

The Masonic Speaker

Unknown

This Bulletin is based upon an article written by Bro. Robert W. Hassell of Newtown Lodge No. 427, Past District Deputy Grand Master of the 8th Masonic District of the Grand Lodge of F.&A.M. of Pennsylvania. We appreciate Bro. Hassell sharing these thoughts with us and trust that they will be used to promote harmony and understanding.

Masonic Speakers are a very special breed of individuals. who have the ability and willingness to share their knowledge and experience with their Brethren. They spend many hours researching their material; more hours in planning, organizing and preparing their presentations; and, in many cases, they spend long hours of travel to deliver their talks. For their dedicated service to the Craft, they deserve certain considerations, courtesies and recognition which are often overlooked. This paper is designed to discuss some of the protocol and common courtesy Masonic speakers should be accorded.

Planning for a speaker should start early. The more time a speaker has to prepare his presentation the better it will be. The invitation to speak should always be confirmed in writing well in advance of the date. This will preclude last minute embarrassments as to time, date, place, length of talk, etc.

Finding a Masonic speaker is not really much of a problem. Obvious sources are the speakers bureau maintained by the Grand Lodge, Scottish Rite Valleys, Chapters, Councils or Commanderies of the York Rite, and Lodges of Research .

A Symbolic Lodge should take stock of its members. The old adage that a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, can be paraphrased to "a speaker is not without honor, save in his own organization." Most Lodges probably number among their members officials of local, county or state historical commissions or societies, who would be happy to talk about those activities.

As soon as a Brother is elected Junior Warden of his Lodge, he would be wise to start a file on speakers he has heard in his visitations to sister lodges.

In looking over printed speeches it is well to keep in mind a quotation attributed to Archibald Philip Primrose, the Earl of Roseberg, dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century: "Few speeches which have produced an electrical effect on an audience can bear the colorless photography of a printed record."

Having secured a speaker, one should treat him in much the same manner one would treat a guest in his home. He should be made to feel as much at home as if he were in his own Lodge. Some Lodges use the slogan: "there are no strangers here, only friends we have not yet met." Certainly it is a sine qua non that he be introduced to the officers, and if a dinner meeting, to those with whom he will be sharing the head table.

Speaking of the head table brings to mind a classic "bloop" committed by this writer some years ago. The speaker involved was a Past Grand Master of a neighboring jurisdiction. As agreed upon, he met me at my home, which was located just a few miles from the Lodge, and we both made what was for me an embarrassing discovery. As a Past Master of the Lodge and the one who would introduce him, I was dressed in a tuxedo; he was in a business suit. He took one look at me and came forth with the perfect, gentlemanly reprimand, "Gee, if you had told me the dress for the affair was tuxedo, I could have arranged to rent one."

This conveyed a lesson I have never forgotten. We must bear in mind that customs in any one jurisdiction are by no means universal. The Universality of Freemasonry is a well established fact but does not pertain to such local customs as this.

Having selected a speaker, it would in many cases be best to extend the courtesy of *carte blanche* in regard to his topic. However, to aid him in selecting a suitable topic, certain facts should by all means be given to him. If possible, a personal meeting should be set up with the speaker, at which time he should be given the objectives of the meeting and his role in the attainment thereof. By all means, the speaker should be apprised of the type of audience. If it is a meeting at which ladies will be present, he should most certainly be so informed. If, on the other hand, only members of the Lodge will be present, he should be cautioned as to the presence of Entered Apprentice Masons and Fellowcraft Masons in addition to the Master Masons. Certain phrases and topics obviously would be omitted if the speaker were aware of the fact that not everyone in his audience had attained the rank of Master Mason.

The time limits for the talk should be clearly indicated. In this respect Publius Syrus back in the First century, B.C. admonished: "Keep the golden mean between saying too much and too little." An old Army adage conveys much the same thought by using the acronym KISS – "Keep it short, stupid." Then, too, there is another saying that the mind can absorb only as much as the seat can endure.

