

# MASONIC EDUCATION AND THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MASONS AND LODGES

Presented by Wor. John Shroeder  
at the Multi-district Educational Program  
Saturday, September 9, 2000, at Kena Temple

We're going to have a short responsive reading.

Whence came you as an Entered Apprentice?

Together -- [Response]

What came ye here to do?

Together -- [Response]

"...and to IMPROVE MYSELF IN MASONRY."

What does that mean to you? What have you done about it TODAY? This week? This month? This year?

How many of you know who your Lodge Education Officer is? How many of you would be able to make a list of the five most important and worthwhile lessons you have learned from your LEO this year? What do you expect of your LEO? Does he meet your expectations? If not, is that YOUR responsibility or his?

On a recent cross-country truck trip with my daughter, we alternated the driving duties. When I was not driving I listened to the tapes taken from the best-selling book, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey. This book is not just another quickie self-improvement book full of sales tricks. Author Covey says we can receive satisfaction

and rewards in life only by acting on our inner values and integrity.

Sounds kind of like a Mason, doesn't he? The tapes made me think (even though I was keeping one eye on my daughter's truck driving.) I thought I would like to share his approach with you today to see if it makes you think also. BUT, nobody else can think for you, you have to think for yourself.

What I normally do in my workshop is to outline the seven habits discussed in the book and then have attendees form into discussion groups with each group taking about 20 minutes to prepare a 2 - 5 minute report for the rest of us on how one of the habits they select can best contribute to more effective members, leaders, and lodges. We then have a general discussion of the reports. This provides everyone opportunity to become actively involved in Masonic education. Today, we will not have time for the discussion groups so I will outline the Seven Habits and ask that you take them back to your lodge to implement.

We say that it is our purpose to take good men and make them better. How can these seven habits be worked into our daily lives as internalized HABITS or principles to make each of us a better man and thus to make our relations with our families, our lodges, our communities, the nation and the world better? This is going to involve some active initiative by you upon completion of today's program.

Dr. Covey defines a habit as the conjunction of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes necessary to make a habit an effective part of our daily lives:

KNOWLEDGE - knowing WHAT needs to be done.

SKILLS - the ability to implement the WHAT.

ATTITUDES - the ingrained desire or motivation to accomplish the WHAT.

Dr. Covey says that if we want to make minor improvements in our effectiveness, we can work on our skills, attitudes and knowledge BUT to make MAJOR improvements, we need to change our paradigms. Webster defines paradigm as a role, pattern or model. Dr. Covey says it is the mental map that we carry with us and by which we judge all other things. He gives an example of a paradigm shift, describing a Sunday morning subway ride with few passengers, quietly and privately enjoying their newspapers and the ride. At a stop a man boards with raucous children who disrupt the mood of the entire car. They are disturbing all who were previously enjoying the peace and quiet. Finally, Stephen Covey, as politely as he can, but also very directly, admonishes the father to get control of his children. The man breaks down and tells Stephen that they have just come from the hospital where his wife, the mother of the children, just died, and they don't know how to handle this crumbling of their world. Suddenly, Stephen's entire view of the situation is changed. He now feels no resentment but only sympathy and warmth for the family. The situation has not changed at all, but his paradigm has changed and it entirely reverses his attitude and how he will behave. To make these seven habits have maximum effect, we must work to change our own paradigms, to always look for that empathy he felt after learning of the family loss.

The habits are divided into three groups. Group I contains habits 1, 2, & 3 which are character habits. Group II contains habits 4, 5, and 6

which are personality habits, and Group III contains habit number 7 which summarizes the other 6.

Most of the human relations seminars available address Group II, the personality habits, and go for the "quick fix". These may resolve acute problems but usually fail to address the chronic, underlying problems which will result in the recurrence of the acute symptoms. I feel that this is very much like our approach in Freemasonry: First we are to convert ourselves from rough to perfect ashlar (the character habits) and then we can help our Brethren become better men by employing the personality habits.

The CHARACTER HABITS:

The first habit discussed is **BE PRO-ACTIVE.**

By this, the author means, "Take responsibility for your own actions and your own futures. Don't blame your circumstances, situation, or problems on your company, boss, parents, spouse, neighbors, children environment or you Lodge Education Officer, as I noted earlier. Take charge of your life. ACT, rather than RE-act." This applies to organizations as well. How many times have you heard someone say, "Our Lodge would do thus-and-so BUT the DDGM [or the Grand Master, or the Lodge Secretary, or whoever] won't support it." Or, "I wish we could do thus-and-so but the Master isn't interested in that." And the matter is dropped there. One of our diplomatic problem solvers has a bumper sticker which reads, "If the people will lead, the leaders will follow!" Isn't THAT a thought-provoking idea!

