

# A Membership Initiative for Lodges

## Five steps of recruitment, orientation, and retention

### Getting Started

#### **The Master's role-**

The Master and Officers must be willing and able to be a major contributor to the membership program. The Master's enthusiastic involvement, support, and willingness to cooperate are vital to the overall success of the program. Lodge line officers must agree to the long-term commitment of a membership plan in order to assure long-term results.

The Master first needs to wisely pick a Membership Committee Chairman. The Chairman should have a working knowledge of Lodge procedures and be acquainted with most of the Lodge's active members. He must not have a closed mind or a preconceived notion of how the program will be organized, but he should be open to new ideas and allow everyone input.

The Master then needs to allow the Chairman to pick a committee and plan time for that committee to meet with the general Lodge members. The Master also needs to meet with the Chairman on a regular basis, to assist him with budget requirements as well other committee needs.

#### **The role of the Membership Chairman-**

The Membership Chairman's main duty is to run his committee. He has the responsibility to help determine its direction and to make sure it stays on course. He needs to assign tasks and timelines for the completion of those tasks. He needs to evaluate the committee's progress to motivate and reward its members.

#### **Duties of the Membership Committee-**

The Membership Committee needs to approach their duties with a positive attitude. They need to understand the frustrations of the past and fulfill their assigned tasks with confidence and determination.

## The Open Forum

A good way to help assure successful planning is for the Lodge to hold an Open Forum retreat night. A retreat is designed to help a Lodge look at where it is now and where it is headed. It will allow time to assess, dream, set goals, determine plans, set a timeline and organize in a positive, open environment. It commits Lodge members to the idea that new membership is important and it gives the membership committee an idea of what obstacles it might encounter.

It is suggested that this special meeting be held on the same night as, and in place of, a regular meeting. This will minimize distractions and involve those who might not attend a special meeting on a separate night. This meeting should be well published to all Lodge members.

The meeting should be run by the Membership Committee Chairman and minutes must be taken to record ideas and plans that develop from those ideas. A flip chart may be useful to record ideas for the group to see and build upon. Some questions that might start discussion might include:

1. What level in the “Lodge Recognition Program” is the Lodge now? Where are we now and where do we want to go?

*We need a quality product that attracts new members.*

2. How strong is the administration of the Lodge?  
The Level of Masonic Light is often a direct byproduct of administration.

*The Lodge needs administrative strength and leadership to enable it to move forward.*

3. How is the health of the Lodge? Are interpersonal relationships among members positive and supportive?

*Do the Lodge leaders communicate together regularly and effectively?*

4. If the budget is set for the year and there are no funds for the program, it is better to continue with the planning stage and submit the membership budget for consideration the following year.

*Keep in mind potential expenses like advertising and public relations.*

5. Do we all really want to grow? Why? If so, how much? Each brother needs to understand and be committed to the advantages of having new members.

*Remember: It is the whole Lodge that will make membership growth a reality.*

Consider playing the twelve minute video that is available through Grand Lodge entitled “Share the Light”. It focuses on how to approach new prospects as well as tips on mentoring.

The Committee Chair might then define the terms of recruitment, orientation, and retention. Here is a working definition of each:

- **“Recruitment”** refers to the process of attracting new members. The recruitment effort involves not only the initial Lodge guest night, but the whole process of preparing a petitioner for membership. Although the membership committee plays the major role, other Lodge entities contribute information and expertise.
- **“Orientation”** refers to the process of helping a new member feel comfortable, informed and connected to the Lodge as a whole. The orientation period usually lasts about a year. Lodges that have a high rate of retention generally do a good job of informing and including new brothers, helping them learn, and provide opportunities for friendships to develop.
- **“Retention”** refers to whatever it takes to keep members interested and involved in the Lodge.

## A Marketing Plan

### **The first consideration should be to public relations:**

Masonry has a long tradition of “keeping our light under a bushel.” As a result, recent surveys find that fewer than 35% of males in the United States have ever heard the name “Mason” or “Freemason”.

The Public Relations Chairman is the representative, spokesman, and point of information for Masons in your Lodge regarding activities and events. If the Lodge already has a Public Relations Chairman, he should be encouraged to work directly with the Membership Committee. If there is no Public Relations Chairman, a Brother on the Membership Committee might be chosen to fulfill this need.

### **News releases**

News releases do not directly reflect the goals of a membership campaign, but few people will join an organization they’ve never heard of. News releases should be a constant consideration for any Lodge.

