

St Laurence Lodge, No. 5511 is a perfectly normal, private lodge which meets in Upminster in Essex and now initiates four or five candidates each year.

Our regular meetings and our annual emergency meeting are insufficient to handle our work, so we take most of our our seconds and thirds out to other lodges in other temples on what we call 'away days'. We take about 15 brethren with us and some participate in the ceremony. The away days are always very enjoyable. We have so far carried out two triple initiations, using a version of the rubric we invented ourselves, minimising repetition but keeping things personal to each candidate. We run an emergency meeting every year.

Our waiting list is usually about five or six. We experience a regular flow of candidates and as the waiting list threatens to exceed what we can cope with, we invite candidates to consider other lodges with whom we are close.

### **How do we do it?**

We are often asked, *How do you do it?* and so we produced a book entitled: *Things to do when you have nothing to do: and how to find those candidates who have been looking for you all this time*. The illustrations in the book feature the brethren of St Laurence and one reviewer said, *The affection the brethren of the author's lodge feel for each other and their lodge is profoundly evident*. I do hope so.

Central to what we do is the *LAW of PARADOXICAL INTENT*. I'll explain that later but let me start with saying that the better a lodge feels about itself, the more likely it is to attract candidates. Unfortunately, many lodges have ceased to feel good; numbers are low; visitors are few; ritual is poor and the festive board a quiet affair which finishes early. When a lodge has no work to do, all too often it launches a desperate search to find someone, anyone, willing to entertain the brethren. When, *All we had at our last meeting was a talk*, the brethren feel bad and brethren are unlikely to invite friends into a lodge they feel bad about.

### **Pushing at the world**

I have had a mixed career. After graduation, I spent a couple of years as a buyer at Fords and then went back to University for my doctorate. I taught university for a while before returning to industry. I became General Manager of Scotland and Northern Ireland and head of International Personnel and Public Relations for Xerox, then a partner in an accounting firm and finally founded *The Working Manager Ltd* which now has revenues of £2 million.

The point of this is to show that in much of my career, I have had to sell my services to survive and it has been my constant belief that if I put in the effort, work will result but rarely from the direction in which my efforts had been directed. I might meet potential clients, speak at conferences, network and attend conventions. I might create marketing literature for a sales drive and so on but the contracts I won were almost never from companies I targeted.

However, I always found that if I didn't put in the effort, no work at all came in. You see, it was the effort that mattered. I succeeded because I was *pushing at the world* and the world responded - and it is the same in our lodges; we need to be pushing at the world. It should be obvious that candidates will come to energetic lodges; ones that are involved, active and ready for something new - and thus feel good about themselves.

### **Law of paradoxical intent**

When faced with a problem, we usually try to solve it on the basis of our experience. That's fine, but when past experience repeatedly lets us down, we have to do something different. We must challenge the assumptions behind our experience. If we don't, we repeat the same failures. We assume - don't we? - that candidates will come via existing members and so call upon brethren to find them. When this fails, we don't question our assumption, and so repeat the failure. The constant pleading and repeated failure to find new candidates, just make the brethren feel worse, and gradually they stop attending.

The law of paradoxical intent holds that by doing the *opposite* of what past experience tells us to do, we will be more likely to succeed that busily not seeking candidates, causes them to appear. We must change our assumptions. After all, doing the *same old, same old* hasn't achieved anything. So stop complaining about the absence of candidates; stop nagging the brethren; stop wasting meetings on talks; ban rehearsals of ceremonies in lodge meetings and focus on enthusing and exciting the brethren. Every dull talk, every dull rehearsal in lodge, is a step backward. You see people will rarely talk about dull, grey lodges but they will talk about lodges that are busy, vibrant and exciting — and excitement is infectious.

As the title indicates, our book offers lots of *things to do when you have nothing to do*; things that will make the brethren feel good. Follow what's in the book or use your ideas but whatever you do, make it new, exciting and a real advance in masonic knowledge. Help the brethren feel good.

Look, I am not saying that this is easy but I am saying it works.

### **Progressive ceremonies are letting us down**

Think about this for a moment. The idea that a real Masonic meeting is a performance of the progressive ritual, the Masonic waltz and the installation, is quite recent. In the 18th century, lodges were small. There were only two degrees and the ritual was brief: an initiation taking possibly fifteen minutes and a second about ten and, even then, they probably took place outside the lodge meeting proper. There was no installation of the Master and no limit on tenure of the chair. What is more those lodges met ten times a year. So it cannot have been the progressive ceremonies that occupied our 18th century brethren. They must have done something different.

