Brethren,

Tonight I want to leverage the writings and concepts of Steven Covey to discuss the Seven Habits of Highly Effective Masons. Covey believes that an individual’s character, basically, is a composite of his habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, habits constantly express our character and produce our image in the external world.

When Steven Covey was developing his Seven Habits of Highly effective People, he noticed that almost all the writings that helped build America in its first 150 years or so identified character as the foundation of success. The literature of what we might call “The Character Ethic” helped cultivate integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, and the Golden Rule. This “Character Ethic” so aptly described resonates in the lessons we learn throughout all the degrees.

Becoming a Mason introduces a new set of skills and language to an individual. Joining a fraternity of men who strive to make good men better, means taking on a new perspective, and accepting a new paradigm. A paradigm shift is a change in perspective, a new way of looking at existing situations. This new awareness requires learning new skills and considering new lessons, of developing new habits. These new skills and lessons are reinforced by learning and doing the Work. Practicing, coaching, learning and recognition reinforce the knowledge, develop an attitude, sharpen the skills and in turn become habits that we adopt.

In the words of Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

It is interesting that compared with the early success literature; the writings of the latter half of the last century were focused on the Personality Ethic: - filled with social image consciousness, self-help techniques, and quick fixes. Covey emphasizes that to be a truly effective person; you need to develop habits related to the Character Ethic, something that we as Masons work to do every day.

So what are these **7 Habits of Highly Effective People?**

1. *Be proactive.* Take the initiative and be responsible for the choices you make.

2. *Begin with the end in mind*. Have a clear purpose or goal.

3. *Put first things first*. Prioritize and organize.

4. *Think win-win.* Seek mutual respect in every interaction.

5. *Seek first to understand, then be understood.*

6. *Synergize.*

7. *Sharpen the saw.* Undergo constant renewal in the four basic areas of life

**Habit 1 - Be Proactive®**

Being proactive means recognizing a personal responsibility to make things happen. Successful people are those who seize the initiative to do whatever is necessary, consistent with correct principles, to get the job done. Successful lodges leverage the skills and energy of the members to deliver and support each other.

**Take action** and **take responsibility**. This is the basis of all further habits and a cornerstone of success. You will influence your life more than anyone else. You have the opportunity to use your free will and hard work to change yourself.

As a Mason be proactive, don’t wait for things to happen. Within your Lodge, step up, ask how you can help. Everyone here has a set of unique skills and ability. Ask yourself how can I add value to my Brothers? You are the creator, the actor and the doer in your life; get started and "just do it".

**Habit 2 - Begin with the End in Mind®**

Means to begin each day, task, or project with a clear vision of your desired direction and destination, and then continue by flexing your proactive muscles to make things happen. Habit 2 is based on imagination--the ability to envision in your mind what you cannot at present see with your eyes. It is based on the principle that all things are created twice. There is a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation.

As a member of the Lodge, what do you want out of your Masonic Journey? Make a conscious effort to visualize who you are and what you want in life. Then work to empower yourself and work with other people to shape you and your life by default. Having the end in mind is about connecting again with your own uniqueness. Consider the lessons in our ritual, and begin defining the personal, moral, and ethical guidelines within which you can most happily express and fulfill yourself.

**Habit 3 - Put First Things First®**

**Set priorities**. Decide which of your roles and goals are most important, then determine what steps will best achieve those goals. Basically it means doing life with your values in hand. It means defining your idea of success in life from the image you would like to leave. Once we have the end in mind, we can clearly schedule our priorities. We can then determine where to spend our time.

First things are those things that you personally, find of most worth. If you put first things first, you are organizing and managing time and events according to your own priorities, and are choosing to make Masonry important.

Each of you here tonight have made a decision that Lodge provides a meaningful experience and is a priority in your life. Consider the newer members, the absent members. Reach out and share with them what Masonry means to you. Why you choose to spend some valuable time in the harmony and fraternity that constitutes a lodge.

**Habit 4 - Think Win-Win®**

Think Win-Win isn't about being nice, nor is it a quick-fix technique. It is a character-based code for human interaction and collaboration.

Win-win sees life as a cooperative arena, not a competitive one. Win-win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. Win-win means agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial and satisfying. We both get to eat the pie and it tastes pretty darn good!

