

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL LODGES

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Inspired by Stephen Covey's self-help and management book, "*Seven habits of highly effective people*", my "*Seven habits of highly successful Lodges*" list my observations of the key features most commonly found in successful Lodges. By successful I mean strong, happy, healthy and attractive Lodges that have good future prospects.

We currently have just over 7,000 Lodges in the English constitution, with an average membership of 33. Many of these Lodges are "struggling". Without a strong pool of diverse members, of varying ages and skills, Lodges struggle to find able and willing brethren to occupy the key offices to keep the Lodge active and successful.

However, many other Lodges have far more members, are attracting new ones and retaining existing ones. They seem to be thriving. So, what are they doing and what can the rest of us learn from them?

1. Great ritual and ceremonial

All the meaning of Freemasonry is in the ritual. Well delivered flowing ritual allows that meaning to be communicated clearly and more easily interpreted.

Well delivered does not imply perfect ritual. Most of us are not Shakespearean actors. Our ritual should be focussed on instructing the candidate. It should not be a theatrical performance to impress the audience.

This requires commitment, early preparation and a willingness to do our best. Nowadays, friendly help and encouraging support, along with teamwork, gets the best results.

2. Good management

Good management involves having clear and agreed goals, planning ahead, carrying out those plans and delivering results.

The management and administrative elements of Lodges and their meetings are very important. They ensure all aspects of the Lodge work smoothly together. However, these are not the reason we meet. Management and administration should be done in the background and occupy the least amount of time necessary at meetings. This can be achieved by advance planning and use of communication technology, which eliminates the need to wait until meetings to deliver messages.

UGLE's Hermes system will simplify the Lodge's administrative work. We should see less meeting time consumed by administration and more time give to labour and refreshment; that is to ceremony, ritual and social intercourse.

3. Active support for newer members

Nationally, one in every five new members resigns before receiving his Grand Lodge certificate. Many of them cite a lack of understanding or involvement, although rarely do they explain this to their Lodge.

Masonic Mentoring provides active support to newer members. It helps them develop understanding and commitment. It is not the passive or reactive approach of just being friendly and available. It has to be planned and organised.

The Members' Pathway provides guidance for planned mentoring, so it need not be left to chance.

4. Engagement of all members

Members' expectations now can be very different from even a few years ago. Many want their voice to be heard and their talents used. Finding a way to involve all members is key to retaining their interest and enthusiasm. This can be helping with social events, communications, membership, fundraising and other Lodge tasks.

Past Masters can lose interest if they don't have a role. Passing on key offices to recent Past Masters keeps the Lodge refreshed and ensures there are competent people to run it. A Lodge's future is threatened if offices do not pass to newer members while there are still others around to support them.

Family involvement is increasingly important, especially in social activities. A family friendly Lodge attracts more support from brethren and their partners.

5. Distinctive features that evolve

Lodges that have distinctive features, or which occupy a niche or associate with another organisation, tend to be more successful at attracting new members. However, it is not enough just to create such distinctive features and associations. Features that appeal to one generation may not to another. Or they may clash with their lifestyles. Such features must evolve to stay relevant in the context of the world outside the Lodge.

Ancient and traditional institutions such as the Monarchy, the City of London and our oldest universities recognise that they must evolve to connect with future "members" and the world in which they live. Freemasonry has been evolving and changing throughout its history and our oldest Lodges are still with us because they have adapted. Evolution allows Lodges to stay fresh, attractive and relevant.

The Members' Pathway provides the tools for Lodges to prepare a development plan; to identify where its future members will come from and how its meetings and practices will attract and hold that membership. This process helps a Lodge to evolve, to refresh and to identify specific groups of potential members.

6. Harmony

Harmony binds a Lodge together and sets us apart from other organisations. New members will soon leave a Lodge that is not practicing its principles of harmony.

Consultation is essential for harmony. It gives everyone a chance to have their say, be heard and to work together for the collective good.

Disenfranchisement of newer members from Lodge decision making undermines harmony. When decisions are made by a select few, the other members can feel that their membership is undervalued. Senior members have a responsibility to promote harmony in a Lodge and encourage all members to work together.

7. Leadership, energy and enthusiasm

Leadership and enthusiasm provide the spark that breathes life into the other six habits. Energy provides the motive force to move and function well.

Our system balances the fresh approaches of the new with continuity from the past.

Wise Masters provide leadership by communicating a way forward with enthusiasm, while others manage the detailed organisation and administration of the Lodge.

The managers in the Lodge are the heads of the administration team (Secretary), the ceremonial team (Director of Ceremonies) and the care team (the Almoner or Mentor). These officers need to work together so that the leader – the current Master – can shine.

None of these seven habits are new and none should come as a surprise. However, if your Lodge is struggling this list might help you think afresh about your way forward.

As guardians and stewards of our Lodges we have a two-fold responsibility to future generations. First, to protect and preserve the core of Freemasonry – that is the meaning that we are taught in the ritual – so that Freemasonry itself continues to be a force for good in the world. The second is to do all we can to pass on to our successors a Lodge that is fit for the future, well suited to current and likely future circumstances.

If your Lodge is struggling or in decline, please use the Members' Pathway to review your practices and agree a Lodge plan. The follow its further guidance to attract, introduce, engage, retain and – if necessary – retrieve members. The Members' Pathway can be found online at <https://b.ugle.org.uk/membership/members-pathway>.

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