



Paper

Preparing for the Chair

Index

A tutorial for the Master and his Officers.

Summary

This presentation specifically is intended for those Brethren who are progressing to the Mastership of the Lodge. It provides advice and guidance to the Deacons, Wardens and Master-Elect, with tips and recommendations as to how to prepare for the Chair.

Keywords

Master, Officers, Committee, Responsibilities, Installation

PREPARING FOR THE CHAIR

Introduction

It would be interesting to know how many Masters' Elect actually pay attention when they affirm that they are able and willing to undertake the management of the Lodge and are well skilled in the Ancient Charges, Regulations and Landmarks of the Order. They may know the Ritual but the running of the Lodge will still be a mystery. This should not be the case and each Lodge should put in place a system of instructing the Officers in what will be expected of each Office on the road to the Master's Chair; in conjunction with the Lodge Mentor and Director of Ceremonies. Following this presentation, it is hoped that you will leave feeling more able to take the Chair and more confident knowing some of the work that is expected of you. The main aim of this is to let you enjoy your year as the head of your Lodge.

Deacons

As a newly appointed Deacon you may suddenly realise it's only going to be four before you will be in the 'Big Chair'. Now is the time to start preparing because time taken now will mean that your year in the Chair will be made a lot easier. Pay attention to all the Officers above you and see how they conduct themselves in the Lodge. Attend the Lodge of Instruction so that you can take the next position above you and gain experience. When conducting a Candidate around the Lodge, make sure you take a firm grip of his arm and be positive with your commands to him. Remember he doesn't have a clue what's going on and is relying on you to tell him.

You may be responsible for the Alms collection and the ballot's so make sure you have done a rehearsal to know what to do when they happen.

Junior Warden

You should now be on top of the Master's work and ideally should be in a position to conduct a First-Degree Ceremony. The more you learn now the easier it will be when you get to the Chair. Try and make an advancement in Masonic knowledge every day. This may seem impossible but if you have 'The Book' with you at all times it's surprising just what you can learn in five minutes every day.

One part of the job which seems to come as a shock may be the 'proving of visitors' and you should be proficient in it. It is much better to report to the Director of Ceremonies 'I have Proved all the visitors' than be asked and look shocked. You should also learn how to call 'On' and 'Off', which is another item that the Wardens tend to overlook, until the night in question when the Master is presented with a blank look. You may also be responsible for a toast at the Festive Board, so prepare something and practice it.

Try and visit other Lodges when you can. This will get you known and will ensure that Brethren from other Lodges get to know you. It is really nice to meet Brethren in the same position, so that you can progress together and make lasting friendships. It also ensures you will have a full house at your Installation.

Senior Warden

In a very short space of time you may well be sitting in the Chair opposite. So, you should now be fully prepared and ready, so that when you become the Master-Elect you will be able to perform your work with confidence and certainty.

Now is the time to start the process of selecting your officers for your year in the Chair. The progressive offices are normally the easy ones, as many will wish to continue, and providing that all wish to continue these will fill naturally. It is the other offices that sometimes cause issues. Does the present Officer wish to continue? Has he done a good job to the best of his abilities or is it time for a change? Is there a succession plan in operation? These decisions should not be taken lightly, or by yourself alone, and your Mentor, Director of Ceremonies, Secretary and Past-Masters can offer appropriate advice.

Master-Elect

Now is the time to plan ahead, consult with the Secretary and Director of Ceremonies and decide what will be included in each meeting of your year. Try and choose who will be doing the Charge, Tools and Tracing Boards; these can then be put into the program and the respective Officers given a copy so they have plenty of time to prepare. If there is a meeting with no Candidates then make sure you have booked someone to give a talk, or organize a quiz or a demonstration. Pre-planning will take some of the pressure off you and give Brethren the chance to prepare.

The smooth running of the Lodge meeting and Committee meeting are up to you. You could practice with an old Summons. Knowing when to gavel and when not to gavel is a good starting point.