A person or organization that approaches conflicts with a win-win attitude possesses three vital character traits:

1. Integrity: sticking with your true feelings, values, and commitments
2. Maturity: expressing your ideas and feelings with courage and consideration for the ideas and feelings of others. Simply put, you must have enough empathy and goodwill to work for a win for your counterpart, and enough courage to win for yourself
3. Abundance Mentality: believing there is enough for everyone and we should all benefit The Abundance Mentality recognizes that possibilities for growth and success are potentiality limitless and sees the strengths in others as an opportunity to complement one’s strengths.

Thinking Win - Win builds a “we first” mentality. A team thought model than enables everyone to succeed. In Masonry we are united through the Work, building together to help each other.

**Habit 5 -Seek First to Understand and Then to be Understood®**

Covey talks about communication as the most important skill in life. Communication is a loop between people, not one way from leader to follower.

The essence of habit 5 is empathy. Not that you agree with someone; but that you fully understand him, emotionally and intellectually. Empathy is delivered with the ears, eyes, and heart - for feeling, for meaning. It’s powerful because it provides context as well as content.

Within Masonry we are provided a tool kit called the Work. In **Penetrating the Veil** communication of the Ritual is discussed: “The general meaning of the ritual can be sensed in the feeling and flow of the words. They are not meaningless. The ritual must impress the candidate with awe and wonder and fill his mind with intelligent information. The Work must be sincere and, although accuracy is pleasing, there must be communication. The right words can be pronounced, but it is unavailing unless the message comes across. Ritual is the performance of a ceremony to illustrate a mystery.”

It is most important in the delivery of the Work to understand the intent behind the words. It is not a catechism, a dull recital of facts and figures. Consider the life lessons we are trying to impart. Each of us as Master Masons is enjoined to take up the tools of our craft and instruct the newer brethren.

As a mentor, a sponsor, or a coach, when working with our members we must first actively listen to them and understand their situation and concerns. Ask them what they heard, saw and felt. Listen actively with empathy, consciously trying to understand and to see the world from the other person's perspective.

Effective Masons need to develop relationships of trust that enable open and frank discussion between Brothers. Members need to have the courage to ask questions, develop understanding and explain the concepts. Lodges need to develop mechanisms through practice and education to encourage communication and ensure we understand the habits we are forming.

**Habit 6 - Synergize®**

Synergize is the habit of creative cooperation. It is teamwork, open-mindedness, and the adventure of finding new solutions to old problems. But it doesn't just happen on its own. It's a process, and through that process, people bring all their personal experience and expertise to the table. Together, they can produce far better results that they could individually. Synergy lets us discover jointly things we are much less likely to discover by ourselves. It is the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. One plus one equals three, or six, or sixty--you name it.  
  
When people begin to interact together genuinely, and they're open to each other's influence, they begin to gain new insight. The capability of inventing new approaches is increased exponentially because of differences.   
  
The Work provides a common frame of reference which lets us all communicate to each other. Seeing how each of the lessons are imparted across the district, I can assure you that we have a uniformity of language, but the delivery is shaped by the emotions, thoughts and experiences of the Mason.

A strong Lodge takes on the differences we all have as strengths. United through the Work, and the values, and habits it provides by extension. Improved by the efforts, skills and abilities of our members, through Masonry we unleash people’s greatest powers. We make a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

**Habit 7 - Sharpen the Saw®**

Take time to **rejuvenate** and help prepare yourself to work better in the future. This often means relaxing, enjoying nature, meditating and spending time with high-quality relationships.

The purpose of this habit is to regularly exercise the four components which many believe make up the human being: body, mind, heart and spirit.

* **Body**: Exercise for a sense of well-being.
* **Mind**: Exercise to sharpen the intellectual abilities.
* **Spirit**: Exercise with meditations and inner reflections.
* **Heart**: Exercise care for important relationships.

Within the Lodge we take the time to shape the character we all share as Masons,

To exercise in all these necessary dimensions, we must be proactive in our approach to learning and delivering the work; proficient in our understanding of the language and the lessons therein and the cooperative in coming together as Brothers united in harmony.

Within Masonry we Work to develop positive habits that benefits each of us as individuals and collectively as Masons. We learn this new language and life lessons and that has to become a habit, which inhabits our individual and collective character.

As Masons, we already get Covey’s core teaching that when building a character ethic, it is most important to focus on integrating the principles of integrity, honour and morality into one's life. This may be a long-term process, but working on character, including an effective view of the world and self-awareness, is habit forming and so is core to delivering our fundamental tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.