You see the progressive ceremonies are letting us down. With their pretence to be all that Masonry is, they make a meeting without them seem a failure. But it needn't be - and it shouldn't be! We can do many other exciting things that offer a genuine advancement in Masonic knowledge. Our book contains four *plays wot I wrote*, to involve the brethren - entertainments we call them - about the Lectures which are what our 18th century brethren actually used; the Antient Charges and the Old Charges; the change of the words of recognition; Jack the Ripper and the Seddon murder; and the exposures of Freemasonry. We know they work because we have performed them.

Use the contents of the book as they stand or as starters for your own imagination, but whatever you do obey the law of paradoxical intent and become a lodge that is always busy, always doing exciting and interesting things.

### **Websites**

The old saying that if you invent a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door, is false. You have to go out and tell the world. Today, a website is a cost effective vehicle. I know of two lodges who paid for a custom website and were still waiting two years later. Do it yourself. Many hosting sites offer easy tools for creating sites. I used one such set of tools to create a site in an afternoon. But do please remember, a website alone is not enough.

There are many boring lodge websites out there which achieve nothing. Our own site gets 15,000 hits a month. To put that into context, the website of the United Grand Lodge gets 30,000. Our private lodge website gets half as many hits as Grand Lodge. Why do we get those hits?

Because our site is lively, updated at least once a week, and carries lots of photographs. It reports our meetings, our visits to other lodges, our social and sporting events. It features our meetings, away days, the St Laurence Grand Prix (racing in go-karts), our attempts at ten-pin bowling and clay pigeon shooting, the new constellation temple at Upminster, the Upminster Fun Day with a great video of our dinner ladies dancing, the Stisted Garden Party, the Pride of Essex award, our e-Bay purchase of a 1963 St Laurence Lodge Past Master's jewel, the TLC skydive and a board in Rochford Hundred Golf Club celebrating its winning the Thornton Cup in 1977. Why? One of our current brethren was a member of that team.

We look for news to report. One of our members travelled around Cape Horn and the Antarctic and sent back photos which we featured. Our site shows Freemasonry to be exciting and interesting - and it is. So please remember, only the website of an active and interesting lodge will attract candidates.

Your website should be more than just an advert. It should carry our message, combat the silly accusations made about us and state our values. The more lodges who do that, the louder our message. The most successful ad ever was *Persil washes whiter*. It was said over and over again. Frequency of message matters - and we have a great message.

### **Getting to know candidates**

Contacts via the web are strangers and you have to put in the effort to get to know them. We arrange visits to Freemasons Hall, tours of the British Museum, pizza evenings, a hour or two at a pub and dinner an Indian restaurant - and of course invite them to our social events. Our rule is that each candidate must attend at least four such events and wait a year between first meeting and initiation.

By the way, names of towns and counties are repeated around the world. We invited a contact, who said he lived in Essex, to a pizza evening in Upminster. Two days beforehand, he asked us for directions. Alarm bells rang. He did

indeed live in Essex - the Essex just outside Baltimore in the USA. Our website says we are men only but twice ladies have contacted us. We pass them on to the Order of Women Freemasons.

### **Do be careful**

We are very careful with contacts. Initial meeting is always in a public place. There are no addresses on our website and we use email, not telephone, until we are sure the contact is genuine. A stranger may not wish us well so our first email is carefully worded. There is an example in the book. Occasionally, a contact is not appropriate and we have to say this. Sometimes, the contact is looking for more than we can offer, even psychological help.

We start mentoring immediately. We ensure that contacts meet members of the lodge and other candidates. We watch the flow of conversation to ensure that everyone is involved. We play 'general post', moving senior brethren around the group to talk to all contacts and ask them what they want to know about Masonry.

### **Brilliant candidates**

We are always delighted with the refreshing quality of the response. Our web contacts have been really good candidates. They have researched us, thought about the fraternity and really know why they want to join. They have proved active and involved Masons, ready to become involved in the leadership of the lodge, organising events and demonstrating excellent ritual. As I write, with the exception of our Inner Guard who came to us via a friend, all the other officers came to us via the web. We have a complete slate of lay brethren in the progressive offices.

Our work does not stop with initiation. We work hard to get candidates, and we work just as hard to keep them. We take new brethren to visit other lodges and to see other forms of the ritual. Our table plans are designed so new brethren get to know different members and visitors at each meeting. We give them a job at LOI right away. We find small passages of ritual for them to work in lodge. After one year, they are expected to do the first degree working tools and after 18 months the charge after initiation - and they do.

So in conclusion let me restate the theme:

- *Doing nothing will result in nothing.*
- *Remember the law of paradoxical intent - doing something completely different, makes us more likely to succeed.*
- *Lodges who are energetic, involved, active and ready for something new, feel good about themselves.*
- *The more that a lodge feels good about itself, the more likely it is to attract candidates*
- *The more it attracts candidates, the better the story it has to tell.*
- *A great website tells that story.*
- *Retention has to be worked at - every day.*