I have a friend who once felt totally alone, and under intense professional pressure in a very remote situation with great responsibility and with no support structure for him to turn to. He confessed that he stayed in bed for two days and may have had what we term a nervous breakdown until the thought came to him in his despair, "No one has dominion over my life except as I grant it to him." This thought converted him on the spot to a self-guided individual. Others recognized this in him and turned to him for guidance and support and he continued to gain strength from this. Eleanor Roosevelt, in her Civil Rights talks, said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission." This concept can give each of us and our organizations the will to do what we will.

When I was in the third grade I was asked to memorize a poem for a Church program. The title was "It Isn't the Church, It's You." The poem described all the criticisms which members make of their churches and the bottom line was, don't blame the church for those things about it which you find unsatisfactory. The Church is You and you can change yourself and so change the church. I think I understood this even as a third grader. Isn't that true also of our lodges? Whenever any Brother complains about your lodge, ask him, in the most friendly manner, what he is going to do to improve the situation. Of course this only works if you are willing to stretch forth your hand to help him.

A feature article appeared in a recent Washington Post about making a list of "Fifty Things I Want to Do Before I Die." This sort of goal setting can help stop aimless drifting and give us more excitement, more accomplishments, and make us a better and more interesting person to be

around. What 50 things would YOU like to do before you die? What would you like to see your Lodge do before you die? As the Nike shoe ad says, "Just DO IT!" This is the essence of "**BE PRO-ACTIVE**".

The second habit is **BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**

You have all heard the following aphorisms:

"Don't start the engine until you know your destination." "Plan ahead."

"Don't put the tongue in motion until the mind is in gear." "If you don't know where you want to go, it doesn't matter what route you take."

Author Covey's family developed a family mission statement to which all family members could subscribe. This led him to his widely praised tape series, "Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families". What is YOUR Lodge's mission? Has it been stated? Would it be helpful if it could be written down for all members to subscribe to? How do we do planning without a mission in mind (or how do we plan our route if we don't know what destination we are seeking?)

The exercise of writing a Lodge mission and obtaining concurrence in that mission statement can be very useful to an organization and provide new insights and inspire renewed dedication. How general or specific should a Lodge mission statement be? How do YOU fit into the Lodge mission?

A few years ago, Coca Cola Corporation worked long and hard to develop a mission statement and finally settled on: "To satisfy the World's thirst." This is very general and opens up many options. It did not prevent them from coming up with the new Coca Cola and then returning to the Classic Coca Cola and adding Cherry Coca Cola, etc. It also opened

up the field to Iced Tea and set a worldwide arena for their business horizons.

Is it a part of our mission to sell Christmas trees or fireworks? Or are these means to our larger mission accomplishment? If means, are these the best means available? What does "Take good men and make them better" mean to our mission statement? Better in what way? What activities or programs or counseling or other ways do we provide to make ourselves and other men better? What is the Masonic mission for each of us? What have YOU done to make a Brother a better man today? this week? this month?

### The third habit is **PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST**

This follows on the second habit. Once we know where we want to go, what we want to accomplish, then we can internalize and make a part of our very fiber, the total understanding of what is most important and what is of lesser importance. This is far more than just the assignment of priorities to a list of tasks which confront us. It does no good to buy an expensive wardrobe for the ski slopes if we don't first put forth the effort to learn to ski and is less than useless if it is not important in our personal system of values to be a well-dressed skier.

A feature article in a recent Washington Post made a case that the purpose for feeding children is a two-fold one: to provide pleasure and to provide needed nourishment, just as it is for ourselves. The author said that forcing a child to swallow food they find repugnant is cruel. That a happy child is more important than eating broccoli or asparagus or whatever else it is that makes a child gag. The first, or most important,

thing is a healthy and happy child, not a clean plate. If a parent agrees this is first, then the parent will behave differently than if the parent believes that the meal hour is an opportunity to enforce parental authority to make the child obediently eat everything served, or sit at the table in tears until both parent and child totally lose interest in the process.

What do we consider most important for our family, personal, and Masonic lives? Are these compatible? Or are there conflicts between the relative importance we assign to the activities of these various compartments of our lives? How do we reconcile priorities? Do we even think about our priorities?

