

Advice to a Leader

Allen E. Roberts

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Many of us of presided over a Masonic Lodge or some Masonic Body. Some have led several organizations more than once. And a few will serve as leaders again. Others soon will be serving the Craft in varying leadership capacities.

It may appear that those who have been leaders many times over need no advice. However, the Grand Master of Masons in India, who was also Chief Justice, didn't think this was necessarily so. When this learned man and dedicated Freemason installed a friend the Grand Master gave him plenty of advice.



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The friend was being installed as Grand Master of the Western Region of India in 1982. This is a position comparable to that of a District Deputy Grand Master in Virginia, but a great deal more powerful. The friend was also a lawyer. Because of their close friendship the Grand Master said he could "be more blunt" than he could be with others.

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This is part of what he told him, and the hundreds who were present to witness the installation:

Freemasonry is of course a Brotherhood, a great Brotherhood; but just as in any family, all brothers are not equal, some brothers being elder brothers and some younger brothers, and one of the brothers being the eldest brother whom other brothers should look up to and obey, so also it is in Freemasonry. The Masonic organization is a hierarchy. At each Installation meeting we are told in the address to Brethren that "such is the nature of our Constitution that some must of necessity rule and teach so others must, of course submit and obey . . ."

Our rituals have been written some centuries ago and in a lighter vein the modern translating of what we have been told in the Brethren's Charge and which I have just quoted can be reproduced in these words of George Orwell from his famous political satire "Animal Farm," where he said "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

Of course, in order to rule and to administer wisely and well you must eschew all thoughts of popularity with everyone, because in the course of your administration, you will be called upon to make certain hard decisions. Always whenever a question arises, first try persuasion, and appeal to reason, but whenever you fail in this, do not hesitate to act firmly and to act swiftly and with determination. This certainly will make you unpopular. Many people may talk against you, but people will talk against you anyway, for that is the fate of anyone who is at the head of an organization, whether he be the head of a Masonic organization or of a government. People will keep on talking and some people will talk behind other people's back. You should pay no heed to them. It is also futile to contradict such talk, because people, as a rule, love sensation. Sensational falsehoods and sensational rumors have far greater attraction than bare unvarnished truth.

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Also, do not try to convince everyone about the correctness of your viewpoint or your case. Abraham Lincoln said that he attributed half his success in life to never wasting his time in convincing those who would not be convinced. Such a man you should pass by after applying to his these lines of John Dryden:

The midwife laid her hand on his Thick Skull,
With this prophetic blessing - Be thou Dull.

For those who talk behind your back, remember again these lines of Dryden:

But far more numerous was the herd of such
Who think too little, and talk too much.

It is evident there was concerted opposition to the choice for the head of the Western Region. Note the interesting way the Grand Master answered those opponents.

It has been said that you are a very busy man, that you have many other interests in life, that you have no time to devote to your duties as Regional Grand Master. In my opinion, and from my personal experience, the very fact that you have no time is your greatest asset and qualification. Having no time, you have no time to waste. You must, therefore, make up your mind quickly and dispose of all matters expeditiously.

The Grand Master told his friend to depend on his secretary and not go near the Regional Grand Lodge office. He added:

Not only do you waste your own time in traveling to and from, but also the time of the staff who will not be able to work with you around. I can think of far more enjoyable places to loiter in than the office of a Regional Grand Lodge . . .

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Now, the sad truth must be confessed. I believe I have traveled Masonically in India and abroad far more than anyone present here. I rank among my closest personal friends some of the Grand Masters in various parts of the world. The sad truth is that all over the world I found that quite a large number of Brethren are in Freemasonry purely for ranks and offices and since you have the power to recommend for Grand Ranks, people will flatter you, people will laud you, praise you, will beg of you and entreat you for ranks. Succumb to no such thing. Remember in either recommending for Grand Ranks or in conferring Regional Grand ranks, you should have only two criteria, viz.: honor seniority unless wholly undeserving, and recognize merit wherever you find it and however Junior the Brethren may be . . .

You must remember that when ranks are conferred like leaves falling in autumn, they lose all value. If you want to be told this very pleasantly, you should read Gilbert and Sullivan's 'The Gondoliers.' Like most of the Savoy Operas, the plot of the Gondoliers' is quite complicated. Suffice it to say that in the kingdom of Barataria, everyone is conferred a very high rank. Not only is there a Lord High Chancellor, a Lord Archbishop, but also a Lord High Footman, a Lord High Cook, a Lord High Drummer Boy, and also a Lord High Vagabond, and in it all departments rank equally and everyone is the head of his department. When Don Alhambra Del Belero, the Grand Inquisitor, visits his kingdom he is horrified to find this state of affairs. Not knowing what to do, he tells in song a story about a king who lived in the "wonder working days of old." This king -

He wished all men as rich as he

(And he was rich as rich could be),

So to the top of every tree

Promoted everybody.

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The king was very popular and everybody sang his praises:

"Now, that's the kind of king for me -
He wished all men as rich as he,
So to the top of every tree
Promoted everybody."

The result was that -

Lord Chancellors were cheap as sprats,
And Bishops in their shovel hats
Were plentiful as tabby cats -
In point of fact, too many.

The moral of this story was soon told:

In short, whoever you may be,
To this conclusion you'll agree,
When everyone is somebodee,
Then no one's anybody.

With this Grand Master D. P. Madon concluded the installation ceremony of his friend.

And here I'll conclude passing along the dozens of lessons excerpted from the hour-long masterpiece of this world and Masonic-wise Chief Justice. I liked what he had to say. He said it much better than most of us could or would.