

Solicitation Rule

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Every Freemason knows in a general way that there is a rule in Freemasonry which prohibits its members from soliciting non-members to join the Craft. But it is a rule that is misunderstood and is misinterpreted by too many of our members. Many will be surprised to learn that there never has been and there is no rule at the present time which states "You shall not solicit anyone to join the Craft." In England the rule is stated that there can be no improper solicitation of a non-member to join; unfortunately, this creates the impression that there is a "proper" way to solicit but that is not true. The trouble arises because of the use of the word "solicitation."

The correct statement of the rule is that each non-member must seek membership in Freemasonry of his own free will and accord. This is easy to understand and eliminates the necessity of the word "solicitation." But the statement of the rule in the negative is so ingrained in the minds of many of our members that it calls for a careful explanation.

This rule is so strictly construed by some of our members that they will not, under any circumstances, discuss Freemasonry in any way with a non-member. This may be due to the fact that the member remembers part of his Obligation and also believes that Freemasonry is a "secret society" or that he has an ingrained fear that he may say something that would be considered improper. For too long we have failed to discuss this subject fairly and completely so that our members may be correctly informed of the meaning and application of this rule.

The rule that a person must seek membership in the Craft of his own free will and accord has been the traditional rule of the Craft for many years. It is not a Landmark of Freemasonry, however. This rule makes our organization unique and it has worked well over these many years. Occasionally some of our members who are amateur physicians announce that they have the instant cure for our loss of net membership. They prescribe that this rule should be repealed and that we emulate the work of some of the service clubs which have membership drives and award prizes to members who bring in the largest number of petitions. They fail to recognize that many of these organizations are having the same problems that we have. These enthusiastic

innovators fail to recognize that we have been successful as an organization and have survived these many years because we are unique and that we have many benefits to offer our members that do not exist in other groups. They also fail to recognize that too often the trouble arises because this rule is misunderstood and therefore wrongly applied. Furthermore, if we made all the changes urged by some of our members, we would no longer be a Masonic organization but would be converted into something else.

From a practical standpoint the rule is that a non-Mason must desire to become a member of his own free will and accord and that no Mason should give him a "sales talk" to join the Fraternity. This does not mean that a Mason must remain silent if a non-member enquires about the nature of our organization, its history, its philosophy, or its work. Certainly it does not prevent a member from explaining to a non-member the qualifications needed to become a Freemason. And, above all else, when an interest is shown by a non-member we ought to make it clear that our organization never issues invitations to non-members to join.

When questions are asked by a non-Mason you cannot disclose the modes of recognition or the details of our degrees. Such matters are private and can be of no concern to the non-Mason.

But there are many things that can be explained, such as that Freemasonry is a serious organization, that its ceremonies contain no horseplay, that the fundamental principles of Freemasonry are based on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, that religion and politics are divisive subjects and are barred from Masonic meetings, and that the Craft engages in many charitable projects. You can give details of the social programs that are conducted by the lodges and the appendant bodies. Engaging in this sort of discussion with a nonmember is merely conveying information and is not soliciting or giving the non-member a sales-talk.

When a lodge presents an Open House Program at which members explain the nature of Freemasonry, its history, its philosophy, and its work this is not solicitation. Telling the persons present we do not have membership drives and never extend invitations to non-members to join our Fraternity but must come of their own free will and accord is not soliciting but is informational; it will prevent a person who joins the Craft from saying "I did not know about your rule and would have applied ten years ago for membership. I have been waiting all this time for an invitation and was beginning to feel that I was not qualified to become a member."

There are many good reasons why a non-Mason should not be given a "sales talk," to join the Fraternity. If one is urged to file a petition and he does not pass the ballot box he will probably become angry with the friend who gave him the "sales-talk" and look upon our group with an unfriendly feeling. He can properly ask himself "Why have I been placed in this position?" On the other hand, if he passes the ballot box in the course of our ceremonies, he will be asked on a number of occasions if this is of his own free will and accord. If he has been given a 'sales-talk' how can he answer this question in the affirmative? And if he answers with a "no" the ceremony must end at this point. If this takes place how will he feel towards his friend who "sold" him on

the idea to seek membership and on the organization that rejected him because of some rule not known or understood by him?

What will be considered as a "sales-talk" will depend on the relationship between the persons involved and all the surrounding circumstances. For example, it would be improper in the first instance to ask a non-Mason "Why have you never become a Mason?" It would be improper to tell him "You have all the necessary qualifications to become a Mason and I will be glad to sponsor you for membership." Clearly and emphatically the first step must always be taken by the non-Mason indicating in some way his interest in the Craft and his desire to become a member. When this occurs the time has arrived to tell him that he has the necessary qualifications for membership and that you will secure a petition for him.

The Grand Lecturer of Colorado, Right Worshipful Brother Billy J. Stallworth, had this to say regarding solicitation:

The free will and accord rule should not be changed. It has been said, "that it is the man alone, divested of all outward recommendation of rank, state or riches, that Masonry accepts and that it is his spiritual or moral worth alone which can open for him the door of our Masonic Temple."

The essence of Freemasonry is "UNCHANGABLE." Change is written upon everything of human construction and upon everything in the material world. But, back of and behind all this are God and His Laws and the soul of man. With these relations Masonry deals. The astronomer with his telescope may sweep the heavens and say he finds no trace of God; the anatomist with his strongest microscope may say he finds no trace of a human soul; but, to quote from Fiske:

"The conception of God as imminent in the world of phenomena, and manifested in every throb of its might rhythmical life. The practical effect of the doctrine of evolution is not to abolish, but to strengthen and confirm it. For into whatever province of nature we carry our researches, the more deeply we penetrate into its laws and methods of action, the more clearly do we see that all provinces of nature are parts of an organic whole animated by a single principle of life that is infinite and eternal. I believe it is with these principles, infinite and eternal, that Masonry has to do. Masonry, by the nature of her constitution and her chosen field must be and remain unchanged and unchangeable."

It is said that ideals rule the world, and we are told that, "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Keeping constantly in mind that Masonry deals with man's relationship with God and his fellowman will certainly tend to give us a clearer idea of what we should be doing while engaged in Masonic work and of the kind of Temple we are building. The spiritual building that each one is erecting for himself will bear the stamp of his thought. "As a man thinketh in his heart so will be his spiritual building." By keeping this ideal in mind we keep Masonry pure and in a way help to bring about that ideal condition of things toward which its teachings point and then be less liable to be tempted to make innovations.

If each of us would live each day by the precepts of our institution, practice its teachings, truly love one another, our great Fraternity will flourish.

Masonry has no report of progress to make to the world, no new message to give to the world, or the promise of any. This world has not outgrown her teachings. Masonry has not lost her place nor is she likely to. When the doctrine of Masonry is recognized and acted upon, instead of being simply a beautiful theory, when the words, "Brotherly Love, relief and truth," make a sweeter music for the ears of men, when this white apron we so proudly wear shall be more highly honored by all nations, instead of the bloodstained banner of war, then and only then, without any change, will masonry be universally accepted among men.

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