

THE MASONIC CABLE TOW

By: Right Worshipful Lonnie Lee Godfrey

We all voluntarily take on certain obligations when we become Master Masons. We promise to help aid and assist a Brother Mason, and we promise to be attentive to summonses from our Lodge and the Grand Lodge. But despite the uniformity of our obligations we are expected to go only to the length of our cable tow. And one of the beauties of Freemasonry is that it recognizes that this is a subjective measure with each member free to determine the length of his own cable tow.

Thus, a Mason can be as active or as inactive as he pleases. But it is important to be active and to seek out and accept a function or role in the Lodge. We all know that you get out of the Fraternity in proportion to what you put into it. If you are inactive you will get very little out of being a Mason.

Fewer understand that it is equally important to say “no” to jobs you really don’t like to do, are not qualified to do, or do not have the time to do – for example when family and business obligations require the lion’s share of your time. After all Freemasonry is a family friendly organization and it does not seek to supplant a Brother’s obligations to his God, his family, or

himself. Thus, at times when a Mason is raising a family or building his business or career he may have relatively little time to devote to his Lodge. And this is fine, since Freemasonry is a lifetime engagement. Later he may have more time, and when his children leave home, or he retires, or if, God forbid, he loses his spouse, he may find he has more time to devote to Freemasonry and to his Lodge. At such times, the Lodge can play a very important role in his life and the Brother will be able to contribute his time, energy and talent to his Lodge.

No Lodge likes to see any of its members fade out of the picture and become "ghost" Masons, who keep their dues paid up, but essentially disappear once they are raised. But the Lodge must be sensitive to the individual needs of the Brother and the length of his cable tow at various points in his life. If it has kept in close touch with the Brother and is aware of his family and professional responsibilities, it should understand and be sympathetic to the time constraints of the Brother. Perhaps in such a case, it can find a task or function to keep the Brother active while being respectful of his time and interests. Certainly, it can encourage his participation in Lodge family events so that he can be with his Brethren while he is still with his family, so his

wife can meet and bond with the other Masonic ladies, and so that his children are exposed to Freemasonry, and given the opportunity to be part of our wonderful Masonic youth organizations.

The Lodge should be equally attentive to its more active members to avoid burn out. Sometimes we incorrectly measure the length of our cable tow – and stretch it beyond what is prudent. You all probably have seen what I refer to as the “supernova” Mason who volunteers for everything, works so hard on so many activities, and then starts finding them less and less fun. In a couple of years he is burned out and disappears. This is the Mason who was not taught how to say “no” when he was overloaded.

The same problem obtains for our officers. In an effort to accomplish everything we sometimes put a tremendous burden on them with regular meetings, officer meetings, practices, and visits, and before you realize it almost every night is taken. We forget that some of our officers are not retired or empty nesters, and even if they seem to be willing we should not be putting too great a load on them. We need to monitor them carefully and adjust their workload before they too become burned out.

I started this talk by noting that each of us decides the length of our cable tow and that the Lodge can help us modulate its length, encouraging us to expand its reach at times and encouraging us to pull back at other times.

Thus, far I have focused about the need to be sensitive to the time constraints and the family and business pressures of our members. But we also need to mentor those "ghost" Masons I mentioned.

Some may have had unclear or unrealistic expectations about Freemasonry when they joined. And now as a member he do not find in it what he had expected. He doesn't see its value or relevance to him, and he disappears from the Lodge.

However, we know that something about Freemasonry caught his attention or he would have not joined the Lodge in the first place. We must get to know him better and find out what interests him. Freemasonry offers infinite opportunities for personal, moral, and spiritual growth, so it is likely he can be directed toward something that does have value and relevance to

him. Just to name a few, there is Masonic history and philosophy to explore, meaningful opportunities to be of service in our neighborhoods and communities, opportunities to become involved in ritual, opportunities to develop communication and interpersonal skills, and to develop organizational and leadership skills, and there is the fellowship and the opportunity to develop lasting friendships. If we mentor this individual we may be able to “materialize” this ghost into one of our most active members.

