



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

(OED) 1440 A.D. from Latin *praeceptor*

one who instructs, a teacher, a tutor, a mentor

Jack of all trades.....
but soon to be
Master
of them all

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When first installed as Warden there is the comforting thought that 'the Chair' is simply *years* away and, after polishing up the Opening, Closing and Proving in each Degree, there appears little on the horizon to raise the blood-pressure. Some might even think: '*Why not sit back, relax and enjoy two 'fun' years - watching the Master strut his stuff?*' So, if that is on your mind too then it may be timely to suggest quickly adopting a Plan B.

In this Preceptor's Pages the Master's role is described as follows:

'It is surely indisputable that the office of Master is the most important office that any Lodge has to bestow. A good Master is part-ambassador, part-administrator, part-teacher, part-leader, part-chairman of the social committee, part-disciplinarian...one could carry on but thankfully the Installation ceremony and the Provincial Grand Master's Address says it all for us. In brief he needs to be a useful bloke, a thoughtful colleague and, above all, a safe pair of hands.'

The Master who Initiated me had waited fifteen years to reach the Chair. My own generation took ten to twelve years. During that time, attending perhaps 80 Lodge meetings and a further 50 in the Lol, we were able to acquire a very sound background of not only the meaning and practise of Masonic ritual but, perhaps less obviously, of the essence of Freemasonry itself. Today, in the five to seven years many Initiates spend before becoming Master, there is precious little opportunity to learn the essentials. The short time available therefore needs to be seized greedily. Recognising this pressure, over the past ten or so years the Stonehenge Lodge of Instruction published articles each and every month to assist and guide prospective Masters. (A list of these lectures is available as and when required)

While the delivery of good ritual seems over-riding it is not necessarily the sternest challenge facing a new Master. Elected by his Lodge to lead and govern, during his year a Master must also come to terms with his financial and administrative responsibilities as laid out in the Book of Constitutions. Time spent devising a social programme is never wasted either. The years as Warden become an ideal opportunity for wise and timely preparation.

A Master's Freedom of Action

Does a Master possess any freedom of choice about his plans for the year? Well, yes... and well, no. A Master has complete freedom to plan his year *providing he works within the Book of Constitutions and the Bye-laws of the Lodge*. He is free to select his non-elected officers (**Rule 104** – see all sub-clauses); he is free to plan the sequence of his meetings and ceremonies; in Emulation Ritual the Master is responsible for delivering *all* the ritual in the three degrees and he is in theory free to choose to whom he delegates part or any (although a wise Master will first discuss the implications with his Secretary and DC); he is free to chair any committee or gathering held to discuss Lodge affairs; he may hold as many or as few social events as his stamina or his finances deem prudent; similarly he may act as Lodge ambassador to as many or as few other lodges within the Province again as his stamina or his finances deem prudent... While he has a moral duty to support the Provincial charity he may also select a personal one for his year; the after-proceedings in the dining-room are also very much in his hands but, again, if change from custom or tradition is on his mind (e.g. choosing separate or long tables, silver service or a buffet, a salad bar or fish and chips(!)) it would be wise to first walk this past the Lodge Committee.

The Book of Constitutions

The phrase '*providing he works within the Book of Constitutions*' however is always key. On the Master's Installation the Presiding Officer will remind him: '*the happiness of [Lodge] members will be generally promoted in proportion to the zeal and ability with which you promulgate the genuine principles of the Institution [of Freemasonry]*'. So what principles and responsibilities do the Constitutions demand of the Master? Let us commence with the **Antient Charge No 5** the Master Elect assented to at the Secretary's table. It is worth glancing over them all but focus in particular on No 5: '*you agree to...submit to the Awards and Resolutions of your Brethren...*'. The Master of course becomes Chairman of the Lodge Committee so let us turn to **Rule 154**. '*No Committee [or Member] can be invested with any executive powers...[but] may submit to the Lodge any matter it deems to be of benefit...*'

The essence of all of this is that, at heart, the consent and overall happiness of the Brethren become the most desirable aims before making any material change to Lodge tradition or accepted practise. Their assent becomes *legally essential* if the proposed changes have any financial implications. This consent is normally sought by preliminary discussion at the Lodge Committee. If the proposed change is so demonstrably beneficial, try to flush out just why has it never been introduced before? In brief a Master is never free to act on a whim or 'just to make his mark'. The overall happiness of his Lodge is the benchmark.

How is the will of the Brethren determined? This is normally accomplished by giving a 'Notice of Motion' on the Agenda at one meeting then voting on the Motion at the next. This permits all subscribing Brethren to become aware of the proposed change and attend to argue for or against the Motion. It follows that if Notice of Motion is not given those Members not present may feel free to ignore the Motion even if passed by all the Brethren present in the Lodge room on the night.

Financial Matters

Discharging a Master's duties on financial affairs is less straightforward. There seem to be two certainties in life (in addition of course to death and taxes): firstly toast always seems to fall butter-side down and secondly few experienced Officers of the Lodge respond willingly to cross-questioning (and none to adverse criticism) from some junior mason merely because he has been installed as Master for the year. So how should a Master respond?

Simply keep in mind that the Treasurer is responsible for receiving, recording and depositing *all* of the Members' monies, including charity and social events as outlined in **Rule 153**. He has to produce timely records for inspection and approval by Lodge members as detailed in the Lodge By-laws.