If the speaker wishes to use audio visual aids, then planning for this must be done in advance. Some speakers require a podium or lectern, others prefer not to use them. This, too, should be planned for. It is important to know whether the speaker will provide his own equipment and

operate it personally or whether he will depend upon the Lodge to supply the necessary equipment and experienced Brother to operate. If the speaker will make use of charts and/or signs, plans should be made for someone to act as an assistant to the speaker to turn charts, hold up signs, etc., as needed. When the speaker is a particularly well-known authority in his field, members of the audience may desire to tape his speech. If so, permission must be obtained prior to the meeting.

As a courtesy to the speaker, he should be included on the mailing list for any meeting promotion material. He should be requested to provide a photo and a biography for the program if one is to be printed, and for advance newspaper publicity. (Some jurisdictions prohibit any newspaper publicity in advance of the meeting and will approve only an account of it after it has taken place.)

Fees and expenses of the speaker should be agreed on in advance. If the speaker is traveling from a distant area, he should be offered the choice of overnight accommodations at a local hotel or motel with the option of bringing his wife along. Some Lodges have organized things so that the officers' wives get together at one of their homes while the husbands attend the meeting. If this is the case, it would be thoughtful to invite the speaker's wife to join them.

If the speaker is an unmarried man or if his wife has other plans, he should be invited to bring along a fellow Mason for company on his journey to and from the meeting.

Then, too, there are speakers who, for one reason or another, may not and should not drive at night. In this case he should be assured that one of the Brethren of the Lodge will be happy to come for him and then drive him home afterwards.

If the speaker from a distance chooses the option of staying overnight at a motel, it would be considerate to designate someone to meet him and assure that the accommodations are adequate. In the event he is accompanied by his wife, a nice touch would be to include a bouquet of flowers.

When the occasion for the meeting is the celebration of some special anniversary of the Lodge – such as fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred years – and a history of the Lodge has been written for the occasion, the speaker should be provided with a copy well in advance of the affair.

Every effort should be made to make the speaker feel welcome and at ease. After all, he is doing a real service for the Lodge and for the Brethren .

The Brother who is to introduce the speaker would do well to review and coordinate his introduction with the speaker in advance. The introduction, of course, will depend upon how well-known the speaker is to the Brethren. It's like the appetizer at the beginning of a meal; a small but tasty serving. Remember, the speaker is providing the main course. The introduction needs only to establish the credentials of the speaker and make him feel welcome – not too short – and not too long.

The comedic introduction of "Our speaker needs no introduction, so I won't bother to introduce him," might draw a laugh, but it does nothing for the ego of the speaker. At the other extreme, the speaker may become ill-at-ease if a lengthy introduction lists all of his titles, memberships, accomplishments, and genealogy. It is well to check with the speaker beforehand to determine what he would prefer to be included – or excluded. Care, too, must be given to the use of correct titles, and correct pronunciation of the speaker's name.

Let us return to the question of a fee for a Masonic speaker. Many Masons are reluctant to accept remuneration for something they enjoy doing out of love for the Fraternity. If such is the case, there are many nice alternatives: for example, a donation in the name of the speaker to a favorite Masonic charity or fund such as the Masonic Home operated by the Grand Lodge of the Jurisdiction in which the speaker resides, or to a building fund of his own subordinate Lodge. This, or any other gift or certificate, can be presented at the close of the talk when he is thanked for his presentation.

This oral thank you should then be followed up within the next few days with a formal thank you note sent to the speaker at his home.

Finally, the officers of the Lodge should evaluate the speech and the effectiveness of its presentation and take note of any special problems that arose, in order that such problems, if any, may be avoided in the future.

L A B O R

He who acts upon the Square
Will always well with all compare.

The Mason uses tools of love
To build a Temple planned above.

The Gauge he constantly employs
To measure work and limit joys.
The Plumb imbues his soul and heart
With love Divine and sacred art.

The Level guides his daily act
And makes good fellowship a fact.
If we employ these tools each day
A beautiful Temple will be our pay.

(Silas Shepherd)

Masonic speakers – bless them – labor in the Masonic vineyards spreading Masonic Light. It is through their labors that many Masons receive the inspiration and motivation to commence their own labors in Masonic education. Let's show them the courtesy and appreciation they deserve.

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