his visit". All announcements should be clear, distinct and not rushed. Review the ritual with all officers as to the proper way to receive Grand Lodge Officers and execute Grand Honours. If all else fails it is totally proper to address anyone by the title Brother eliminating all titles unless on official business.

Courtesy

When a Past Master or other member of higher active or past rank enters the lodge after it has been opened it is Masonic Courtesy that the master will call up the lodge. It is only right and proper that his position is recognized.

It used to be that when a lodge was invited to visit they were escorted into lodge by the Director of Ceremonies and an experienced Past Master of that lodge. They were then escorted to the altar where they were given Grand Honours three Times. It added a nice and classy touch and showed the appreciation of the lodge for their visit. This practice too should not be abandoned for the sake of convenience or time. Visitation is a right and privilege and should be treated as such by the host lodge.

Greeting Visitors

Too many times I have seen a visiting brother being left to his own devices in the outer precincts of the lodge before a meeting. No brother should be left to his own devices as he may never come back, but worse yet he may tell other Masonic friends that they should not visit there as it is a very cold lodge and not friendly to visitors. A caring lodge will ensure that he is greeted warmly, introduced around and that he is seated with and under the care of a member of the host lodge, both upstairs and downstairs. In my estimation the master should greet the visitor in lodge and one of the best I have seen is the visitor being

introduced to the lodge at the alter and then the master and wardens advancing to him to shake his hand and welcoming him to his temporary Masonic home.

It is the master's prerogative to invite any visitor to sit with him in the east, Past Master or not! Especially if he is a visitor from far away.

Some Lodges still use a visiting card that he may take back with him to his mother lodge. This extends fraternal greetings to other Masonic Lodges and makes a nice keep sake for him.

The master and his wardens should be in the foyer to visit with his members and visitors, not running around at the last minute taking care of business. That should be done long before, a Lodge is a people place and a venue to meet and visit friends.

Length of Meetings

Far too many meetings are only reoccurring business, the same time after time. The master should not be afraid to have the minutes confirmed and something of interest put in its stead. Here I am talking of Masonic Education. This education can take many forms such as papers, discussions, partial exemplifications, speakers, etc. Make it varied, make it different, make it often. Just remember the length should be what the backside can stand. Ten to fifteen minutes is ample. Variety and interest yields a steady attendance and active interested members.

A general rule of thumb should be that for every hour of time spent upstairs there should be an hour downstairs for the members to visit. Too often the meeting drags on leaving precious little time for the social hour. If you wonder why fewer members and visitors go downstairs look at your watch next time lodge is closed and you will know. Everyone has a family to be with, a loving wife at home and a job the next day. Getting home at 11:00 or 11:30 or later does not cut it. It is in my mind the height of discourtesy to place member or visitor in conflict with his public or private avocations. Could this be one reason why attendance and visitation is not as strong as we would wish it to be?

One last point to consider in this area is the number of candidates that a lodge processes at a time. I have seen third degrees where five candidates were given the ceremony at one time. It was 11:45 P.M. before the lodge was closed down and then there was the festivities downstairs, I wonder what time they got home?

Is one or two candidates at a time enough considering the time commitment?

Balloting

A ballot belongs to the Master of the Lodge and the Senior Deacon is in charge of it for him. He should not surrender the ballot box to anyone but the Master. When he goes to the wardens to have the ballot inspected he must keep his hand on the ballot box and thereby in control. At the alter he is on guard so to speak but in the east he surrenders the ballot box to the worshipful master.

In some lodges it is accepted practice that when the members of the lodge rise to attend the ballot the visitor seated in that area will rise and salute the Worshipful Master, Addressing the chair, "Worshipful Master". This shows respect to the host lodge for the serious task they are performing and the solemnity of the occasion.

Perambulation

All officers and members should walk with dignity and purpose. All too often it is apparent or appears that the members on the floor do not know where they are going or are not sure what they are to do. Walk with dignity and pride even if you don't know what you are doing, at least it looks good. In processing around the lodge the senior member should always be on the right, that is with the senior member nearest the altar. Rules of Precedence: In the order of procession check the Grand Lodge Rules but in general the junior members should always be at the front followed by the officers then the Past Masters and behind them the Past Grand Lodge Officers with the Master of the Lodge at the rear. Always remember the end of the line is the place of honour. This place of honour applies not only here but also in the order of speaking. After the Master has spoken it is not proper for anyone else to speak except for a visiting grand Lodge Officer. As an example on the official visit of the D.D.G.M. after he has addressed the lodge at the end of the meeting no one may speak again not even the master of the lodge. It is improper Masonic etiquette to do so.

Dress

All members should respect and abide by the standard set by the lodge for dress. In some lodges it is expected that all members should arrive in business suits. This applies to all members and visitors. Other lodges have set the standard at a tuxedo for all meetings. The visitors then would follow suit if they wished but if not then fall back to the next standard of dress, the business suit. It is proper etiquette to follow the standards of the group.

General Points

- The Worshipful Master should at all times be addressed as Worshipful Master. Never is he referred to as a sitting Worshipful Master he is the Worshipful Master or at a stretch as the current Worshipful Master.
- The Worshipful Master should return all salutes. During Lodge the officers should be addressed by their rank and title of office for example Brother Senior Deacon.
- Members of the lodge are called 'Brethren' not brothers. At all times the lodge brethren should be addressed by rank and surname.
- The officers do not surrender the collar of their office to anyone at anytime for any reason.
- The Worshipful Master and his officers should arrive well before the time for the opening of lodge in order to ensure that everything may be ready and in order to greet the brethren.
- Brethren who are summoned or invited to attend lodge at a specified hour will exhibit the best etiquette if they are on time.
- The lodge should be opened promptly at the hour specified.
- The Worshipful Master should arrange his schedule of business so that visitors may be received within one half hour after the scheduled time of opening. It is scant hospitality to keep visitors waiting in the anteroom.
- Meetings should be organized and conducted with expedience so that the brethren can get home at a reasonable hour.
- A brother who wishes to address lodge should rise salute the Worshipful Master and wait for the Worshipful Master to recognize him by returning his salute before beginning to speak.

- All remarks are addressed by courtesy to the Worshipful Master. Motions should be made and seconded promptly.
- Two brothers should not attempt to speak at once, nor should one interrupt another. Interruption is the prerogative of the Worshipful Master alone.
- It is extremely discourteous for members or visitors to engage in private conversations while business and ceremonies are being conducted.
- Details of business should be discussed to the extent that is needful. It is improper before an election to speak in the body of a lodge or outside a lodge for or against any candidate.
- It is also improper to politic for any candidate in any Masonic election.
- It is highly improper for any one to reveal how he balloted or to ask anyone how he balloted, the ballot is always secret.