



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

June 22, 2014

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

What makes a viable, strong and healthy Lodge?

I have often talked about the concept of the "three-legged stool" as a simile for the Lodge. If all three legs of the stool are sturdy, then the Lodge will be sturdy. If one of legs is weak or missing, the stool will wobble. And you can only imagine what will occur if two legs are weak or missing. The three legs represent (1) the rich history and ritual of our Order, (2) social activities within the Lodge for members creating good fellowship and allowing members to have some fun, and (3) outreach into our towns and villages to do good community works. If a Lodge emphasizes all three, it will be a three-dimensional Lodge and I guarantee that it will be a Lodge that is healthy, retaining existing members and attracting new members. These, by the way, are not new or radical concepts. Sovereign Grand Lodge, and your own Grand Lodge, emphasize holding more social meetings and reaching out into the community to do good works.

One way that a Lodge can develop good fellowship and community outreach activities is to create committees of interested members to plan and coordinate such activities. I am a great believer in the committee structure which allows interested members of the Lodge to shepherd activities (from start to finish) that benefit the Lodge and its members. I have (sadly) attended meetings of some Lodges where there are NO committee reports, NO old business, and NO new business to discuss. What a sad state of affairs. Such a Lodge is moribund and static, and is destined to diminish and fail. How does one retain the interest of existing members or attract new members to a Lodge that doesn't really do anything for the benefit of the members or to help the community? Statistically, the 90% decline in our membership numbers over the last three generations proves that one-dimensional Lodges are a relic of a prior age, and simply are not sustainable in the 21st Century.

So, let's talk about committees.

All Lodges have the basic internal committees that are required by Code or By-laws. And, if done right, these committees do important work. I am talking about committees such as the Visiting Committee, Finance Committee, By-laws Committee, Membership Committee and the like. But Lodges can do more - much more - in the way of committees. My own Lodge - Davis #169 - has 26 committees, all staffed by members of the Lodge who are interested in the subject. Now, let me be very clear. I am not saying that Lodges should have 26 committees, or even half that number of committees, or any particular number. And I am not saying that Lodges should have the same committees as the Davis Lodge. What I am saying is that each Lodge



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should develop appropriate committees that reflect the interests of that Lodge's members. And even two or three new committees will spark a lot of enthusiasm in a Lodge. It's important for Lodges to encourage members who present new ideas, and to support and implement these new ideas by the formation of committees.

By way of example only, I will briefly discuss 10 of the committees we have formed in my Lodge - the point of this exercise is to stimulate your brain cells, encourage discussion within your Lodge on the subject of committees, and to give you examples of the sorts of committees that could be created. So, here goes:

**Good Fellowship Committee.** This committee plans social activities for the members (and applicants for membership) to the Lodge. For example, each and every Thursday evening, from 5 to 8 p.m. the Lodge is open for what we call "Club Night at the Lodge" which is just a relaxed, informal social time for members and applicants (and friends) to drop in and chat. We have a big-screen TV which is usually on, the bar is open with libations, dinner is available for those who wish to participate (at \$7 a plate) and there is typically an activity going like trivia night, karaoke, poker night, etc. This committee also plans trips - for example, in September we are renting a bus to visit the Amador County wine country.

**Community Support Committee.** This committee is given an annual budget to help community groups and do good projects in the town and county. With this budget, the Committee sponsors co-hosted events at the Lodge Hall with diverse groups such as Hospice, the Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Center, the Mexican-American Concilio of Yolo County, etc. The Committee also purchases tickets to community events to support community and charitable groups. Finally, the Committee gives grants to worthy local programs like the Yolo Crisis Nursery.

**Bingo Committee.** For the past seven year, - with the concurrence of the City Council - the Lodge has operated real Bingo games on the second Sunday of every month, which bring 75-90 people to the Lodge to enjoy Bingo and which generate a fair amount of revenue. Every month the Bingo Committee designates a community beneficiary to receive the proceeds of Bingo. This July, for example, the beneficiary is the Davis Encampment which raises funds to send children from very low income families to Three Links Camp. These grants total between \$600 - \$800 per month.

**Music and Concerts Committee.** One the first Thursday of each month, the Music Committee hosts "Thursday Live!" at the Lodge, free of charge and open to the general public, featuring local musicians and musical groups. The music has ranged from rock and roll, to classical, to



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jazz, to country and western, to Japanese, to Klezmer. Over 100 members of the public and Lodge members attend these monthly gatherings.

OddtoberFest Committee. Every year our Lodge has an Oktoberfest which we have dubbed "OddtoberFest" for our members, our applicants for membership and friends and family. Typically, we have close to 100 attendees who enjoy traditional German food, Bavarian music, dancing and door prizes. Prior to the OddtoberFest, another one of our committees - the Zymurgy Committee - brews up three different beers to enjoy at the Fest.

Social Services Committee. This small, but active committee has dedicated members who spend time - one on one - with persons who have mental health challenges. Sometimes, these folks just need a friend to talk to.

Odd Poetry Committee. A group of Lodge members enjoy poetry and meet once a month just outside the Lodge Hall under the "Poet Tree" to recite poems they have found or they have personally written. Often, other members bring their guitars or flutes and perform a few songs. These "Odd Poetry" evenings are done in conjunction with the city's once-a-month "Art About" where folks walk around the downtown visiting art galleries and admiring public art (including a great historical mural which was just painted on the side of our Lodge Hall). Typically, members of the public who walk by, join in and provide their own poetry readings.

Breakfast with Santa Committee. For many years now, this Lodge Committee organizes "Breakfast with Santa" for the children of our community. The event has grown so popular, that we have three breakfast seatings. The children and their parents/guardians enjoy breakfast, each child gets a goodie bag, and they all get to meet "Santa". Many of our members (including the gentleman who plays "Santa") first came to the Lodge with their children or grandchildren for Breakfast with Santa.

Taste of Davis Committee. Once each year, the Lodge - through this Committee - hosts "A Taste of Davis" featuring over 20 local restaurants, wineries, and breweries who provide samples and tastings of their wares. This extremely popular event brings hundreds of folks to our Lodge Hall, and also raises a significant sum of money which enables our Lodge to make contributions to Odd Fellows charities and other worthy causes.

Hiking Committee. A number of our members wanted to go on day hikes. Hence was born the Hiking Committee - or as we like to call it, the "Take a Hike Committee". Members plan hikes throughout northern California - some easy, some moderate and some hard. As many as 20 Odd



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Fellows and friends have gone on some of these hikes.

These committees accomplish three very important goals: (1) They provide a great deal of social interaction and enjoyment to members of the Lodge; (2) they provide a significant outlet to members who wish to give back to their community; and (3) they bring members of the public into the Lodge and expose the Lodge to the public - many of our applicants for membership have come through the work of our committees.

I hope these thoughts have sparked some ideas as to what can be accomplished for your Lodge through committees.

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Dave Rosenberg  
Deputy Grand Master