



A MASONIC MINUTE

*MERIT AND
ABILITY*

JULY 2014

A MASONIC MINUTE

according to merit and ability

“All preferment among Masons is grounded upon real worth and personal merit only, that so the lords may be well served, the Brethren not put to shame, nor the royal Craft despised; therefore no Master or Warden is chosen by seniority, but for his merit.

Charges of a Freemason – IV – Of Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices

In a few weeks the Masters, Wardens, and Past Masters of all lodges duly returned on the Grand Lodge register will have the privilege, opportunity and responsibility of electing certain officers of Grand Lodge from those Brethren who have offered their services for positions of added responsibility. The registered delegates at the Annual Communication will select from among those nominated, the leaders of the fraternity for the ensuing term (one or two years, depending on the office). At a time when many long established institutions, including our ancient and honourable society, are experiencing challenges that require strong, decisive and creative leadership, these elections take on even more consequence.

Masonic leaders around the world, including our Most Worshipful Grand Master, have identified leadership – a leadership of service, not of control and domination – as the greatest challenge facing the fraternity at large in the twenty-first century. All agree that succession planning is the key to our future. It is not knowing where to go; it is knowing how to get there.

From its earliest manifestations, and throughout its history, Freemasonry has been, by definition, a **meritocracy** – as the quotation from The Charges of a Freemason above makes plain

– in which leaders are selected because of their abilities, not because of their money, social position, or popularity – one “*who is of singularly great merit in the opinion of the lodges.*” At his Initiation the newly Obligated Mason is informed that “*there are several Degrees in Masonry... These, however, are not communicated indiscriminately but are conferred upon candidates according to merit and ability.*” (emphasis added)

This appears to be at odds with the prevailing view and practice of modern society. A recent article in Maclean’s Magazine observed: “*The workplace rewards narcissism rather than substance. ‘We’re more focused on gaining attention than on work.’ The prevailing wisdom: that self-promotion and self-regard bordering on narcissism are the way to get noticed.*”

Quoting Professor Sandra Robinson, University of British Columbia, “*You don’t have to have substance or integrity; you just have to go out there and be heard and dance with your arms waving a lot. ... We need people who have good leadership skills, even if they don’t want to be leaders. They could actually be the introverts.*” The article goes on to identify the traits of productive leaders: they are collaborators, with emphasis on ‘we’ rather than ‘me.’ They display...

1. A strong sense of responsibility
2. A meticulous attention to detail
3. An ambivalence about recognition¹

Freemasonry is not immune from the current social norm. However, if we are true to our high calling as Masons, as a community within a community, our contributing role is not as a sub-culture, but a counter-culture.

On what basis, therefore, does the voting delegate make an informed choice when marking the ballot? The geography of this vast jurisdiction may preclude intimate acquaintance or personal knowledge of the candidates for many. Published evaluations of past, present accomplishments, and potential contributions to the Craft are limited. Overt campaigning – politicking – is strictly prohibited. During the last few years an opportunity to ‘meet the candidates’ at the Fairmont Royal York has been provided on the Tuesday evening prior to voting – a step in the right direction.

One of our senior Past Grand Masters once sagely observed, “*The Brethren will decide, and the Brethren are always right.*” In a democracy, we consistently get the leaders we deserve. When balloting in the lodge, there is an old phrase frequently recited by the Worshipful Master: ‘Look well to your ballot and vote for the good of the Order.’ This cautionary statement has never been more valid and pertinent than at the present time.

¹ Maclean’s Magazine, 23 June 2014 – Ken McQueen: [The invisible in your office](#) pp. 46-47.