



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

July 26, 2012

Does Your Community Know You Exist?

Sometimes in our order, we become jaded. A number of our lodges are large enough to feel like their own separate worlds. But many of our other lodges have become simply a refuge from society. Ask an onlooker how they view the I.O.O.F. and they will probably give you a puzzled look. Very few of the public have ever even heard of us. If you point out that the lodge is the biggest building in the oldest part of town often times the person will remark that they had no idea that the order even existed. Or, even worse, they may say that they had no idea that the order still existed. In some cases, the public will respond in a startled manner, almost in disbelief. Our order could easily become a vestige of history, an afterthought to the history of a town. Yet, if we were to delve into our history, we would usually find that many prominent citizens were members, in years long past. This is one of our strengths. We have a long and vibrant history, with many instrumental members from almost every community in this populous state of California. This is a factor that we should not forget.

In our journeys as elective officers we have found lodges that are on the cusp of dissolution. These are lodges that without one or two of their most influential members in attendance that will inevitably close. In most cases, the influential members are elderly, often quite elderly. While we owe a vote of gratitude to these fine individuals, we have to seek new ways in which to attract new and vital members. Without new members, our order will cease to exist within the next 20 years. Whatever your view of our order may be, there can be no disputing, that we must work together to mobilize our lodges to invigorate our present members and to somehow attract new members. It can be done. There are a number of lodges throughout the state that have experienced growth, and they have done it using various methods, but simply sitting in a lodge building behind a locked door will not do the trick. We can't attract anyone if we don't make an effort. Think about your role in your community. Is there something your lodge could do to attract new members?

Look at the interests in your own lodge and in your own local community. Perhaps your lodge likes antiques, old cars, board games, music, art, or any of a myriad of other interests. This connection tends to draw prospective members. Often times, a lodge forms a committee devoted to a single interest and this may attract new members. One lodge has a beer-making committee, another lodge has an antique car committee, a third deals with historical memorabilia, a fourth celebrates music of all types; you get the idea. The public will join if it sees something of



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interest. Advertise your interest, and you could be surprised at the interest it creates. If a lodge has as one of its interests an antique car club, does this make it less of a lodge? Certainly not. Lodges have always been connected by shared interests. No one was born an Odd Fellow. They have to be created. What is an Odd Fellow Lodge without specific interests? It is a lodge waiting for the end. This notion that somehow a lodge with a specific interest transforms itself into a club is clearly negative thinking. A lodge should be what it has always represented, a loving parent with encircling arms. One lodge can house many clubs, or interests.

The Odd Fellows must step back and ask themselves what are they, exactly? This is clearly one of our core issues. In every lodge, we should begin to develop a core interest or multiple interests. Otherwise, ask yourselves what draws new members? Simply stating that we have a pot luck at 5pm on Tuesday nights will not do the trick. Times, they are a-changing. We must learn to change with them.

Around the order there are those who speak of lodges with success with almost derogatory speech, but those larger lodges now are the reason we still exist. Can you imagine an order with lodges of less than 10 members each thinking somehow that they are the example for the future? It simply is not feasible to have an order where lodges have no real core, no interest, and no point to existence. Yet this is the position now of most failing lodges. If you as a member of a failing lodge can't tell an onlooker why they should join your lodge than your lodge has failed. Some members think that each lodge should develop a lodge Mission Statement, and this is an excellent idea, but it should have consistency. It should say something substantial. Just repeating the terms Friendship, Love, and Truth, ad infinitum, will not do the trick. All of us should give serious thought to why we are members, and prepare a speech, written or vocal, to tell to anyone who may show interest in our order. If we can imagine why a prospective member might join our order, it may just happen!

In Friendship, Love and Truth, Rod Metoyer & Rick Boyles