Some new Brethren may have spent time and bonded with their catechism coach. But he may not be able to attend Lodge, and when the new Brother comes to Lodge he does not know anyone. Given our inclination to socialize with the Brethren we know, we may unintentionally ignore the new Brother, and after attending a few meetings without making any friends – and perhaps not finding the meetings particularly interesting, he also just fades away.

We can deal with this “ghost” if we are alert to the problem and act quickly. No new member should sit alone in Lodge. It should be a custom in your Lodge for two of the Brethren, seeing someone sitting alone – a new Mason or a visitor – to get up and

sit on each side of him and get to know him. If this happens, after three meetings the new Brother knows six of his Lodge Brethren and will be on the way to feeling very comfortable and very welcome in his Lodge.

And then there are the men who have had a history of enthusiastically joining organizations and then just as quickly abandoning them. Their initial enthusiasm wears thin when real work appears on the horizon, and they fade away looking for some other group that may seem to promise status and sociability without real involvement.

But we need to realize that there is something that has motivated these men to join the various organizations. And if early on we make the effort to understand their underlying needs, we may be able to find a niche in Freemasonry which aligns with their available time and interests and gives them a feeling of belonging and the satisfaction of contributing.

There is another type of Mason within the Lodge as well. He

is sometimes called the "Christmas tree" Mason. He wears every lapel pin in the Macoy catalogue, often at the same time. He belongs to every appendant organization that will issue him a dues card. He's got every apron, every hat, and every jewel, but usually few of the Lights of our Craft. We should capitalize on his interest in the trappings of Freemasonry by encouraging him to get pins for his contributions to our Masonic charities, get pins and certificates for participating in our educational and ritual programs, and achieve the recognition that will be his for becoming a more active participant in the Lodge. In time his interest in pins and memorabilia may ripen into an appreciation for the more fundamental aspect of our great Fraternity. He may come to place greater importance on the underlying meaning of these symbols, the real acts of Masonic support, and the true insights of Craft philosophy which will enrich his life and the life of his community.

And finally, there is another sort of Mason – the serious student of our history and philosophy and of esoteric symbolism. This type is essential to all that is good in the Craft, but sometimes they tend to become a bit overbearing. They also tend to view other Masons with a sort of contempt, incredulous

these others see only the lighter, social aspects of our Fraternity. These Brethren often are very smart from an academic perspective, but have limited interpersonal skills and their attitude can be a drag on the Lodge.

We can give these Brethren an opportunity to shine by displaying their knowledge about Freemasonry in programs and publications, but we can also help them to understand that Freemasonry is a Brotherhood; and the fellowship we share and the assistance we provide each other is what Freemasonry is all about. As we help them to understand this fundamental truth about our Craft, they will begin to understand that the length of their cable tow should not be limited to reading and research but include also building lasting relationships with their Brethren.

This brief discussion should remind us that Freemasonry is an organization composed of many different types of people with different personalities, interests, and skills. Men knock on our door for many reasons.

We say that Freemasonry seeks to make good men better. It does that by recognizing that each of us has different needs and then showing them how the Fraternity can meet those needs and help us grow as individuals so that we are a credit to ourselves and our Lodge.

As a mentor our job is to give these new Brethren the proper choices and show them the proper roads to follow, but we must take care not to force them down our own path. Each of us must develop his own personal philosophy through a process of self-examination and education. We can use our study of Masonic history and philosophy to hone our understanding of Masonic principles. Then within the common set of guiding tenets that makes us Masons we can correctly determine the length of own cable tow and determine how we will operationalize the obligations we took at the sacred altar in the midst of our Lodge.

It is important that the Master and Wardens, and each of us act as mentors to our Brethren, especially the new Brethren. This will do more than anything else to keep our Brethren active and maintain peace and harmony in the Lodge.