



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

May 26, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

The front page of the current edition of I.O.O.F News (May-June 2012), published by the Sovereign Grand Lodge, contains the following words in big and bold letters: "Let's Reach Out Into Our Communities" I couldn't agree more. I have said time and time again that to grow our membership (and our Order) we can't just focus on one thing. We need to focus on three things: (1) Our rich heritage and ritual as Odd Fellows - the things that make us a unique fraternal order; (2) Good fellowship activities within our Lodges - the social activities and interaction that members want to have when they join a fraternity; and (3) Reaching out into our communities to do good community works - the civic and charitable involvements that members want to engage in and which give them satisfaction. If any one of these elements is missing, we have turned our backs on a great source of potential recruitment of new members. Even Sovereign Grand Lodge recognizes the importance of emerging from our four walls and reaching out to our communities. Yet to this day, we have Lodges who barely touch the subject of community outreach. What a shame.

Because I get so many demands for this information, I have attached again the article that I wrote on "10 Helpful Hints". And I remind DMC members that the Grand Lodge office has a video available that any member or Lodge can purchase (\$5 plus shipping) which recorded a Membership Development Workshop that my Davis Lodge presented a couple of years ago. The subjects covered in that workshop are as relevant today as they were then. If you want a copy of the video, simply contact the clerk in the Grand Lodge office at c1@caioof.org and request it.

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Dave Rosenberg

10 Helpful Hints to Bring New Members into the Order

By Dave Rosenberg, PG #169

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Most of you who read this article will have been Odd Fellows longer (perhaps far longer) than I have been. I'm a relatively new member of the Order, having been initiated in March of 2004. So, as I write this article, I've been an Odd Fellow for about seven years. And yet, I am asked, again and again, for advice on how to bring new members into the Order. In response to these many requests, I've been urged to write this article. And, ladies and gentlemen, we absolutely have to recruit new members – Odd Fellowship in California has now dropped 90% in membership since WW II, and we have less than 5,000 dues-paying members. This situation is unsustainable, and – as Lodges diminish in membership - is causing innumerable problems throughout the state.

I suppose that I'm asked for advice because I have, personally, brought so many new members into Odd Fellowship. Specifically, I've sponsored about 100 new members. In 2009, the Sovereign Grand Lodge recognized me as #2 in the SGL jurisdiction in bringing in new members; and in 2010, SGL recognized me as #1 in the jurisdiction. I am a member of the Grand Lodge's Membership Committee, and I've developed a "Membership Development Workshop" which, by the way, Grand Lodge has available to anyone who wants it, on a DVD. I serve as the Chair of my own Lodge's Membership and Initiation Committee.

Yet, I do not profess to say how YOU or YOUR Lodge should recruit new members. Frankly, that's up to YOU to determine. What I can do is give you some helpful hints that have worked for me. If those hints happen to make sense to you, or fit your style, or you wish to try them out, then please do! So, without further ado, here's Dave Rosenberg's 10 Helpful Hints to Recruiting New Members into the Order:

Recruitment on the Brain. The single most effective tool in recruiting new members is to have "recruitment on the brain" at all times. Talking to potential new members is not an occasional thing – it has to be a constant thing. When I meet new folks, I size them up, assess them, get to know them, and often ask them to consider applying for membership to the Lodge. For example, we recently hired a contractor to do some work at our Lodge Hall. After getting to know him, I talked to him about Odd Fellowship, and invited him to apply. He did. And I never give up. I talked to one woman for over five years about joining the Lodge. Recently, she did. I constantly carry application forms in my pocket. You never know when you may need one.

Functions at the Lodge. One of the absolute best tools for recruitment is to have an active Lodge. Most of the new members I have recruited have first come into contact with the Lodge through Lodge functions. They come to the function, have fun, meet members and are curious about Odd Fellowship. I have recruited dozens of new members who first came in contact with the Lodge through our community events such as "Breakfast with Santa" or who came to the Lodge as a guest of a member



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during our annual “OddtoberFest” or when we rented a bus to visit wineries in Amador County. Active Lodges create opportunities to recruit.

