

I recently read a brief article entitled “How to Manage Veterans in a HiTech environment” and it set me thinking about some of the very real challenges facing our order as we look to the future.

The writer says “To manage veterans can be a difficult task, can frustrate and challenge the work force, but can enrich it as well. The successful Manager identifies the problems and potential solutions that his veterans may present and finds common ground with them, guiding them through the generation clashes.

As a general principle, veterans tend to be directive, as was the standard operating procedure of the 50s. They are likely to take charge, delegate and make the bulk of decisions themselves. As a Manager, you have to appreciate such a take-charge manner, even though it tends to conflict with modern trends. Veterans can make fine team members, but can also be prone to buck the authority of younger Managers.

While they didn't learn about computers in school and may often find technology confusing, remember that it was their generation that initiated so much of the technology which has made your PC possible.

Let them know that their age and experience will be considered an asset, not a liability, exhibit flexibility and emphasise respectful relations. While new ideas and changes may often meet with their resistance, it is well worth focusing on retaining the talents and gifts veteran employees often have.”

When I started on my Masonic journey, Brethren, I could not help but notice the wide range of ages of the Brethren around me. I watched in awe as senior Brethren received jewels for 50 years service. From a personal point of view, I saw this strong diversity of ages as a real attraction and know of no other society where members spanning 2, 3 or even 4 generations can so effectively participate in shared activities.

But then, the ancient principles and teachings of Freemasonry are, indeed, ageless. The precepts of truth, morality and brotherly love are as valid for an 18 year old as they are for an 80 year old. The application of charity and the striving to be a better man living in a better world is

not bound by time. The traditional ways in which Masonic teachings are imparted are so rich in symbolism and tradition, that to dramatically change them would deprive upcoming generations of some of our Masonic life's richest moments.

In my view Brethren, Freemasonry itself remains as attractive today as it has ever been. Why then, are concerns raised about declining numbers? Why do we have Lodges torn apart by internal conflicts? Why do we so often struggle to get our basic messages across? Why does so much of the profane world hold us in low esteem and, in many cases, actively seek to harm our Order?

I would suggest, Brethren, that we need to take more account of the fact that, while the principles of Freemasonry never age, the world in which we live is a rapidly changing one. The M Wor Grand Master has, on several occasions stressed the need to be more open, to eliminate unnecessary secrecy and to look for ways and means in which we can promote our Order more effectively to the profane world. We have to clearly understand the boundary between that which is a tradition to be jealously guarded and that which is a current practice which should be reviewed and possibly amended as circumstances change.

We also have to accept, Brethren, that people have changed. While the article I referred to talks about "managing veterans", it is equally true that the suitable young men we are hoping to attract and retain today, require a very different style of management to that applied in the past. They tend to come from the "fast-food" generation where things change quickly and often. Rules tend not to be as rigid as they used to be and, for better or worse, authority is far less imposing. They have been brought up in a world where the options are vast and the demands on time are enormous. Things must happen – and must happen now!

Freemasonry is in the privileged position of being able to draw from the wisdom and experience of the senior Brethren, while enjoying the energy and enthusiasm of youth. Our challenge, Brethren, in making the changes so essential to our future, is to effectively harness all these attributes and use them to our best advantage. We need the ongoing support of our older Brethren, but must also ensure that the younger Brethren have the freedom to implement some of their own, fresh ideas. In all our Lodges, we have to continually strive for peace and harmony, based on a genuine understanding of our Brother's point of view. That way, the different generations may most effectively work together toward the attainment of our unifying common objectives, our cherished Masonic goals.

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