

# Keeping Engaged as a Master Mason

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*Presented by Wor. David J. Smallridge, Warwick Lodge No. 336*

I have a few questions for you about your journey in Masonry. How much have you learned up to this point in your journey? How engaged have you been? How engaged do you want to be?

It is with little doubt and observable quality evidence that working my way up to being Master of Warwick Lodge No. 336 had many moving parts and potential paths to work through. The focus to have the items in hand that were necessary to advance was a moving priority for me. Between getting my Warden's certificate and having an established plan of what I was going to be doing as Worshipful Master, it was a vacillation of varying importance. Little did I realize how much more I was missing, but would soon learn while I was in the East.

It goes without saying that I also had other prioritizations in my life that included my relationship with the love of my life Beth, and two sons Ethan and Colin. The saying goes that behind every good man, is an exceptional woman, and there is little doubt in my mind to that truth. Relationships that

work well are hard work and must be maintained, and that does not just happen of its own volition.

I had to ensure I was engaged with all three of my family members but especially my 17-year-old son Ethan and 14-year-old son Colin. Both "Boyz", as I lovingly refer to them as, have two very distinct needs. Ethan is in the throes of transitioning to college. He has just about attained his private pilot's license and is looking towards attending USAFA which will lead him to a career as an astronaut. Colin is preparing to transition to a High School that will hopefully fuel his brilliant mind and gifted music abilities.

In getting to the East there were things that occurred that surprised me and placed me on my heels a bit, but I recalibrated myself and figured what needed to be done until the day came that I was elected by the Brethren of my Lodge to lead in the East during our centennial year. What an honor it was and a year I will always cherish. The support I received was astounding and the lessons, both good and bad; I learned made me come to the realization of what was truly important in Masonry and as a Worshipful Master of a Lodge.

The biggest lesson by far, was my educational engagement in Masonry, or rather how I chose to be engaged in the things I needed to know about in Masonry. I will admit I was a bit aloof in my focus as I agreed to be an officer of the Lodge. That aloofness was fueled by my priority of family, and that

other focus I had which involved my work. It hadn't been totally clear to me as to what things needed to be a priority. Was it Masonic ritual, Masonic law, Masonic history, my plans for my Masonic year in the East, or was it the business side of Masonry I needed to be focused on? With the need for my Wardens certificate, Masonic ritual was the priority.

I was always told the things I needed to be privy to and to accomplish, but I really missed the boat on the importance of the timing of the 5 aforementioned items or to seek the appropriate mentoring. How does the adage go, if you don't know what you don't know, then you don't know.

I cannot thank the Brethren enough, and you know who you are, for the guidance I received while in the East. I learned what was important, what things needed to be known about, how to act appropriately, and I learned how I do not want to act. All of those lessons, both good and bad, were critical to me in how I planned to remain an engaged and productive Mason and Past Master after my short time in the East.

While in the East I learned the importance of communication, through email, social media, written letters, phone calls and by being present. I always tried to have an approach of "There you are!" vs. "Here I am", and to remain humble in that if I messed something up, that I would own it, and not defer to a "Well, I am the Master" approach. I learned the importance of ritual and to ensure that if I had short comings in the other attributes I sought counsel.

Now as a Past Master I realize I want to enrich the brethren with the things I know I should have known, but did not. I have been honored by Worshipful William J. Spencer who selected me to be the Lodge Educational Officer of Warwick Lodge No. 336. I am not just excited to be in this position, but I expect to do things that will encourage and educate the Brethren in a manner that I know I would have appreciated.

I am excited to be working with my District Educational Officer, Rt. Wor. Gerald Lee Frey, and how I have come to appreciate him along with some other Brethren who have made me smarter than I was when I started, which is amazing to me seeing my limited abilities. I want to be an example of someone who strives to not just do more, but to be effective in what I do.

How engaged are you today in Masonry? When you look at where you are in our fraternal order, you should be asking yourself a couple of questions. The first and most critical is "What should I know based on the level I would like to participate?" Are you content in just being a Master Mason and sitting on the sidelines? Do you want to engage and look into what it takes to be an officer? Do you want to be a Master Mason or do you want to be a part of making Masonry the beautiful and elegant fraternal order it is? There is a published work on our Virginia Grand Lodge Portal I encourage all Masons to look through, which is titled *District Education - Officer's Manual*.

Do not be intimidated by the number of pages of this document, but look into each section which starts out on what you should know as a Master Mason and then, should you choose to commit a little deeper, what you should know of every officer position in a Master Mason Lodge.

The Illustrious and Most Worshipful Jim Cole has said numerous times: "I often think about my position as a Past Master of my Lodge and a Past Grand Master of Virginia. My single largest goal in those jobs was, and still is, to avoid the stereotypes of the PM and PGM shaking his head and saying "back in my day!"

I have a similar view and would add that in lieu of letting future Master Masons struggle with their engagement, that I would be a positive influence for all Brethren, willing to take the time, to be more proficient in Masonic Ritual, Law, History, Business, and Preparedness as a rising Master. This is part of my goal to stay engaged in Masonry; do you have a goal to stay engaged? If you need help, advice, mentorship, I am here to serve, just let me know how I can be helpful.