I had a friend who always assigned priorities to all his work in the office and to his chores at home. His only problem was that he then devoted as much time as was needed to do the top items on the list perfectly, even those jobs where "acceptable, not perfect" would have been good enough. The result was that he always had half his day's work undone because it was too low on his priority list to get his attention. This was the quick fix attempt for an acute problem of task overload. Many, if not all, workers suffer from this syndrome much of the time. That is the chronic condition. The symptoms are fatigue and disaffection. If we really operate on what is most important to us, we can be re-vitalized and gain new energies to resolve those things to which we are truly committed.

This brings us to Group II, habits 4, 5, & 6, the personality habits:

The fourth habit is **THINK WIN/WIN**



I have a whole book on this topic that I find inspirational. Decision theorists refer to zero sum games. Zero sum games are those where there is only a defined limited amount of goods, dollars, land, respect, or whatever is the reward for a competition, and what I win you must lose and what you win I must lose. In chess, for example, if I win your Bishop or Knight or Rook or Queen, I have become stronger and more threatening to your King. We must always be 60 - 40 or 70 - 30 or 40 - 60 or 30 - 70. "Ties are like kissing your sister," some coaches and sports writers have said. Stephen Covey says this is the outlook of those who operate from a mental paradigm of scarcity.

Others, he says, who operate from a paradigm of abundance say that life does not have to be like a game of chess. Win/win strategy says that in the long run, the best solution is one in which everyone wins. This was the basis for all of Henry Kissinger's international negotiations and, whatever you may have thought of his politics, he was the world's most respected negotiator among the international diplomatic corps. Dr. Kissinger believed that if one side or the other felt they had been cheated at the negotiating table, they would start working to undermine the result the minute they left the table. For a historical example, Adolf Hitler was able to gain influence in the Weimar Republic because the German people had been chafing for 20 years under the punitive decisions of the Treaty of Versailles which ended WW I which were designed to prevent them from ever gaining strength enough to start another war.

A recent business management book is called The Death of Competition. It's theme is that corporations of the next decades will not

thrive by putting their competition out of business, as in the days of the old railroad barons, but will instead succeed by linking their prosperity with the prosperity of the other companies in their field -- by being facilitators of the success of their competition -- a win/win strategy.

The fifth habit is **FIRST SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, AND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD**

Probably, everyone has heard a friend, co-worker, and/or family member complain, "THEY just don't understand me/my problems/my needs/my potential/etc." This is sort of a sub-set of being RE-active instead of PRO-active -- again laying the blame on others for our problems. Author Covey says the preferred effective approach is to be a good listener, understand clearly what is being said and, of equal importance, listen for what is NOT being said. What don't we tell others? [our fears] We don't even let ourselves think of our fears. This may come from being repeatedly cautioned as a child, "You MUSTN'T be afraid of that!" If we listen carefully to what is NOT being said, we come to understand the other person's fears, one of the most powerful motivators of most peoples' lives. If we understand their fears, we can help arrange solutions which resolve those fears. Psychologists who have studied fear tell us that 90% of what is feared will not happen. Of the other 10% of things we fear, we cannot do anything to reduce the risks of about half. We only need then to find a way to help establish risk-reducing controls which can reassure the other person, and 95% of the time, we will be right.

The author illustrates the effectiveness of the habit of seeking FIRST to understand and THEN to be understood by telling of a salesperson who had spent many months working on a huge sale which would generate as much income for him as he had made the entire past year. He thought he had the sale closed until the final meeting with the client and several competing firms when a new person in the client's organization seemed to be leaning toward one of the competitors' proposals. He could feel the commission slipping through his fingers and wanted to shout, "But you just don't understand the superior advantages of our proposal!" and place the blame for a deal gone wrong on the new man in the client's office. But... he had attended one of the author's seminars and remembered, "First seek to understand and then to be understood." so he said, "I feel that you may have some reservations or concerns about our proposal. I want to TRULY understand any reservations you have and would like to visit with you for about 20 minutes so I can FULLY understand your concerns." After two hours of listening to the client with very little being said by the salesperson, the order was his because the client representative knew that he would have a sympathetic listener in the supplier's company. Everyone wants to be understood and appreciated. When we genuinely want to understand and help and appreciate others on an equal footing so that we can go for the win-win strategy, it is automatically sensed by the other who is willing to be more relaxed, more honest, more cooperative and to work with us instead of against us. This is the very opposite of the high pressure sales closing tactic which can cause the reluctant buyer to up the ante of resistance to meet the increased pressure to buy. It does not have

to be a product we are talking about here, it can be any decision in our home, office or Lodge. I had one Brother, with whom I shared these lessons, tell me that he felt that this lesson alone saved his marriage, a most rewarding response for a Masonic educator or mentor. The author guarantees this habit will immediately improve ALL of your personal relationships -- in the family, on the job, and in your social groups.

