



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

December 1, 2011

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Hard to believe, but it's already December. Following is a column written especially for our DMC Newsletter by Grand Warden Rick Boyles. He has taken us "alphabetically" through some issues that have led to the decline in membership. As you well know, the focus of DMC is to RECOGNIZE, STOP and REVERSE the decline in our Order's membership. Rick's column is food for thought!

And again, if YOU know of a member of this Order whom you believe would be a good addition to our growing e-mail matrix, please check with them, confirm that they would like to be included, and send me their name and e-mail address. We're happy to add them to our expanding DMC list.

Fraternally,

Dave Rosenberg

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Our group was formed with the sole rationality of finding ways in which to add members to our order. Whether or not you agree with our actions, you can't dispute our motivation. Our order is swiftly failing. Just in the period in which I have been a member, we have lost 20 % of our total membership. We can't handle this rate of decline much longer. We have seen once thriving lodges now virtually on the brink of collapse. Members have left our order at a much greater rate than we have garnered new members. Why? For a number of reasons, of which, here are a few spelled out.

- a) Many of the older members have died, or no longer attend.
- b) A large percentage of our lodges have become virtual vacuums, with no desire to attract new members, to the point that now they have become almost totally exclusionary.
- c) There are a number of members who belong to the order merely for self-serving reasons, to protect an agenda, financially generally. While this is not wrong, it is wrong to fear new members because of a fear of intrusion or self-examination.
- d) Older members resent newer members, claiming that they are not "true odd fellows", when, in effect, they can't even state what a true odd fellow is, except to point at themselves. In point



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of fact, the members who oppose new membership are the ones who actually are beginning not to resemble true odd fellows. Has Odd Fellowship come to mean hatred and fear?

e) We as an order for years have resisted any trend towards technological advancement. Most of us refuse to use email, although obviously, it is here to stay. It is also obvious that those who are connected by email and other modern methods, such as facebook, twitter, etc. are more apt to be connected to the order in general.

f) Long term members like to guard their own existence by fear and resentment, often belittling new members or those who try to be the least bit innovative. I personally have been berated by people I have long admired for being part of a group simply formed around studying how to get new members. They have allowed anger and resentment to guide everything they do. They intend to stifle change by ignoring the need for change. Or, they say the order needs change, just not "our change".

g) Rumor and gossip about newer members is so rampant that anyone new is subjected to slander unless they toe the party line, which is so outmoded as to be ludicrous.

h) New members, who join to be part of revitalized lodges, are often treated as lesser members, since perhaps they joined for musical, dramatic, or other lodge committee reasons. Yet, we cease to realize that people must join for one reason or another. No one is born an odd fellow. No one odd fellow is truer than another.

i) Racial or Sexual bias. Long a part of our history, we still seem focused upon hatred of one type or another. Yet, we talk about friendship, love and truth. Whose friendship, love and truth are we referring to? Just our own?

j) Ludicrous dress codes. Both our male and female members practice total immersion into the 1920's dressing in tuxedos and long dresses. Every time I ask a new member why they don't attend a function they answer that they don't possess the appropriate dress or tuxedo. Nowhere else in modern life do we ask people to dress in such an outlandish manner.

k) We're the boss and you're not. That is the attitude of the old line. They don't want new members, and certainly don't want to have new members sit at their table. They have controlled the order so long now that to go against what they believe, would amount to their vision of treason.

l) Functions revolve around the elderly. Even our committee is made up of primarily elderly individuals, but we have gotten to the point where most of our functions are geared towards the elderly. Functions are planned which actually exclude anyone with a job. Annual trips tend to be grand voyages to far off places for 2 weeks at a time. So, we get the same old retirees every



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year. I personally have spoken to many members who would like to attend annual events but can't because of employment or family responsibilities.