While preparing general news releases, the PR Chairman should concentrate on the needs of the Press. A newspaper, magazine, radio station, television station, or any medium that publishes or broadcasts regularly, faces the problem of filling space or time with news, information, and entertainment that they feel will appeal to their audience.

Here are some tips when preparing a news release:

1. New or Unusual Approaches to publicize annual or routine items. This is where your imagination counts.
2. Human Interest Angles: Everyone appreciates stories about warmth, humor and unusual events of other people’s lives, especially if it involves youth, the elderly, the community or deserving persons.
3. Look for “news hooks” in your stories: This might be a single facet that makes your news story different from all the others. Examples: include any firsts; a program designed to accomplish a unique purpose; unusual

participation or involvement of people; a new twist to your story theme; one-time only events never before done; something that affects the majority of the people; topical events, information, solutions, etc.

4. Look for potential features in your story – something which people would appreciate knowing about in greater depth. Past events, anniversaries, history and holidays lend themselves to this approach.

5. A flair for the dramatic: The story, unto itself, might be less than exciting, but its history, background, environment, concept, application, or potential may make news. A good photo can also sell a story—the best photos contain a close-up of one person or of just a few people.

6. Think about the reader: Each newspaper has particular visual needs and interests. Think of the visual potential of your story as if you were an editor or news director — or someone other than a brother... does the idea still “grab you”? If so, GO!!

7. Initiating or providing support to elements of prime importance to your community... pollution control, youth activities, charities, crime prevention, health and educational activities, urban development, self-help or locally oriented programs for community betterment: all have news potential

8. Special Awards received or presented by your organization, especially for other than Lodge activities.

9. Guest Speakers, speeches or interviews presented by well-known spokespersons or authorities, particularly those visitors with credentials.

10. Reaching milestones as they affect local people and the community.

11. Public Installation of Lodge officers... Be aware if there are any ties to the community.

12. Visitations by Grand Lodge Officers, or for that matter, any noteworthy guest or speaker. Again, the key words are *noteworthy to the community*.

13. The three phases of any project depending upon the event provide at least three opportunities for publicity:

A. BEFORE the planning stage, announcement of plans.

B. DURING the announcement phase what's going to happen.

C. AFTER the event, the follow-up report of what happened.

## **Newsletters**

Proper communication with the membership is crucial. All should be informed of upcoming degree work and guest nights. Ideas concerning the membership plan should be published and members should be constantly encouraged to think membership.

## **E-mail lists of current membership**

The Master should have the Secretary request the E-Mail address of all members when sending out the dues statements. He should then have a computer knowledgeable Brother set up email lists of the members, honorary members and visitors that frequent your Lodge. You can then send out free communications concerning membership. You can also advise the Brethren of degrees, other functions, Lodge notices, etc.

## **Lodge Web Sites**

Twenty percent (20%) or more of our new members now find Masonry through the internet. This is our face to the world now, and it will be even more so in the future. A Lodge should give antequate attention and recourses to making their web site informative, attractive and welcoming to new member prospects.

The Lodge should not use host services which use ad banners or pop-ups. The Lodge has no control over that content. If the Lodge acquires its own domain name, it should be short but it should convey the name of the Lodge (try not to abbreviate). Music, Flash and heavy graphics should be used with extreme caution. There are people who still view the sites connecting at dialup speeds. Some sites currently in place take many minutes to load at that speed.

A private (password protected) section might be included. The basic rule for determining whether something could be public or private is- if it is of interest to the public or to a sojourning brother, it can be public. If it is of interest to neither, the information might be considered private.

## **Printed Material**

Brochures, postcards, newsletters and direct mail pieces can be developed to promote your Lodge. Printed pieces allow for depth of information, which can't be accomplished in a 30-second television or radio spot.

## **Displays**

Displays provide an excellent vehicle for delivering your Lodge message and membership benefits. Scout your community for display opportunities that will reach potential members and expose your Lodge to others whom you want to reach.

### **Display Tips:**

- To maximize your exposure, choose a location that is guaranteed to have heavy "foot traffic."
- Choose display items that reflect positively on your Lodge.
- Spread your Lodge's message by introducing yourself to individuals passing by your display. Staff any display with enthusiastic brothers who enjoy sharing their Masonic experiences with strangers.

- Narrow your display focus to one main point. Think of the display as a 10-second commercial for your Lodge.

### **Signage:**

Check out the sign outside of your Lodge. You see it all the time and might not have noticed that it has deteriorated over the years. If appropriate, consider a new sign at the edge of your city or town. You control the first impression that the community has of your Lodge. Pay attention.