Husbands and Wives. I have found that one of the best draws for new members is to make it user-friendly for husbands and wives (or significant others), and also for young parents with children. Very few organizations offer couples the ability to work and play together. Odd Fellowship does. Those Odd Fellows Lodges that restrict membership, or discourage membership of women, have cut off 50% of the population. Those Lodges that fail to recruit young parents have cut themselves off from a large segment of the community.

Community Support. The regalia, ritual, grips, passwords, and symbols of Odd Fellowship make us unique and distinguish us as a fraternal order. They should and will always be with us. However, virtually no one joins because of that. A full appreciation of the ritual will develop over time. But, frankly, most folks are drawn to IOOF when the Lodge engages in local community support. New members want to be part of good works in the community – whether it’s feeding hungry people, or working with people with developmental disabilities, or planting trees. When a Lodge engages in active community support activities, that Lodge opens a gateway to recruitment.

Good Fellowship. The other draw for potential new members is good fellowship activities within the Lodge. People today seek a social network and a fun place to enjoy activities with others. When Lodges have a full slate of social activities, recruitment of new members is dramatically enhanced. My Lodge, for example, hosts music events, good fellowship “Lodge Nights”, an “OddtoberFest”, a Halloween Party, and numerous other social events for members and potential new members. Let’s not forget that Odd Fellowship was started in Old England in pubs.

Social Meetings. Social meetings are not prohibited by the Code of Odd Fellowship, and in fact, are encouraged by Grand Lodge. What’s a social meeting? It is simply a meeting of the Lodge where no regalia are worn, no ritual is employed, and no secret signs, grips or passwords are used. Lodges that engage in social meetings have another huge technique available to them for recruitment. Potential new members can attend, can see what the Lodge is up to, and can meet members.

Don’t Make it Easy. There are Lodges that are so desperate for new members that when they get one, they immediately rush into an initiation. And then, once initiated, that new member is plunged into a formal, ritual meeting, and often the Lodge never sees him/her again. In my Lodge, the process of joining (we call it the “pledge period”) takes at least 5-6 months, the applicants (we call them “pledges”)



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have a number of requirements to accomplish before the interviewing committee and membership even vote on them. This makes the goal of membership a valuable goal for them – plus it gives them a chance to meet the members and for the members to meet them – to determine if Odd Fellowship is the right fit.

Diversity. The strength of America is its diversity. That should be the strength of Odd Fellowship, as well. When I recruit new members, I am looking for diversity in age, ethnicity, employment and gender. I want the Lodge to look like my community. It's particularly important to bring in new members in their 20's and 30's. They are the next generation of Odd Fellowship. When a Lodge's members are all in their 60's and 70's and older, it's virtually impossible to attract the younger generation we need to grow.

Leadership. A critical factor to growth of a Lodge is the ability to attract community leaders. A century ago, everybody who was anybody in town was an Odd Fellow. We lost that edge over time. But, if you can attract one or two community leaders, those leaders will attract others. Members who are recognized leaders in the community will elevate the status of the Lodge and open the Lodge up to new memberships. In my Lodge, for example, we have elected city and county officials, school board members, the police chief, several judges, the district attorney and public defender, and so on. What a great recruitment tool you have when you can tell prospective members that your Lodge is the Who's Who of the community.

Mentors. It's important not only to attract new applicants, but to keep them in the process and to actually initiate them. In this regard, it's useful to appoint a Mentor for each new pledge. The Mentor may be an experienced member, but often it's better to have a relatively new member Mentor the pledge. The Mentor acts as a big brother or big sister, a buddy, available to answer questions and to introduce the applicant to other members. An effective Mentor system can really help move the applicant into membership.

Recruitment of new members is a job for each of us in this great and ancient Order. We can't just sit back and wait for the "other guy" to do it. YOU are the other guy.