

# Meeting Management



**Grand Lodge of Virginia  
A.F. & A.M.  
2007**

## MEETING MANAGEMENT

The success of your Lodge depends in large part on retaining an active cadre of members who will attend the meetings and be a part of the various activities.

One of your key jobs as Worshipful Master is to make it attractive for your members to come to meetings. This means having good programs at every meeting, and also having projects that interest, excite, and involve the Brethren. It means ensuring that the new Mason is made to feel welcome, and given a role that is right for him in terms of his available time and interests. And finally, it means ensuring that **all** of the members are given a task they will enjoy, so that every Brother is contributing something to the Lodge.

It is helpful to think about your stated communications in a very special way. Your stated meeting is a crucial element in the life of your Lodge. Good meetings keep the Brethren active and energized. Poor meetings lead to poor attendance and reduced participation in the Lodge and in Freemasonry. So, as part of your responsibilities as Worshipful Master, you must effectively manage the block of time in the life of your Lodge we call the stated communication.

As a guideline, a meeting ought to last about two hours. A very short meeting that has no real content is a waste of everyone's time and should be avoided. But a meeting that is much longer than two hours is an imposition on the Brethren and also should be avoided.

The next issue is how you can best fill the two hours. Again, as a guideline, I would suggest an hour of substance and a half hour of administrative matters. I suggest that the substance come first, both as a courtesy to the speakers and so the members are able to concentrate on the program while they are fresh.

Right after opening the Lodge, the Worshipful Master should have the featured speaker give a 20-minute presentation, with perhaps another 20 minutes for questions and discussion. The discussion part of the program is sometimes as important as the talk itself. This is because while "talking heads" are fine up to a point, a lively discussion keeps the interest of the

Brethren and gets them involved. The bottom line is that you want the Brethren to have experienced something at the meeting that is interesting and exciting, and perhaps motivating. The “takeaway” should be something he can talk about with his colleagues or his wife when they ask him what he did at Lodge last night.

The second item on the agenda should be a short educational program by one or even two of the Brethren lasting 5-10 minutes. We need to involve the Brethren, and asking a Brother to give a 5 minute presentation on some Masonic topic during the course of a year is not too much to ask. It will encourage him to do some research online or to read a Masonic article or book, and report back to the Lodge. This is an important role for the Brother, and it will contribute to the Masonic education of both the Brother giving the talk and the members listening to it.

The third item should be a “let me tell you about myself” talk by one of the Brethren. This could be autobiographical or simply a brief talk about a hobby, or interest, or an interesting experience. Again we are talking about 5-10 minutes. There should be no specific requirement as to what the Brother has to say, so he will neither feel that his privacy is being violated nor that he is constrained in what he wants to say. This part of the program is designed to ensure that the Brethren know each other better. This is important because the more the Brethren know about each other, the stronger their ties and the stronger the Lodge. And, again, asking a Brother to talk for 5-10 minutes about something of interest to him is not imposing a difficult assignment.

These three talks should result in an interesting evening and a good Masonic experience for the Brethren, but all together take only about an hour, leaving the next half hour for the Secretary to clear his desk and for you to take care of business and introductions. And given the two-hour guideline, you have a half hour slack time in case something runs over.

As Worshipful Master, you should consider yourself the stage manager or director of the meeting. You want to allow more time when interesting events are occurring, and move things along when they bog down or get boring. Accordingly, you should streamline the meeting where possible. Thus, if announcements are taking too long, consider having most of them typed up before the meeting and passed around to the Brethren. This will have more impact, save time, and leave the Brethren with something they

can keep and to which they can refer. Similarly, you should ask the Secretary to clear his desk rather than wasting time asking if there are new petitions, maturing petitions, bills, etc. The Secretary can cover what is on his desk without this dialogue. And, of course, the Master will want to ensure that the minutes are summarized – to cover the major events of the meeting. There is nothing more discouraging than to listen to a long recitation of the minutes where the Secretary rereads the correspondence, or identifies each committee selected to do introductions and details the progress of the Brother from the altar to the East. The Brethren were there. They don't want to hear it a second time. As Worshipful Master you want to work with your Secretary, so minutes take no more than five minutes to read.

There is one last point to consider. If it is at all possible, it is a good idea to have a dinner before the meeting. There are three reasons why this will boost attendance. First, except for those directly involved in the program or very excited about their Lodge, Brethren who go home, kick off their shoes and have dinner are not prone to go back out to attend a meeting. Second, if the Brethren come to Lodge directly from work, they will be very hungry if they have to wait until after the meeting to eat. And third, many of the Brethren may have to get up quite early in the morning, and may have to leave right after the meeting. A dinner before the meeting gives them time to socialize with their Brethren.

*Notes:*