### **Public Service announcements**

A public service announcement (“PSA”) is an educational message designed to focus public attention on issues of community interest. Media donate airtime and print space to nonprofit organizations for this purpose. PSAs must be for the betterment of the viewer, listener, reader and the community. Consider using PSAs to promote your Lodge’s participation in the Kid’s ID Program.

### **Advertising**

Advertising is publicity you pay for. There are dozens of ways to advertise: in movie theaters, billboards, placemats in restaurants, benches, bus shelters, playbills, grocery store shopping carts, church bulletins, realtor newsletters...the opportunities are endless.

Unfortunately, most Lodges can’t afford frequent advertising. However, there are some media (notably radio stations) that will give discounts to non-profit organizations. Explore your options. It’s important to consider the frequency of your advertising. The industry rule-of-thumb is that a message must touch someone at least three times before it sinks in. The message can come from multiple sources, but one exposure is not enough.

### **Word-of-mouth Marketing**

Masons everywhere agree that our most effective public relations tool is ourselves! No one can sell the Masonic story like the people who are committed to it and love what they do. Word-of-mouth marketing should supplement all your other marketing efforts. It’s important that members are well versed in the benefit message and the facts about Masonry.

### **Evaluation and adjustment**

It’s vital you evaluate the results of your marketing efforts on an ongoing basis. How many guests did you get through the door? How many new members did you get during this period? How do these figures compare to your objectives? What specific tactics really worked? Which bombed? How can the plan be improved or modified? Be candid in your assessment. Learn from every effort so you can improve for the next time. Prepare a status report and share this with your Lodge members. Remember, each member is a stakeholder in marketing for members—it is a total Lodge responsibility. Finally, keep comprehensive records and files for your successor so he doesn’t have to re-invent the wheel. Truly successful marketing plans are ongoing, not one-time shots. Consequently, they need to transition smoothly and build from year to year.

## **The New Member Guest Night**

### **Personal prospect lists**

Many Lodge brothers find it awkward to approach potential members personally to ask them to consider joining. Personal prospect lists are developed by asking each member of the Lodge to make a list of those eligible men who they would recommend as members. Lists may be developed from existing lists through church rosters, business contacts, relatives, friends etc. Lists need to include names and addresses but they might also include phone numbers, email addresses, and other ways of contact. The Membership Committee may have to make repeated contacts with existing members to ascertain these names.

With these lists of names, the Membership Committee can send a formal invitation to an “Informational Night” (or Guest Night). The invitation should first congratulate the receiver as being a man of integrity. It should also say that he has been recommended for membership because of his reputation as a good citizen.

The invitation should then outline the event. Care should be made to not make a potential attendee feel that he will be coerced or intimidated into joining. If the information is available, a follow-up call or email may be used to assure attendance and to estimate how many prospective members may be present at the event.

### **Lodge Building Appearance**

It must be remembered that most attendees at these events have never been inside a Lodge building. Effort should be made to make the Lodge building as clean and attractive as possible. You only get one try to make a “first impression.”

### **Prepared Presentations**

The Grand Lodge has made a number of video and Powerpoint presentations available for these events. Don't rely on just showing a canned presentation. The program needs to be well thought-out and rehearsed. The best speakers need to be employed. Do this right.

### **Handouts**

A number of brochures are available through Grand Lodge at little or no cost. They can be used for displays, handouts, and mailings. Consider stuffing one in each newsletter sent to the membership.

### **Knowledgeable Tour Guides**

Make sure you have the right members welcome and guide guests through the Lodge. They should be informative without being over-bearing. They should be personable and able to answer a number of questions.

### **Make it a family affair**

If the wives of prospects are invited, make sure officer's wives are present to answer their questions.

### **Refreshments and decorations**

It may feel secondary to worry about refreshments and decorations, but many times it is important when wanting to give a positive first impression.

### **Special Attraction**

A number of ideas can be used to promote attendance. You might have a special speaker or perhaps give out a “Citizen of the Year” award. You might honor the local fire department or give out checks to scholarship winners. Use your imagination.

### **Publicize- Publicize- Publicize**

Along with the use of prospect lists, publicity is very important. If you have a special attraction, you will want to write a press release for the local news. You might have posters printed for distribution or flyers for handouts. You will want to publicize it in your newsletter and on your web site. Make sure each one of your Lodge brothers know about it and that each of them knows that they should consider inviting someone to attend.

