

Should there be Fun in Masonry?

Parkwood Lodge No. 695 – February 9, 2012

South West in the early 2000 was one of the few airlines making a profit. The company's Mission Statement – "People rarely succeed at anything unless they are having fun doing it." This was an airline that is suggesting that their staff should be having fun at work. I'm thinking, that as one of a few hundred passengers on a jumbo jet, do I want my pilot having fun? I believe that they were referring to enjoyment of their work and not frivolous fun. There is a time to be serious and a time to relax.

I would suggest that if having fun at work is good for business, then having fun as a volunteer must be a good idea. It has been proven that having fun in business can make a significant difference in the result. If a volunteer is not enjoying the experience they just won't continue to serve; while in business employees may be unhappy but "show up" just to collect their wages. In business it's obvious that attitude reflects employee unhappiness but in a volunteer organization we are left with the question of where did they go or what happened to that brother?

Now no one should suggest that we are Masons just to have fun; but the lodges whose members can't wait to get to the next meeting have a significant amount of fun blended with sincere fellowship along with the serious ritual.

Whether it is flying an airplane or attending lodge there is a place for everything. I'm sure that most of you have been to a funeral and heard the words from Ecclesiastes Chapter III verses 1 to 8. I will now quote from the New Living Translation of the Bible –

A Time for Everything

- 1 For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.
- 2 A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.
- 3 A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.
- 6 A time to search and a time to quit searching.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

8 A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace

I would like to add—a 9 for today's 9th: -

A time to be serious and a time to have fun

A time to work and a time to play.

Let me assure you that all work and no play makes for a very dull brother.

In July 2010, I attended the "member's luncheon" at the Shriners Imperial Convention in Toronto and heard Bro. Jeff Sowder – Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kansas and soon to be Imperial Potentate-- make this statement: "Keep them Happy, they will stay." As Shriners are Masons; then this should also apply to Masonry at all levels. If so, what does it take to keep them happy?

We often hear of the concern for shrinking memberships and lack of attendance at our lodge meetings. Do they leave because they are bored and find outside activities more meaningful, satisfying and more fun? How often do we appoint a committee to carry out an exit interview to find out why that brother decided to ask for his demit? Should we do some surveys to find out why some of our members are not attending on a regular basis? These activities could provide us with some answers to our concerns.

It is my understanding that Masonry worldwide expanded at an exceptional rate during the '30s, '40s and '50s of the last century. Our jurisdiction had a membership of approximately 150,000 Masons. The lodges must have been very busy doing multiple degrees at every meeting to have arrived at this significant number. Did our lodges become degree machines to meet the demand of men desiring to become brothers and forget the importance of fun and fellowship? Feasts and fellowship had been a landmark in Masonry and was one of the two reasons why lodges in England organized in 1717. It would appear to me that ritual has now taken precedence over fellowship.

Masonry over the last century has been a serious organization with the occasional social function. Ritual delivered properly has a rhythm to it that is very enjoyable and pleasant to listen to.

I have had the opportunity over the years to watch many volunteer organizations rise and fall. In every case whether it was a service club, lodge, church or community organization there was an increase in membership and activity if the members were having fun as they carried out their duties. This held true in reverse that if the organization had boring meetings and no fun the membership and activities dropped off significantly.

As leaders we do need to be original in our approach to ensuring that the members are enjoying themselves. I recently heard of one lodge that had a banquet, which they invited their wives to attend, before each meeting. When it came time for the meeting the brethren assembled in the lodge room and the wives went on their way or had some other type of planned activity. This may not work for all of our lodges but it points out that we do need to look outside the box for some original ideas. A few examples that I have come across are – monthly breakfasts, past masters’ luncheon, theatre night with the wives and widows, pot luck feast before lodge, etc. The success of such an event should be measured by the quality of the fellowship not on the number of members present. I have also found that there is a direct relationship between the quality and quantity of food and drink and the level of fellowship that occurs.

If a Mason leaves the lodge room or the banquet room with a smile on his face he has probably had a good time. If the experience was a good one, chances are that he will be back, show an interest and be prepared to take on some new work or even take on one of the chairs.

Show me a lodge that is getting new members, expanding with ideas and activities and I will show you a lodge where the members are having “Fun.”

Yes, there should be fun in Masonry; the kind that you get from learning, from enjoyment and from satisfaction. We are a volunteer organization and the brethren come to meetings because they want to, not because they have to.

Whole New Mind – Daniel Pink
New Living Translation of the Bible

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