

SPONSORSHIP - SOMETIMES CALLED THE LONELY BROTHER

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Have you ever been lonely? Have you ever been left alone at a party, where you didn't know a soul except for the person who brought you?

How about being left alone in a city where your guide, so to speak, has left you to fend for yourself? That even sounds lonely, doesn't it? What if you are alone and cannot even speak the language? Scary, eh?

Well Brothers, that's almost what it is like to be brought into a Lodge, initiated, passed, and raised to the Sublime degree of a Master Mason, and then being ignored or neglected by your sponsor, as well as everyone else.

Think about all the weird and strange goings on during degrees. It could be enough to drive a new Brother away.

We should take a more serious look at our responsibilities as sponsors.

Let's start with the application. To begin with I don't think a newly raised Brother should sponsor anybody for initiation for at least one year.

Let me refresh your memory concerning a portion of the Charge in the Entered Apprentice Degree: " If in the circle of your acquaintance, you meet a person desirous of being initiated into the Order, be particularly careful NOT to recommend him, unless you are CONVINCED, that he will conform to the principles of the Order, that the honour and reputation of the Fraternity will be firmly established, and the World at large convinced of its good effect."

Did you catch the word NOT? Be careful not to recommend him! How about the word CONVINCED?

Brothers, a newly raised Brother does not yet fully understand the glory, honour, and reputation of the Fraternity, let alone all of the principles, so how can he honestly recommend someone else for something that he doesn't fully understand?

You know, Masonic Lodges do not annually give pins to brothers for recruiting new members as some service clubs do. Brothers, we are not a service club. We are a fraternity. Mind you, our membership has been declining quite steadily, but

it's better to lose what once were good members than to be recruiting many poor members.

So, let's suppose that you are sure that you know what you are doing, and you want to sponsor a friend into the Order. Well, that's great, and nice going. You get the application from the secretary, and you fill it out with the proposed candidate. Or you are co-sponsoring a person. Now here's a mistake that we see happen every so often. A brother brings in an application with only one sponsor's signature. He says, "I need another signature", and he asks you to sign. You don't know the applicant from Adam, but you sign it anyway. Pardon me for saying so brothers, but that's a very careless as well as a very stupid move.

Do you know what you're doing? How can an experienced Master Mason recommend someone he doesn't know? Stop and think about it. We may say "well Bill's a good Mason, so if he is recommending this guy, he must be okay. WRONG! You're putting your reputation on the line as far as I am concerned. What if this person is bad news for us? What if he degrades the order? Well, Bill has something to think about, the damage he has done. Brothers, don't be part of it. Don't be afraid to tell the other sponsor why you can not sign. Check it out first. He should understand. Just remember - a co-sponsor has as much responsibility as the main sponsor.

So, you have signed or co-signed and the application has been processed and the entered apprentice degree is coming up. Have you seen the candidate since he signed the application? Have you been keeping him informed as to just what's happening with the application? Have you told him about the investigating committee? Did you speak to him after the committee met with him and maybe with his wife? Does he have any further questions since he met with them? Did they confuse him? Can you re-assure him?

These are sponsor's responsibilities to candidates and to masonry. Don't turn in an application and then forget it. I've seen a brother sponsor a person and not even show up for any of the degrees. As a matter of fact, he rarely shows up at all.

So anyway - it's degree night. One of the sponsors should volunteer to act as the conductor for the degree. Let the candidate know that he is among friends. Then after lodge, in the banquet room, stick with him. Answer his questions. Try introducing him to the other brothers. They know him - he doesn't necessarily know them.

Between then and the fellow craft degree, stay in touch with him, work with him. Coach him - explain the work of proving up to him. Let him know the importance of proving himself. Volunteer to ask him the questions that he must learn and then volunteer your services and become part of the degree team. It won't hurt. You may surprise yourself and become part of the conferring of degrees. It's a superb feeling.

Then after the proving, be conductor for the second or Fellowcraft degree. Make sure that your protege (and that's what he is) does you "proud". Coach him and guide him in the proving of the fellowcraft degree and once again be conductor for the master mason degree. Let him know that the degree will be a long one and encourage him to relax and learn and above all, keep re-assuring him that nothing harmful or embarrassing is going to happen to him.

Encourage your new brother to have a little speech prepared to be given after the master mason degree is conferred enabling him to tell his reasons for wanting to become a freemason as well as his feelings toward the craft at this stage. This helps to stop any embarrassment he may experience on being called upon by the master for a few remarks.

Okay - So now you have a person that you sponsored. He has received his master mason degree. Then what? Shake his hand| Congratulate him! Say good night and run out and find another candidate and forget him. Wrong again! Your work is just starting. Work with the new master mason again on proving his third degree. Take him visiting. Show that you and the lodge are interested in him and in his future Masonic development.

Guide him around before lodge opens - explain the three fancy seats that he sees - sit with him during the opening and closing. Let him know when the sign of fidelity is given, the voting sign, the responses to prayers and to the senior deacon's closing.

After lodge, ask if he has any questions. If you don't know the answer, find out for him. Let him know that even though you are experienced in the craft, you and all the rest of us are still learning and that no one knows it all.

Explain about grand lodge officers and official visits, the protocol, i.e., no passing between the master and the alter, the grand honors, the official visitor has

the last word and to not speak after he unless he departs from the lodge before the meeting ends.

Help him to feel part of things. To be wanted.

Do you remember your sponsors? You should. Were you pleased to have them as your chaperons? Were you proud of them? Did they lead you through your first year or so in an educational manner? Did you look to them for guidance? Do you still look up to them? If they are setting the proper example, you should be looking up to them.

What about yourself? Have you ever sponsored or co-sponsored anyone, and if so, how would they answer the questions I just asked? It's food for thought.

My brothers, we should encourage those we sponsor to attend regularly. Help get them started on a degree team, and to participate in extra lodge events.

If we see a sponsored individual being neglected, we should step in and be a sideline sponsor, if we want to call it that, and offer our services to the sponsor and his candidate. If you want to be diplomatic about it, and we should be, tell the sponsor that you haven't sponsored anyone in a while (and most of us probably haven't) and you would like to assist him. You know - be nice!

One big mistake that's made many times is to drag a new brother further on to chapter, etc. It may be very nice for the concordant bodies, but it's not helping the new brother. He doesn't know what the first three degrees are about yet, and we ask him to go beyond and join other lodges.

I've had new master masons ask for my advice. Their sponsors have encouraged them to join chapter and they don't know if they should. I tell them - NO, NO, No. Become proficient in what they have started and then consider going further.

I have on different occasions asked the sponsors to lay off and I explain why. And you know, some didn't even realize what they were doing until it was pointed out to them.

And you know what else? Most told me that THEY were encouraged by THEIR sponsors to go on, and I know that some of their sponsors did nothing to help their protegee in the previous degrees, so what help can the person hope to receive from him in the next degrees?

Brothers! Be cautious but be Masonic when you decide to sponsor a new candidate. Be proud of the order and be determined to turn out knowledgeable and well informed master masons. Remember - good training starts with good sponsorship.

Be a sponsor ---- be a good sponsor. Do us proud brothers.