



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

July 28, 2013

Grand Master Rick Boyles has sent us a powerful article for our current DMC Newsletter. Please read it and please pass it on to your Lodge brothers and sisters, and members in other Lodges as well.

The way to grow this Order is to say "yes" to new ideas. The way to kill this Order is to say "no" to those new ideas.

The secret of success for the future of Odd Fellowship is to marry our history and ritual with community service and social activities within the Lodge. In my own Lodge, 10 years ago, when a member proposed a new idea, the typical response was "no, we can't do that", or "we tried that before and it won't work", or my personal favorite, "that's a stupid idea." Today, when a member proposes a community-serving suggestion or makes a suggestion for a fun social activity for the membership, the typical response is, "sure, let's work out the details, and give it a try." Does this modern approach work? Yes, it does. Last week, my Lodge voted 18 new members into the Order and we have an initiation planned next month.

I commend the Grand Master's attached article to you.

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Dave Rosenberg, GW

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### **It's all About the Average Joe**

There are quite a few theories about how our order began, but one of the best I have heard is from Brother Richard Brouse, co-chairman of the Cave Degree, while I was in attendance for this fine event up in Yreka. Much of what I list is taken verbatim from his speculations. I quote from a historical paper he gave to me at the Yreka Lodge. His explanation of the beginning of our order is that guilds existed in the common ages formed for both religious and social purposes and were voluntary groups. They would have organized festivities providing for the sick and the impoverished, pensions and burial funds. The Masons had builder, merchant, and craft guilds. His theory is that common laborers, who worked at "odd jobs", logically became known as "Odd Fellows". It is known throughout history that journeymen laborers were known as "Fellows",



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hence the combination makes a great deal of sense. And he notes that in the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> century, the word “odd” may not have had the meaning it has today.

I like this explanation of our beginnings because it points to our inherent humility. Rather than presuming that our order was based upon a bunch of affluent guys (and I do mean guys) doling out charity, it may have been based upon group interaction and cooperation. Now, clearly at that time, many could not read or write, so that those who could were quite important to their lodge, but they weren't the whole story. The whole story is that lodges came together based upon their own differences, gathered for the purposes of benevolence and charity. I am quite sure that many in attendance had their best meal of the day or week at the lodge, and found security in their membership. Lodges, according to the old minutes I have read, were self-policing, self-protecting, and of course, self-serving. Some would say that this is a flaw of the order, but it is part of our history. In today's world, we may say that help is still needed for destitute members but it appears not on the base level that it was at one time needed. Most, if not all of us have shelter and sustenance without a lodge's assistance, hence in my thinking this is another reason why lodges of all orders have ceased to have central significance within most members' lives.

So then, we arrive at the crux of today's question: how do we translate yesterday's value of a lodge to today's world? An answer might be to somehow give the individual lodge significance. This is why several lodges in our state are experiencing growth; their ability to attract people extemporaneous to that person's base needs but integral to something else that person needs or desires. I have noticed in my travels that lodges which have diverse committees tend to have a more diverse and invigorated membership and this may be integral to a lodge's survival. Some lodges, have committees. The Davis Lodge, for example, has over 20 committees, including some really diverse ones such as a hiking committee, a poetry committee, a community support committee, a music committee, a wine tasting committee, a photography committee, a legacy tree committee, a zymurgy (beer-brewing) committee, an “OddtoberFest” committee, a Halloween Party committee, a good fellowship committee, a social services committee, a bingo committee, a “Taste of Davis” committee, and many more. Some applicants are attracted to that lodge because of their interest in one of these committees; and some members of the lodge stay involved because they enjoy working with a particular committee. Is that a bad thing? Some elderly members seem to think so, but if you look at other lodge groups, this is not unusual, and in fact, in other lodge settings encouraged. The point is that somehow we need to encourage growth, not block it. Whatever your political viewpoint within the order, if you oppose committees or growth of any type, then surely you will be instrumental in our demise. We must get around this tired issue of whether or not we should encourage growth, or surely we will shortly fail outright. It is time to realize that we either grow or die. Simply



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handing out membership forms without something to offer the prospective member is tantamount to idiocy.

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Rick Boyles