m) The code. We have allowed the code, or codes, to become bludgeons. Every time some member announces a new idea or event, we search the code to see why it should not be allowed. In fact, the code is meant to maintain a semblance of order and congeniality. Nothing else. We have come to the point where we only legislate mediocrity. The code should be edited down to the point, where all that is undesirable is conduct unbecoming of an odd fellow. If we say that the order in general is failing, what does that say about our code? Simply put, the code has become too restrictive.

n) React but don't overreact. Too many times, we close lodges rather than counsel individuals. Most people mean well. Rather than pull a charter, we should examine an issue. Sooner or later, there will be too few charters to pull. If a member is bad, it does not follow that a lodge is bad.

o) Along those lines, a lodge should be allowed to remove a member or members for cause. Period. The code allows for this, but also has been so written that a trial by a lodge is so convoluted that even Perry Mason would have a hard time getting it right. Many people have left the order because of another member being too disruptive or destructive. Neither should be tolerated. If we are really serious about conduct unbecoming an odd fellow, than no one should be allowed to promote violence, swear, or otherwise disrupt a lodge. Why would we want that in any lodge? Certainly all members have a right to feel safe and secure in their own lodge, and that should allow them the right to remove someone who is threatening or overbearing. Years ago, a large lodge could be self-policing. Now, smaller lodges are being commandeered by those who have only their own agenda to protect.

p) Protect our heritage. Too many times, lodges have been sold lock, stock, and barrel without first assessing its internal possessions or property. Some lodges date back to the gold rush, which means that many of the furnishings or possessions date to that time as well. I have gone to lodges in disrepair which house great stores of antiques or first editions, yet they close or fail in bankruptcy. For many years, no member even viewed a property that was put up for sale. Would you handle your own property in such a cavalier manner?

q) Membership drives designed to fail. Too many times, we initiate or continue membership drives that have little or no consequence. Other times, we resist the urge to try something new. If we are to grow, we must drop what has not worked and try something new. We look for things that are inexpensive, and yet, we still don't realize, that the internet is free, that email is endless, that facebook and twitter are worldwide, and all can be done in the comfort of our own



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homes. Even my own 85 year old mother enjoys email and facebook. It is time that the order actually at least climbed into the 1980's (at least!).

r) Hatred. Too many of the older members are carrying longstanding resentment towards others. This should not be tolerated. No matter what the position of the odd fellow, no matter what he or she has originally accomplished no hatred should be tolerated. Yelling at another member causes only discomfort.

s) Fear. We all fear the new or unseen. But if we are to guide by friendship, love and truth, this should act as a shield to protect us. If those who are to join us also practice friendship, love and truth, we have nothing whatsoever to fear.

t) Truth. We must first examine ourselves. Are we handling ourselves in the correct manner? Do we love what we do? Are we in the order for the proper reasons? Everyone joins for one reason or another. All clubs or lodges maintain a focus, but has our focus been dulled? Do we see all people as prospective members? Too many times, we eliminate people before we even take the time to know them.

u) Acceptance. Many of us are old. All of us will end up old. We must understand that new members bring new ideas. This is not to be feared. If we lead by love, those we want to join us will reciprocate.

v) Time. We are almost out of time. We are all good at procrastination, but soon there will be little left for us to procrastinate about. Many lodges now have only a quorum of 5 members in attendance at meetings. If we just lose one more member at each lodge, it closes. Now is the time to react.

w) Keep it going. We start with what we have and allow it to breathe. Give that new member a job. Let him or her know you care about their opinion. Don't be the obstacle to growth.

x) Go outside the lodge. Look outside the window. It is a big world. Anyone could be a member if we allow them to be. If we look at people as enemies they are destined to become them.

y) Learn by example. There are lodges that have had success. Let's not waste our time filled with resentment or slander. Let's see what they do right and adopt what we think might work for us.

z) Love. If we practice this, we have little or nothing to fear. That is why I joined, and I hope and pray that is what will keep us afloat.

Oops! Out of Space!



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In Friendship, Love and Truth, Your Grand Warden, Rick Boyles