The sixth habit is **SYNERGIZE**

This is a management and human relations buzzword which means that the effectiveness of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. In medicine, it means that a combination of drugs given simultaneously can be more effective than the drugs would be if given separately. This means that if we can bring different individuals with different talents, interests, beliefs and prejudices together, capitalizing on the different contributions of each, to pursue a common goal, or mission, as it was termed in habit number two above, "begin with the end in mind", we can multiply our effectiveness. In warfare, leaders speak of "force multipliers". They mean, for example, that if a third-world nation drops a few \$5,000 mines in the sea, we have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to counter this threat. General Collin Powell said that continued optimism is a force multiplier. If we can bring together different individuals, recognizing their differences as a strength rather than a weakness, to achieve a common goal, we can realize a force multiplication.

This requires deep thinking and thoughtful planning as it seems to be almost inherent in men and organizations to reward uniformity and punish non-conformity. Differences are often seen as threatening. I have been

told that some pioneer farmers used to harness an ox with a horse to plow the prairie under, one walking on the unplowed sod and the other in the previously plowed furrow. To work a mixed team was more work but they could plow more ground in a day by capitalizing on the inherent strengths of the ox and the horse to offset the weakness of the other. Likewise, it can require more thoughtful leadership to achieve a synergistic effect in an organization.

This brings us to the last habit which alone comprises Group IV:

The seventh habit is **SHARPEN THE SAW**

This term comes from the story of the woodsman who was wearing himself out and slowly sawing timber with a dull saw but had so much work to accomplish before dark that he couldn't take the time away from sawing to sharpen his saw, so he tried to maintain his rate of progress by sawing harder.

By this the author means to continuously seek self-renewal of each of the four aspects of the human personality: physical, mental, spiritual, and social. Again, this sounds much like our Masonic teaching of the physical Entered Apprentice stage of human development, the mental Fellow Craft stage and the spiritual or Master Mason stage. Stephen makes a good case that to be effective individuals we need challenges, work, and problems to solve but we also need to step away from our work to take a re-freshed look at it with new insights gained from study, new contacts, and improved health. Some might say, "take a fresh look at

things.” But I prefer the term RE-freshed look because it is not our first fresh look we are talking about, but the richer, more insightful renewed slant or view we may gain when we have RE-freshed ourselves by changing our pace, by switching from physical to mental effort and back again, by gaining new spiritual dedication through study of sacred literature and prayer, new knowledge gained by deeply thinking about and studying the problem, new contacts with others who are working similar or different problems with solutions which can be applied to our problems. Many of you have read of Thomas Alva Edison sleeping only a few hours a day but switching from one type of activity to another in order to re-fresh himself .

Is this one of the primary missions for Masonic education, to foster a sharpening of the saws of our members? What about prospective members? If this is the appropriate mission for Masonic education, how should we go about it? Who should be doing it? Who should be the target audience, as they say in the world of marketing, primarily new members, old inactive members? What should we put first when we put first things first?

One of Brother Rudyard Kipling’s aphorisms is, “I have six honest serving men, they taught me all I knew. Their names were ‘What’ and ‘Where’ and ‘When’ and ‘How’ and ‘Why’ and ‘Who’.” An outstanding professor of education once comforted his students worried about not being quite up to their responsibilities to educate the youth of America, “There’s little you can do to keep the intellectually curious from learning and no one can do a great deal to educate those who are not.” I trust

that each one here today will put forth his very best effort and engage in that hardest of all work, original thinking, to analyze these seven habits and work on ways that we can make ourselves and our Lodges more effective by “frequently inculcating and strongly recommending” their daily practice in order to make good men better and improve our families, our churches and synagogues, our communities, our Commonwealth and our Nation.

John Shroeder, PM, Elmer Timberman Lodge No. 54, Annandale, VA,  
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STEPHEN COVEY'S SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE BE PROACTIVE BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST THINK WIN/WIN SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND AND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD SYNERGIZE SHARPEN THE SAW	STEPHEN COVEY'S SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE BE PROACTIVE BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST THINK WIN/WIN SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND AND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD SYNERGIZE SHARPEN THE SAW	STEPHEN COVEY'S SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE BE PROACTIVE BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST THINK WIN/WIN SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND AND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD SYNERGIZE SHARPEN THE SAW
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