### **The Closing of the Sale-**

Sometime during the Guest Night there will be an opportunity to ask those in attendance if they would like to join. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind:

### **Benefits-**

The prospect will always have this question in his mind: “What’s in it for me?” Your message needs to answer that question. Here are just some of the reasons that might be given:

- Friendship
- Networking
- Community Service opportunities
- Education in the field of leadership
- Self improvement
- Fraternal Bonds

The benefit you offer has to strike your target as so compelling that it’s worth his investment of time, energy and money. Concentrate on the positive aspects of membership. Many might not join because they were simply not asked.

### **Have First degree date set-**

Be definite and positive. If a prospect asks when he might join you need to have an answer for him.

### **Handling Objections-**

A prospect will many times voice an objection or bring up an obstacle concerning joining. A good way of handling these objections is the method of “*Feel, Felt, and Found.*”

As the issue comes up simply say;

I understand how you *feel*.

*I felt* that way myself  
*I found* that out different.

## **A Calculated Retention Plan**

Almost no other program or idea accomplishes more for the long term success of a Lodge than a well-defined mentor program that is purposely carried out. Bonding to our Fraternity is no different than bonding to a new job, a new church, or a new friendship. It takes about six months for a person to firmly make up his mind as to whether he seriously wants to be involved. If the new Brother has not bonded with us in 6 months, he will fade away quietly and you may never know why.

The Mentor Program goes a long way to help the bonding process, but it takes the involvement of the entire lodge membership to make the new Brother feel totally welcome. Redundant contacts are the key. Do things with the new Brother outside of Lodge. Try to get his family involved and get him involved in Lodge activities.

### **The initial interviews**

First impressions last. This maybe the first time anyone has interviewed the applicant for anything. It is important that he is not threatened or intimidated. This also is the best opportunity to start the bonding process. Answer his questions and include his wife, if possible. Remember, you may be talking to your next newest Brother.

### **Assigning a Mentor**

After the petitioner is elected, it is time for the Master to appoint a Mentor. This is an important selection and it may have a direct effect as to whether the candidate will become active in the future. The Master should receive information from the initial interviews about his age, family status, interests, occupation and hobbies. Using this information will help him find a Mentor that truly fits.

As soon as the Mentor is chosen, the Secretary should send the Candidate Registration Form to the Grand Lodge. It is attached to the formal petition. It asks for information on the candidate, the top line signer, and the Mentor. It also asks for the anticipated first degree date. With this information, the Grand Lodge office will send some great information on Masonry to the candidate. Don't forget this step.

### **Bonding before the degree work starts:**

A great idea is to have the candidate join the Brothers at Masonic events before the night of his first degree. This might include a dinner before a meeting or a fund raising event. The Candidate's Mentor should arrange these meetings and make introductions.

Perhaps a little explanation of how the degrees work is in order. The Mentor should talk to him about obligations that he will be asked to take. He might just say that he will be promising to keep Masonic secrets and to support the Fraternity. He might also say that eventually he might be asked to support a Brother Mason in need or his

widow and orphan. It should also be made clear to the candidate that there will be no horse play.

### **The Degree Experience**

Candidates seek and deserve encouragement after each Degree. This should go beyond a handshake or a welcome. The new Brother should know that he is truly a part of our organization. Lodge Protocol should be explained by the Mentor. This should include Lodge dress, dues cards, wearing the apron, giving the pass, the attitude of prayer, gavel raps, giving the sign to Master when speaking, and crossing the East.

Other duties of the mentor may include the following:

- Plan to meet the new brother at Stated Meetings
- Introduce him to other Masons
- Get his family involved
- Visit another Lodge with him
- Be sure he knows of all upcoming functions
- Contact him outside of the Lodge
- Always be available for questions
- Keep the new brother involved

### **Orientation of the New Master Mason**

A video is available to assist with orientation of the new Master Mason. It is entitled “What Every New Mason Should Know”. It is available from the Grand Lodge for a nominal price. The new Master Mason should view it with the Mentor and perhaps be given a copy.

### **Long Term Involvement and Bonding**

It is the responsibility of the Mentor to keep close contact with the new brother for at least a year. It is the Master’s and Lodge officer’s responsibility to make sure that every Brother finds the Lodge a welcoming place where he can truly find friends, encouragement, and a true fraternal bond.

The new Mason needs to be given responsibility and direction. **“Every new Mason needs something to do and something to learn.”**

## **The Final Result**

This program is offered as a guideline to help Lodges with issues of recruitment, orientation, and retention of new members. This is an ongoing process and this program should be considered as a tool to be used yearly. Results, of course, will vary from Lodge to Lodge, but the effort will be well worth the outcome. Your Lodge and Masonry deserves nothing less.