It is noticeable that at the Installation meeting the Toast List is quite often forgotten about and a new Master may not have seen it before he is presented with it at the table. So, get a copy from the Director of Ceremonies or Secretary well in advance and practice all the names and titles. It is not easy to read this list for the first time when you are nervous about your speech. Talk to the Director of Ceremonies about who you wish to take wine with. He will advise you on how many and what is expected.

As to your speech, keep it short (Three minutes is good). Your main aim is to thank to the Brethren for electing you and thanks those Brethren who have organized the Installation. Do not tread on any other Brother's speech. Remember the time you sat at an Installation ceremony having been asked to respond to the visitors toast and spent the proceeding minutes crossing out parts of your speech because someone else had said it all.

Master's Responsibilities

It is obviously important that you learn the Ritual to the best of your abilities. Everyone is different in this, and as long as you have done the best you can then you will feel you have achieved what you set out to do. By the time you get to Master-Elect you should be familiar with most of the ceremonies and be well practiced in opening and closing. It is not a failing if you decide to pass certain parts of the ceremonies to other Brethren. Most will be only too pleased to help out. Charges, Tools and History are the usual ones to delegate to others, but others can be done as well.

You are now the Senior Manager of the Lodge. You should conduct the business of the Lodge with authority but compassion. There may be times when something arises that you are unsure about and then the Lodge Mentor, Director of Ceremonies or Secretary should be your first port of call for advice as to procedure.

Each Master before you has conducted the Lodge in his own way and some may feel that their way was the right way. That may not be the case but now is the time for compassion and understanding. Listen to what they have to say before making a decision.

The Lodge Committee can be a testing place for a new Master if he has never chaired a meeting before. It is easy to lose control when spirits are high over a contentious subject. If necessary, keep a gavel with you so that you can bring the meeting to order. Meetings should not be overly long; 30 minutes is a good guide unless there is a big issue to debate. If longer is required it may be better to schedule a separate meeting or form a sub-committee so that the issue can be brought before the Committee with a solution, or viable options.

Your year as Master should only cost you what you can afford. There is no hard and fast rule about expenses. You can pay for as many guests as you like. No one should feel left out if they are not included in this. Raffles and Ladies Nights are all under your control and you can ask for advice from the Immediate Past master as to what he did. Do not feel obliged to follow his lead. You can have a very successful social year without having to remortgage your house.

Above all enjoy your year as it will pass very quickly.

‘May God grant you health
and strength to perform the
Duties of your high office with
Satisfaction to yourself and
Advantage to you Lodge’.

##END##

Recommended use of Papers

Papers offer a simple, direct means of advancement in a particular aspect of Masonic knowledge. They can be used in a variety of ways:

- Read at home for private study
- Shared for pre-reading by members of a discussion group
- Read aloud in Lodge or Chapter, or in an LOI/COI/new members forum
 - Followed by ‘any questions’
 - As a precursor to a discussion (*in which case much more time is needed, possibly more than double that allocated to the paper itself*)
 - Supported by audio-visual aids, if necessary.

They can be delivered by a single person or split into bite-sized pieces and read by multiple presenters (*in which case, the speaker(s) should have read and practiced the delivery of the paper beforehand*).

If the paper is to be used to introduce a discussion, the presenter will need to have thought about the material, done a little research, and prepared some open questions to engage with the audience. Kipling’s dictum can be of help in preparing open questions, which should begin with one of his ‘serving men’, as follows: *‘I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew). Their names are, What and Why and When and How and Where and Who’.*

Rudyard Kipling

If used as part of an event, the paper should be advertised and promoted by way of trailers, flyers and announcements, in summonses, letters, emails, notice boards, and on social media.

For further papers and other learning materials visit “Solomon” at <http://solomon.ugle.org.uk>

Acknowledgement:

UGLE gratefully acknowledges C J Harding and J E Churches as the authors of this item and for their permission to publish it in this form.

Disclaimer:

Every reasonable effort has been made to contact any known copyright holders, but if there are any errors or omissions, The United Grand Lodge of England will be pleased to insert the appropriate acknowledgment.

The views or interpretations contained in this article are those of those named. UGLE recognises there are many different interpretations of ritual, symbolism and history.

Copyright:

All rights reserved. No part of this paper may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from The United Grand Lodge of England in writing.

