



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

June 7, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Every year for the past several years, my home Lodge (Davis #169) has been listed in the Grand Secretary's report as one of the Lodges that has shown the greatest net increases in membership. The secret of success is, ultimately, net growth in a Lodge. Every Lodge loses members - through death, withdrawal and otherwise. So, the goal of a Lodge is to bring in sufficient new members to cover those net losses, and hopefully, to exceed the net losses and show a net gain.

When I joined the Davis Lodge in 2004 (10 years ago) we had a membership in the neighborhood of 25. Today our membership is 220, with 23 applicants seeking to join our Lodge. In many communities, Odd Fellows Lodges are almost invisible, or if visible, are considered a strange curiosity from another era. In Davis, the Odd Fellows Lodge is a high-visibility, premier organization, that is a focal point of activity in the town.

How did this happen?

I am often asked this question by members of other Lodges. And while every community is different, it may be useful to look at what the Davis Lodge did to change its complexion from a quiet, almost moribund Lodge, to an active and dynamic Lodge that members of the community wish to join. Here, in a simplified and condensed version, are the secrets of success of one growing Lodge:

1. Listen to the Members. It is important - very important - for the leadership of a Lodge to listen to the goals, needs and desires of the brothers and sisters. A Lodge - to thrive in the 21st Century - must do more than simply open meetings and close meetings in form. In the 19th Century it was enough that members memorized their parts in the ritual. In the 21st Century, we need to do more to retain members and attract the young men and women we need to grow. So, take the time to listen to the members and poll their opinions on what the Lodge should engage in socially and within the community. My Lodge, for example, doesn't say "no" when members propose new ideas - and we set up new committees to handle these new ideas. Such new ideas have resulted in the Lodge creating new committees to handle such diverse projects as: bingo, music, hiking, social services, community support, zymurgy, legacy trees, good fellowship, classic movies, etc. Our Lodge now has 26 committees.

2. Community outreach. Lodge members (and potential new members) want to be involved in the community. Not only do members enjoy such community involvement, but it brings great



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visibility to the Lodge and to Odd Fellowship. Significantly, every time my Lodge does a community activity, not only are we benefiting our town, but invariably folks come up to me to ask me about IOOF and about joining the Lodge. When our Lodge does Breakfast with Santa, Breakfast with the Bunny, a Taste of Davis, etc., this sort of dynamic takes place. Let me give you an example. Recently, one of our members suggested putting on a "DogtoberFest" to help raise money to purchase a new police dog to replace a retiring canine. It was a fun project that attracted hundreds of community members (and Lodge members) to the event at the Lodge Hall. Not only did everyone have a good time, and not only did we raise a significant amount of money for the new K-9, but a young couple who attended expressed great interest in the Lodge and submitted applications to join. That happens a lot.

3. Social activities. Let's face it. We are a fraternal order. Fraternal orders are meant to have a social component. Heck, when Odd Fellowship started in Merry Olde England, the brothers met in pubs to dine and drink and socialize. Not only are these social functions enjoyable for the membership, but they are important in attracting the young men and women of this Century. So, let the ideas flow and don't be too quick to say "no". Some social activities take time to organize and some are pretty simple - but it's important to allow your Lodge to become a social center for your Lodge members. As an example, my Lodge has a "club night" once every week where members can drop in and socialize - we offer dinner during this evening, as well as activities such as "trivia night" or "poker night" or "bunco night". My Lodge offers an annual Halloween costume party, an OddtoberFest, wine country trips for members and friends, etc. Again, let your imagination be your guide.

4. Recognition of history. We are an ancient and storied fraternity. Let's never forget our history, which makes us unique and which is of considerable interest to many potential new members. My Lodge has recognized that history by decorating our Lodge Hall with memorabilia of Odd Fellowship, and actually creating a small museum with cabinets displaying Odd Fellows paraphernalia, ribbons, pins, jewels and the like. These items make great conversation starters with visitors. When we give tours of our Lodge Hall, we have a tri-fold brochure that we provide to visitors which tells them about the Order, about our Lodge, and about the social and community things that we do.

5. Upgrading the Lodge Hall. Not every Lodge can afford to do this. On the other hand, no Lodge can afford not to do this. I remember peeking into the window of my Lodge before I joined (I had to peek into the window as the Lodge was rarely open). All I could see was some dingy carpet, some horrible green paint and a chair lift on the railing. What sort of message does that send to prospective new members? Take some time to upgrade and remodel. A fresh coat of paint can do wonders. The Grand Lodge is always available if your Lodge wishes to negotiate



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a loan for remodeling and upgrading. When a Lodge looks clean and modern, it becomes inviting to the public.

6. Handling Applications. New applicants for membership in the Lodge are the lifeblood of a Lodge and this Order. I am often asked about the Davis Lodge handles new applicants - because our process is a little different. Most Lodges almost immediately schedule an initiation for new applicants. And then, sometimes, the new applicants are surprised at what they have gotten themselves into. In the Davis Lodge we do it a little differently. We conduct two initiations each year - one in the Spring and one in the Fall. Our current Fall 2014 Pledge Class has 17 applicants, and we already have 6 applicants for the Spring 2015 Pledge Class (which will officially begin in late August of this year). The process takes at least six months between application and initiation. When we receive an application, we place that person in a "Pledge Class" with the other applicants, leading to initiation to those who make it through the process. We give each applicant a "Pledge Book" full of information about IOOF and the Lodge, and we assign a mentor. There are requirements in the "Pledge Book" to interview a number of members of the Lodge (it's a great ice-breaker and a great way for the prospective member and the Lodge members to get to know each other), and we expect the prospective member to attend a certain number of social meetings and Lodge events. We invite them to join our Lodge committees. We want them to be involved and to get to know us (and we want to get to know them). Some don't make it for one reason or another. Better to know now, than later. Those who do make it, however, are committed, knowledgeable, active, interested and involved. And our Lodge experiences very little turnover. If you are interested, the Pledge Book can be found at [www.davislodge.org](http://www.davislodge.org). Move your cursor over "About the Lodge" and click on "Forms and Documents".

I hope there are some kernels of wisdom in the above thoughts that you and your Lodge can use to help you in the quest for new members and growth of your Lodge.

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