The Lodge Examiners (formerly 'auditors') are appointed *on behalf of* the Lodge members to ensure that neither Master nor Treasurer have misapplied their funds. Their role is more than making sure the sums add up or that monies due have been paid on time. They should make certain that all non-routine payments have been properly authorised by a Motion recorded in the Lodge Minute-book and any financial Motions passed by the Lodge have actually been undertaken by the Treasurer.

Although they are rare events, should a Lodge come to the attention of the PrGM or even Grand Lodge it will as often as not be due to some financial misadventure or oversight. A wise Master therefore, while not responsible for the detail, should always take a prudent interest in his Lodge's financial as well as administrative affairs. Using a little diplomacy - 'out of interest' - ask to discuss the Lodge Accounts before publication and be talked through them by the Treasurer. A Master should also quietly ensure that the Examiners have cross checked the accounts against the Secretary's Minute Book. Too many lodges fail in this duty. (While it is improbable that any problems will arise, should they do so ask the Lodge's Grand Officer to have a quiet word and put the train back on the rails)

Administration

The Lodge Secretary is the gateway to the outside world and all communications to/from the Lodge will (should) cross across his desk. He has certain statutory duties to perform (see **Rules 146** and **151**) but in most smooth running lodges an informal and open rapport between Master and Secretary is often the key. Talk to each other. Have no secrets. At heart he is merely an Officer of the Lodge and directly responsible to you.

This openness becomes especially important in communications with Province. Be sure you are aware of all non-routine Provincial matters sent to the Lodge. (When meeting with the PrGM you may be asked for your views on a recent topic so be forewarned.). The Secretary provides, either to the Provincial Secretary or the Visiting Officer, basic information guiding the Provincial Promotion of (perhaps) more senior Past Masters. To avoid disquiet, always ensure that a senior Lodge member (perhaps a Grand Officer) is first consulted.

Social Programme

The Master may plan his social programme as he wishes. He is limited only by his imagination and energy and the competing restrictions of the diary. Keep a few rules in mind though. If you leave planning until you are in the Chair it may well be too late – popular venues for the major functions or music makers may already be booked. Start

planning now as a Warden.

You and your wife/partner will want to enjoy the social events to the full and not worry about details on the day. Good practice is to involve the relevant Lodge officers as a social committee from the outset. Outline your plans. Invite their ideas:

- the Treasurer has responsibility for handling and recording all monies paid by lodge members;
- the Secretary has responsibility for undertaking all of a lodge's external correspondence;
- the DC may be your choice to act as MC.
- the Assistant Secretary is responsible for seating plans, place cards, advertising and co-ordination of replies.

You are normally responsible though for organising the flowers and purchasing presents (if any) from your own funds.

Some Masters have occasionally invited just one man to act as their 'Mr Fixit'. Be cautious, as he may inadvertently become 'busy' himself as the great day approaches and may not be able to make the arrangements you and your wife/partner had in mind. Thinking that all is in hand, other Lodge officers, not unreasonably, may have turned their eyes elsewhere and your best laid plans will start to fragment. In brief, you have appointed your Officers to serve both you and the Lodge. Use them and set up that social committee.

As a general point, social events should be entirely self-supporting; you should **never** cross-fertilise social accounts from any other lodge funds such as the general or dining accounts. If members wish to attend, say, a £40 event then the ticket price must be £40. Secondly, while members will always wish to support you, you may find that 'social fatigue' can set in if there are too many competing events testing their diary and their budget. Be selective and go for the 'special event and location' and, if possible, the 'economical' but make them memorable and make them happy. Mutual enjoyment and friendship are the essential ingredients to a successful event and by which the event will be judged.

After-thoughts

You may feel that these pages contain a long list of 'don'ts'. Let us put this feeling into perspective. Speculative Freemasonry is an admirable body that offers moral guidance in a social and sociable setting of good fellowship. Worthy men – many of whom have lacked the worldly wisdom of your own generation will have filled the Master's Chair before you. Each in turn has found 'their Year' to be immensely enjoyable, memorable and fulfilling, and all will attest to the fact that it passed far too quickly.

Few problems are new and all have been solved. There are some wise old owls in the Lodge. Lodge Officers are there to guide you every step of the way. Talk to them, keep that open liaison with the Treasurer, Secretary and DC. The Lodge may also contain *very* senior officers in 'other Orders' – their perspective or judgement on 'sensitive issues' may be relied on implicitly. They will be anxious to assist and advise but will not want to swamp you. They merely await your query.

You now have the opportunity to prepare for such a year both to ensure that you enjoy it to the full and also that you will have give the Brethren of your Lodge a year that they too will remember with immense satisfaction and the happiest of memories

It clearly brings people on-side if the WM's programme enables as many as possible to feel 'ownership' of the Lodge by sharing the rituals and toast lists. The addition of an outside speaker or a demonstration team can leaven the diet of rituals and also demonstrate the efforts the WM is making on their behalf.

If all else fails a WM is free to make his year special by nominating a charity close to his heart and organising events to support it both in and out of the Masonic building. Ladies' or Social Festivals can become high points as can an exciting family programme of meals out and visits away.