



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

November 19, 2013

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

As you all know, DMC focuses on just three things: Membership, Membership, and Membership.

DMC welcomes diverse opinions and dialogue on a broad range of subjects relating to membership. These subjects can include - among others - reasons for the diminution of membership, best practices on re-energizing Lodges, suggestions and techniques for increasing membership, and the dire impacts of a diminishing pool members in a Lodge.

DMC is now an official committee appointed by the Grand Master and we view ourselves as the philosophical arm - conscience if you will - of the California Order. We are saying things that need to be said. We are encouraging a full discourse of the elephant in our Odd Fellows room: the continuing decline in membership. And we are all about suggesting real and practical ways to reverse this trend and start growing this Order once again.

To further stimulate the dialogue, DMC has received the attached article from one of our members in Southern California, Past Grand and current Vice Grand of his Lodge, Gary Charpentier. Not everyone will agree with Gary's article. But that's not the point. Gary's article is pretty blunt and hard-hitting and may stimulate further thoughts and dialogue. (Let's hope that you don't recognize your own Lodge in Gary's words.)

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Dave Rosenberg
Grand Warden

The Odd Fellows are not a Tontine

There are far too many in the order who treat their lodge as a tontine. The last member standing gets all the cash and investments of those who came before. Unfortunately there are far too many lodges that operate as if they are. Their dues do not even cover the operational expenses of their lodge and they must dip into their investments to pay the operating expense. The lodge has meals with every meeting. Who pays for the meal? It doesn't matter if it is potluck or surf and turf. Someone pays, and it is the lodge. Unfortunately the code permits this as it permits a lodge to have dues that are less than the cost of running the lodge.



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There are brothers in the order, who today are simply looking for what they can grab. After all they joined when lodges helped their members so today when they didn't plan for their retirement they want help. It might be a couple of free meals a month or in some cases free rent by staying in the lodge as caretaker. When a lodge has a couple hundred dues paying members, supporting one or two freeloaders is possible. When a lodge is down to ten members

This attitude of running a lodge into the ground, like a tontine, has to change. Far too many brothers, feel that any lodge no matter how bad is better than no lodge. Unfortunately the dead wood is rotting the tree from the inside out. Instead of a bundle of sticks, the center is hollow and it will not stand.

In 1850 when California #1 started dues were \$10.00 a year, and there was no Grand Lodge taking part as per capita fees. In 2012 dollars that is \$271.91. Why do we permit dues of \$45.00 or over 6 times less today? Is that part of our failure? Have we forgotten basic business, have we forgotten to take care of ourselves first?

Davis lodge is taking the Costco method of hiring in finding new members. Most other lodges are taking the Wal Mart method. Costco looks for people who will be valuable long term employees, someone who will take your job when you retire. Wal Mart takes the first person off the street to perform as a robot and expects them to leave PDQ. Each treats their employees based on those expectations.

The failure we have is that of leadership. It started a long time ago, over a generation. Unfortunately in many lodges there isn't anyone who knows how to run a business. That has become obvious when the IRS revoked dozens of lodges non-profit status because they didn't send in tax returns! A lodge is a business! If you don't know how to run it, it will fail. That is the bad news. The good news is that can be taught.

Is there a list of best business practices for an Odd Fellow lodge? If our house isn't in order can we expect to grow? Is this something that the DMC can do to help get us back on track to being a growing order?