



Notes from a Preceptor's Handbook

A Preceptor:

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

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

“Man proposes
but the Lodge
disposes”

'Man proposes - but the Lodge disposes...'

'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a new Worshipful Master, regularly installed, is thereby given complete authority by the Lodge members who elected him to make any such changes as he sees fit...' Well, no, Jane Austen didn't actually say that but, rather like her 'single man/ large fortune', this thought too can lead to some fraught mis-understandings before reaching the last page.

Let us consider a new Worshipful Master chairing his first Lodge Committee. Phrases at his Installation from the PrGM's memorable Address remained crystal clear in his mind: *'...happiness of members... proportionate...to your zeal and ability...'*. 'Freemasonry Today's article about the responsibilities of a WM for recruitment and retention also seized his imagination. His aim seems clear, he feels duty-bound to attract new members, bring back the old and, in short, lift the Lodge out of its present rut seemingly held back by the resistance of the Lodge 'dinosaurs'. He can become the new broom for a younger generation and for Freemasonry tomorrow!

To a breathless Committee he recalls those 'visions splendid' that caught his eye when visiting as a Warden – tricorn hats and gauntlets, striped shirts, fancy waistcoats, bow ties. Opportunities for *'out with the old and in with the new'* seemed as tempting as they were plentiful...

But what about those 'dinosaurs? An enthusiastic (and perhaps slightly mischievous) Past Master suggests that to avoid an unpleasant open debate (*'a split in the Lodge, Worshipful Master is in no one's best interest'*) he should make the changes off-Agenda, quickly and quietly. *'The Committee will be fully behind him.'*

Despite his Committee's seeming mandate, a moment of reality ought now to enter our WM's thoughts. Even before we introduce the Book of Constitutions into our discussion let us remind ourselves that we are all Freemasons *and Brothers*. The WM is not captain of a ship, a CEO or owner of a small business – each monarch of all he surveys. He is proudly and happily - *but merely* - first amongst equals. The vote of the newest Entered Apprentice is of no less value than that of the most senior Grand Officer - or indeed of that of a Worshipful Master. A Lodge is no place for employing the three card trick.

The Ancient Charge (No 5) read to him at his Installation is easily forgotten: *'that he will submit to the awards and resolutions of your Brethren in general Lodge convened...'* (i.e. Their wishes prevail over his, not vice versa). Rule 154 develops this: *'The Lodge by resolution... may specifically refer any... matter... in open Lodge to such a Committee [of which the WM is ex officio part] for consideration and report but no Committee may be invested with any general executive powers'*. In sum, a Committee may *recommend* a change to Lodge practice but only the lodge members themselves can *enact* it.

How then can he make that change? A Bruce Forsythe moment strikes him. Like Bruce the WM can say *'I am in charge'* but remember Bruce first sells himself to his audience - and so should he. If a change seems far-reaching he can prepare the ground by first presenting his ideas to Lodge members by letter (We oldies always like something to chew on) - he can then employ the power of the Master's Chair, looking his members in the eye, explaining his reasons, using his skills to persuade them to share in his vision and then vote for the Motion he proposes. Remember if the aim is worthwhile then so is the effort required.

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.

While always remembering he may *invite* but never *impose* our WM can always create a *very* happy year for his Brethren that ensures his name will stay long in Lodge memory.

(It may be of interest that the Heir to the Throne has as his motto 'Ich Dien – I serve so that I may lead.' That is possibly very good advice for our WM too!)