

The crucial importance of long-range planning

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We stand at a crossroads in Masonry. We are experiencing an influx of young men joining the Craft. At the same time a large number of all brethren are in the 80s and 90s.

I have seen this year the effects of this influx. In some lodges, responsibility for administration and planning has been handed over quite deliberately to younger persons. These lodges have these characteristics:

- They have young men in the chairs most of whom are master masons.
- They have excellent ritual.
- The young members bring in more men from their peer group
- They make plans for events of a different nature from their elder brethren.

Some lodges have had an influx of young men who have delayed further degrees, stopped coming to lodge altogether or demitted before receiving their second or third degrees. In these lodges there is the appearance of the older members, now of necessity, holding on to responsibilities for planning and administration.

I think that the majority of lodges are between these positions, but as the number of young men increases, they are reaching a "tipping point" where the situation of the lodge could go in either direction.

There is an important book called "The Black Swan". The term "Black Swan" describes an event that is unexpected, unforeseen, highly significant, and usually having negative effects. It is named after the Black Swan discovered in Australia, prior to which the description of swans was that they were always white.

This discovery was unexpected and permanently changed our concept of a swan. The event was not predicted and made lasting change. Most significant change comes about like this.

It is in human nature that when an unexpected event occurs we all seek to find the reason for it. We assume that must be some reason why an unfortunate event occurs. The media are particularly prone to this. An excellent example is the recent shootings in Tucson. The media has been full of talk about whether or not political, and particularly right wing, rhetoric, has brought about a tragic event.

This is typical of such an event. We seem to have a great need to explain events on the basis of past events. With black swan events this is usually not possible, or worse, wrong. The best example of this is the black swan that happens to the turkey at Christmas. The turkey has been in a pen for hundreds of days. Every day someone came into the pen and fed him. Then one day the same man comes into the pen and wrings his neck. For the turkey this is the supreme black swan event.

This has everything to do with long-range planning. We seem to think that we can predict future events by what has happened to us in the past. In fact complex systems are determined by so many different and unrelated circumstances that doing so is impossible.

So how can we make appropriate plans? Well, we know that men joining the craft are young. Most of them are under 40. Most of them become of age to join the Craft in the 21st century. They have the following characteristics:

- They look for leaders with honesty and integrity
- They look for great role models
- They have new ideas and opinion
- They don't want their ideas to be ignored

- They want learning opportunities
- They love trying new things
- They look for growth and development
- They ask that their ideas be treated with respect
- They are idealistic.
- They are familiar with the concept of multitasking
- They are familiar with, and comfortable with, networking over vast distances, by electronic means
- They understand and embrace diversity
- They seek to work in a friendly environment and to work with friends
- They are busy
- They are vitally interested in history, symbolism, spirituality and learning how to use methods of self improvement (note, for example, the enormous number of young people who filled auditoria throughout Canada on the recent visit of the Dalai Lama)
- They look for growth, strong relationships, and endless opportunities to help others

They have been described as being “a perfect fit for Freemasonry.”

We know that something like 40% of our members have passed their 80th birthday and that there was a huge influx of masons after the Second World War. The demographic of masonry today is distorted by that fact. As a result the number of members of the Craft at the Lodge, District and Provincial level has fallen dramatically and for the next few years will continue to do so.

This doesn't mean however that masonry is going to die out. This is emphatically not so. There has never been a time in history when masonry has been more important and it will be sought after by men yearning to discuss with other men their spirituality and the path to mature masculinity.

I wanted to introduce the concept of a multiverse. As we pass through this life we make many choices. Choices are made which would take us in a totally different direction. Our universe is changed as a result. All change is a result of *all* of the choices that *all* people make *all* the time. There is a concept that, in fact, we live in but one of billions of universes which are coexisting in time and, more importantly, that we ourselves create our own reality through those choices. In other words we can and do invent our own future. Whether you believe this or not and, although there is some evidence to support it, it remains for now a matter of faith, it is the best way to do long range planning: Invent your own future and set a course towards it.

We, in fact, know only two things: the situation today, and the future we have envisioned

Thus, my brethren, long-range planning can create a future in which the model of masonry must change. This planning must be done if we are to realize a vital, active and modern version for our ancient craft. The timeless vitality of Freemasonry, the hard-core what we do, will not change.

It is evident from the half-year report of our district long-range planning committee that only a minority of lodges has a long-range planning committee or a long-range plan. This is unacceptable. It is essential for the future health of every lodge that it plans for its future, the not too distant future, when the average age will be much lower than it is today, and the number of members will be lower.

It is furthermore essential that we, as a district, initiate serious discussions on its size. It has often been suggested that we are approaching a time when it will be no longer necessary to have two districts in Ottawa and the valley. I am convinced, as many of you in this room are, that this is indeed so, but I have seen no evidence of any preparation for it.

It is as if, by ignoring the possibility, the reality will go away.

It will not go away. We have the opportunity to create a future for ourselves that will enable us “to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others.” In this case we refer to the happiness of our younger and future brethren and the health of our Craft.