



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

August 3, 2013

A few days ago I received an e-mail from one of our DMC members who was concerned about losing new members in his Lodge due to "boring" meetings. His question: "How can we make our Lodge meetings more interesting?"

It's a fair question, and frankly, an important one. The rapid decline in our net membership numbers over the past 65+ years indicates that we are not attracting the new blood into our Order, certainly not in sufficient numbers to offset our membership losses. And if we were brutally honest with ourselves we would realize that the vast majority of men and women in their 20's and 30's and 40's simply don't want to stay connected to a Lodge where the members just gather once or twice a month for a highly structure ritual meeting, with little else going on. They might join that Lodge, but they won't stay. And if you don't believe me, check the statistics.

So, what's the answer to how we make our Lodge meetings more interesting?

I think the answer for each Lodge is ultimately up to the members of that Lodge, but I can certainly offer some suggestions:

1. Have more social meetings. There is absolutely no requirement that every single one of your Lodge meetings must be formal, with structured opening and closing, and full regalia. You are permitted to have social meetings. In fact, you are encouraged to have social meetings in your Lodge. Both Grand Lodge and Sovereign Grand Lodge have pushed us to have more social meetings. At a social meeting, of course, we don't use alarms, passwords, signs and grips, and we don't open and close formally. You don't share fraternal secrets. Instead, the Noble Grand runs a much more informal meeting. But there is no restriction to the members talking about and planning for social events, community events and charitable causes. There is no restriction to reviewing the calendar or for Lodge committees to meet and report. In my opinion, Lodge members can even vote on things at these social meetings relating to social and community projects and events, subject to the votes being ratified at a subsequent formal meeting. One of the beauties of the social meeting is that it more casual and comfortable for members, and you can even invite prospective members, applicants and family members to these meetings. It is a great way to expose your Lodge to the community and to generate applications.

2. Develop your own agenda. Contrary to popular opinion, the formal agenda contained in the charge books is a suggested agenda - not a required agenda. A Lodge should feel free to tailor its agenda to its own special needs. Certainly, there are items on the agenda that should be on every agenda (e.g. Treasurer's report), but Lodges can tweak agendas as they see fit. For example, in my own Lodge at least half the agenda is dedicated to reports from our committees (we have 20 committees) and we also have time on every agenda for an historical report about the Order (that is one of the tasks we give to the Vice Grand). Plus, feel free to modernize the agenda. For example, I have found most Lodges have the Secretary actually read, word for word, the Minutes of the past meeting. If you find that time-consuming



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(and boring) you can dispense with that. In my Lodge, for example, all our members are on e-mail and the Secretary e-mails the Minutes out to each member several days before the meeting. There are also hard copies available at the meeting, just in case. The review and approval of Minutes at the meeting takes a very short time.

3. Have some social time before the meeting. If you want to liven things up, schedule a "social hour" before each evening meeting. The social hour can include dinner, or just snacks, and beverages. Nothing like a little social time to make members happy. Remember, this fraternal order was founded in Merry Olde England as a place for social interaction. In fact, the first meetings of Odd Fellows Lodges took place in pubs. And the founding location of this fraternity in North America was none other than the Seven Stars Tavern.

4. Develop committees and have them do their own thing. There is no substitute for activities and projects to liven up a Lodge and liven up a meeting. When members are planning social events, or community support events, or charitable projects, they are following the precepts of this Order, and they are having fun doing it. Committees should meet apart from the meetings, so that they plan in an informal and comfortable setting. What committees? Well, let the members decide. They may want to do wine tasting, or go hiking, or help a foster family, or go bowling, or golfing, or plan a Christmas event for the community, or paint a public building, or plan a potluck and movie night, or plant trees in the community - etc., etc. Don't reject ideas because they are new or different. Give it a try. What do you have to lose?

5. Think outside the box. Why only have meetings in the evening? How about breakfast meetings? Would a breakfast meeting (breakfast first, followed by the meeting) be of interest to your members? In other words, just because your Lodge has done something the same way for the last 50 years doesn't mean you have to continue to do it for the next 50.

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