

Keeping the Secrets

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If "keeping the secrets of a Brother" is crucial to the Craft, why is it not followed? This question was brought up by a scorned Brother. I must believe this has been discussed many times before this. Perhaps, it is the way of our world, or it is just the human condition not emphasizing "keeping your word." That is what it means when getting down to the basics of the question.

From the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the modern English word "secret" comes from the Latin *secernere*, or to separate or distinguish. The prefix "se-" means apart, and "cernere" is to distinguish or choose. To keep a secret is to keep distinguished information apart from a particular person or persons. Merriam-Webster uses many definitions. These two relate to our question:

1. Something kept from the knowledge of others or shared only confidentially with a few.
2. Revealed only to the initiated.

We now know the definition, but we also have the operative side. Our Operative Brethren had much to lose if their members talked about the construction of a building (yes, I am going back that far). These would be

"Trade Secrets." A "Trade Secret" is defined broadly to include business plans, designs, reverse engineering, building construction, and materials for everything we use. As they were essential to the ancient craftsman, these secrets, from the military to businesses, are even necessary today. These secrets derived the craftsman's economic value and competitive advantage from another's. Therefore, it was incumbent upon every "operative craftsman" to identify and classify his own trade secrets, restrict access, and educate on the importance of adhering to guidelines to protect these precious assets.

Now, we have the material importance of a secret from the past and the present – the importance of confidentiality and discretion and how it could affect us personally and our fellow workers. People have experienced the severe consequences of disclosing confidential information, losing friendships and employment opportunities, and damaging their reputation and good name. This understanding of secrets brings us to the question, "Why is it so important to keep silent when asked to?" It is what we, as Freemasons, obligated ourselves. We gave our word in front of our personal God and Brethren.

Our personality, integrity, moral compass; otherwise, our character; honorable or not was created by the people around us from childhood to adulthood. Each day from our birth, we moved around collecting data to become who we are.

As a child, I was raised as a Marine by my father, who was one. He taught us the Corps values from toddler on. In our eyes, anything else was less and would not be acceptable (I did enlist in the Navy, another story). We were taught not to lie, steal, cheat, or disgrace our family by talking out of place. To be protective of one another. Once in a situation where I had to protect my younger brother (who was two at the time) from our sitter's mother. His crying was causing her to be upset. To evade physical altercation, I removed my brother from the room he was in, to the bathroom. I took a beating from a rolling pin traveling to this little room of choice (I want to make sure that everyone understands she was not mentally stable. This is before our understanding of dementia as we do now). My older brother was not happy about us entering the bathroom also, because he was using it. Realizing what she had done, she threatened us and said she would take the roller pin to our younger brother when we were not there if we said anything. We did not. She explained her story to our father, and we said nothing. I do not recall how many times I took lumps to the head until we got home. Then it was a spanking for the books. No dinner, and we could not keep our dogs any longer.

Later, that night our father woke us up around one in the morning. The initial thought was getting another spanking when he just apologized. He had told us that the sitter called and said she found the towels I had used, that we had hidden in the trash can. She had profusely apologized and said that her mother would never come around us again (she went into a hospital that night). After we told our story, he again apologized and explained that it was

great to protect our little brother. However, there is a time to keep a secret and a time not to. I tell this tale not for sympathy but to remind Brethren that it is in your election to keep secrets. If it is detrimental enough to speak out, you must say it when agreeing.

The other story does not end well and will be very brief. Many of us who have served have acquired many Brethren through our service. These Brethren are our family. One of my shipmates who was on tour happened to be riding in a convoy on a route that was not to be known. Carelessly, that was not true. Another spoke about the movement the night before among listening ears. My Shipmate, my Brother, lost his life in that convoy.

The life lessons passed down to us by our parents and grandparents can be true gems of wisdom that stay with us throughout our lives. However, the life lessons lived are harder, for it is personal. Both tales explain why and when we should keep a Brother's secret. When asked "to keep it on the square," review your life and the information given before sharing unnecessary or damaging information with another. What we may deem of no importance may be important to another.

If we all practice the principles of the Craft, the right thing to do may be to refrain from contributing to that discussion and instead remember the importance of empathy and mutual respect. Our obligation to keep the secrets of a worthy Brother is "our word of honor" that we chose to do in front of our Brethren and our personal Deity.