



Independent Order of Odd Fellows
Dedicated Members for Change

July 17, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Here's another well-written article by Junior Past Grand Master Rick Boyles. This is a must-read for all of us in this Order who want to ensure that the Order not only survives, but flourishes.

Rick asks a key question: Who are we?

Can you answer if a prospective member to your Lodge asks the following questions: What is your Lodge all about? Who are the Odd Fellows? What does your Lodge do for our community? Why should I join Odd Fellows rather than (fill in the blank)?

F - L - T

Dave Rosenberg
Deputy Grand Master

Who Are We?

This is the primary question each of our lodges and the members within them should ask themselves. If we simply say, we are Odd Fellows then we have not done anything to make our lodges any more distinctive than the Elks Lodge, the Lions Club, or any of the other myriad of groups searching for members. We need to have an identity. In the state of California, we can proudly point to our retirement communities, our Rebekah Children's Services, and other activities that we engage in, but in attracting members to our specific communities, we need to offer something locally. Many lodges do, so they are able to at least sustain their members but other lodges, and way too many, offer nothing to attract new members. It matters very little what you do, whether it's a revisiting of history, a pancake breakfast, a car show, a wine tasting, a chess club, a bowling tournament, an Easter egg hunt, anything, but if you have nothing to offer, what makes you think membership will suddenly increase? There was a time 50 years ago when business people would join a lodge just to make business contacts, but no longer. Why is that? Because there is little or no activity within a lodge to warrant a business man joining to make contacts: they have become too small and often peopled with members of retirement age and often times near death.



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The best way to test this theory is to ask ourselves how do we describe our lodge to a prospective member? If we can't then it's evident that our lodge has little or no identity. Like them or not, successful lodges have identities, and can attract new members based upon this. Lodges with five members who meet in a shadowy room in the dead of night no matter how well meaning are only partially a lodge. In the heyday of lodges, this would not even be brought into question, but in today's world where many of us have experience with failing lodges we are often called to defend such lodges, but deep down I suspect we all know the truth. A lodge with five active members will soon cease to be a lodge just by virtue of mortality rates, so we need to stop fighting about the facts and start dealing with the reality. By ignoring reality we only seal their fates. Do we really think that ignoring a problem will allow it to go away? We are all mortal, we all will get old and die, and if we really want our order to continue, we will concern ourselves with the growth of our order in general and in particular with each and every lodge.

The DMC was an idea conceived up by a few dreamers in the Odd Fellows: Past Sovereign Grand Master Don Smith, Deputy Grand Master Dave Rosenberg, Grand Warden Peter Sellars and myself. Our sole intention is to gain new members, and happily, we have found in the state of California, we are now moving in a positive direction. The DMC does not take credit for this but at least we are sure that we do not deter new members. Yet there are those within our order who seem to be absolutely resistant to new members. We need to face the simple facts that without new members our days as an order are numbered. There will be growing pains as there are in every instance. There will be problems and issues as there are in every group, but consider the alternative: shall we continue to shutter lodges, meet with fewer and fewer members, deal with dilapidated properties, struggle with dwindling funds, and argue with obstinate individuals about who is in charge of a group of three? The clear answer is that we must go into the light and not away from the light: we must move forward or we accept failure. If you are one of the few remaining who oppose DMC, what is your suggestion? What, dear fellow member, is your idea for growth, because, to be clear, we would support it. The point is, that growth is our goal, and how we each go about it, is up to us individually. The point is that we all need to be supportive of each other. We will succeed if we stick together. If we just want to argue about how to succeed we are missing the larger issue which is growth. Let's look at growing lodges and take away what we can use. Some things may look crazy but upon closer examination seem inviting - let's not be too hasty to judge another's point of view. If we remember our core beliefs, we will survive, if we don't we will continue to deteriorate... - let's take the news of a leveling off and use it to climb into the future with open eyes and hearts.

In F.,L., & T., Rick Boyles