

MASONIC TEAM-BUILDING

A Group Dynamics Approach

by Rt. Wor. Walter H. Hunt

We are often nostalgic about Masonry's past, when our lodges worked two meetings a month to handle the flood of degree work, had packed sidelines to attend meetings, and there was competition to have a chance to serve in an officer line with the hope of climbing all the way to the Oriental chair.

It turns out that it wasn't always like that, at least not all of the time, and certainly not everywhere; but previous generations attracted men to Masonic bodies who were working in business, and understood some of the essential principles needed to organize and execute plans. As we regrow and get younger, these skills are sometimes absent—and the times themselves have changed: leaders must learn leadership (and altogether too quickly) and organizations must quickly form effective teams to deal with responsibilities and commitments. This is an essential part of making a lodge or other Masonic body functional and productive. It can sometimes make the difference in that body's long-term survival.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, our Grand Lodge has taken great strides in recognizing and addressing the need to train today's leaders to deal with these responsibilities. Educational programs at district and state level such as at Lodge of Instruction, the Master's Path workshops, and the Masonic Leadership Institute have all been put in place to teach such skills. But once these men are trained, then what? Every master says these words: "he can't do it alone." Any sort of plan in any Masonic body requires group effort. While individual training is essential, team-building is critical. A team exists to assist the master in carrying out his plan, the master's leadership helps the team, and the team members help each other. Each person brings skills and perspectives, making the team more capable than any single member or set of members could be.



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Team Building In Business Organizations

Stephen Balzac of 7 Steps Ahead, a consulting firm located in Stow, Massachusetts, writes and lectures extensively on team-building. His experience working with individuals and businesses has given him insights into the way in which teams are built, grow, and how they adjust (or fail to adjust) to the needs of the organization. These essentials are highly applicable to our Masonic bodies.

Mr. Balzac points out the traditional management rubric of the four stages of team development: *Forming*, *Storming*, *Norming* and *Performing*. In the *Forming* stage, the team is created, usually centering on a strong leader; in the *Storming* stage, team members learn to deal with conflict, making it productive and creative; *Norming* establishes hierarchy and helps team members become established in the roles that fit them the best; and *Performing*, when the goal and the effort to achieve it are clear and the participants are working hard and productively. Most management training identifies these stages, with the fourth stage being the ultimate objective. All too often, teams never get there, but work gets done anyway (sometimes leading to a perception that the team is stronger than it is); in fact, work can get done at each stage, but as the team progresses the amount of effort required is lower in proportion to the output achieved. Teams can move either forward or backward on this path—there are events and circumstances that can drop a team back to the *Storming* stage when the goals are well established, or even back to the *Forming* stage if there is a crisis the team cannot overcome.

Forming, he says, is critical to team development. During this phase, team members determine whether or not they feel emotionally and intellectually safe working with one another; they can either develop a sense of group identity, or remain a collection of individuals. What's more, the first stage of team development is guided by the personality of the leader; he 'calls the tune' and directs the work, often in lieu of objection or argument from other members of the team. In this stage, leaders with the ability to impose such authority are valuable; we see this in our own lodges, when a new master takes charge and has followed the traditional adage—plan your work, then work your plan. In organizations where dynamism has been lacking, this often leads to one of two results: the new master's efforts are a breath of fresh air, or inertia and stubbornness cause his plans to be opposed or ignored. This is where team-build-

ing is critically important. In the first case, the new master has to strongly lead by directing the work and finding the right people to do the job (since he can't do everything himself); in the second case, he may have to advance directly into the second stage, allowing conflict to take place and harnessing this energy to promote interest in his projects, which might not turn out the way he envisioned them.

Teams that progress to the second stage, regardless of the length of time they spend in the first, can often be paralyzed by avoidance (not enough argument) or conflict (too much). Avoidance is particularly a problem when a team progresses into the second stage too quickly; team members who are uncomfortable with any sort of conflict may do anything to prevent it, leaving them "on the cusp of *Storming*." Neither the Master's Path, nor mentoring from wise old past masters, can provide a remedy for every situation. Often the solution to the problem is closely tied to the individuals in the group. Are they being used effectively? Do they have previous experience as leaders or as contributors? Are they frustrated with the effort, opposed or indifferent to the goal, unmotivated, or fearful of failure?

Team Building in a Voluntary Organization

Leaders of teams—even the biggest team in our jurisdiction, the Grand Lodge—have to decide when to direct and when to conciliate. As Mr. Balzac says, "There's an old saying that a couple isn't really married until they've had their first fight. The same is true of teams." It is critical to understand that in an organization of strong personalities, conflict is inevitable. Leaders must be ready for it, and be ready to make it work for them. Indeed, for an organization to get things done conflict is necessary. If no one will question or argue, errors may not be caught early enough to be remedied. For any team to have a good chance of surviving the *Storming* phase, members, including the leader, must be comfortable with the idea of questioning and being questioned. It's also important to note that some leaders have difficulty giving up power. All through *Forming*, the leader has enjoyed unquestioned control. Suddenly, the honeymoon is over. As a result, when the team does enter *Storming*, the leader is sometimes taken by surprise and can react badly.

"The good news," he says, "is that while taking the right steps early in the formation of a team can save headaches later, it's rarely too late to create a functional group dynamic." We have the disadvantage that, unlike in business, our organization is a volunteer one; it's often difficult for a master or any team leader to exclude a willing participant, even if that man's involvement creates problems with the dynamic. The opposite is also true; we have all heard the truism that Masonry is a volunteer organization. As an old friend and past district deputy grand master used to say,

however, "it's a volunteer organization until you volunteer." Part of a successful group dynamic involves putting the right people in the right positions, and then making sure that they can effectively accomplish their tasks. It is particularly important for a volunteer organization such as ours to be able to articulate a clear and inspiring vision in order to build commitment and excitement, and to remember that appreciation is a powerful coin. In the end, it's being part of something bigger than any one person that can keep people motivated.

Every organization wants to get to the latter two stages of team development: *Norming* and especially *Performing*. Those that are already there want to stay there. Time, entropy, changing circumstances, and the constant change in leadership all work to disrupt these processes. By understanding group dynamics and recognizing the patterns that all teams follow, we have a better chance of achieving those laudable goals. Remember what masters always say: "I can't do it alone." ■

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their clown unit for many years. He is also a member of the Scottish Rite Valley of Worcester and the Boston Consistory as well as Aleppo Temple Shrine. Bro. Glass was also an active member on the committee to procure a Torah for the Chapel at the Masonic Home in 2000. Currently, he serves the Jewish community of Worcester as a volunteer driver for the elderly and as an usher at Temple Emanuel in Worcester.

Despite his mixed feelings about current recruitment policies, he says his lodge has benefited from them and has raised several men who have become valuable assets. He also says the reverse is true of those who have been raised and never step foot in lodge again; that bothers him. He says that overall, Masonry is making a comeback and attracting younger men, but he is not sure that the message and teachings of Masonry are viewed as relevant in today's society. He would like to see what he calls "sales meetings" held throughout the various districts where knowledgeable speakers espouse the fraternity, explain the origins and history of the Craft, and answer questions. He feels that the proper speakers with the right attitudes would make Masonry relevant to today's society.

Right Wor. Stuart E. Glass has certainly embodied everything a Mason should, and has endeavored to help as many as he possibly can. He is very proud of his Masonic membership and of what he has accomplished, and looks forward to continuing to serve in any way to improve his lodge and the fraternity. ■