

Balance and the 24-inch Gauge

December 3, 2015

Buchanan Lodge No. 550

Brethren, the date is now December 3, with a good portion of our Masonic year already in our past in what seems to me as just a blink of an eye. On Monday evening during what was a particularly pleasant evening I attended a dinner where I saw many men whom I hadn't seen in several months. Many of these men asked me how my year was going thus far, and then quickly followed that question up with the common statement that this year is extremely busy. My response was the same to all of them. I really don't feel that busy, and in fact I feel great and am having a great time.

After that evening I began to think about what busy really means to me. People commonly ask my wife how she copes with my busy work life amongst my other community and Lodge activities. Her common response has always been that it all comes down to my ability to manage my work life balance. In all of the hustle and bustle of our busy lives, I believe that we would all be lost without that balance.

In the face of hard work, I commonly think of the words of Thomas Jefferson who said that "the thing with good luck, is that the harder I work, the more I seem to have of it." ...but all things in moderation.

A little while ago I came across a blog post from a distant contact of mine that has stuck with me. He is a man in his mid-thirties who in the eyes of many young entrepreneurs is living the dream. He had expanded his small software business to several hundred million dollars in revenues in just a few short years. This blog post however occurred after he flew into one city in the morning, only to be flying back out in the afternoon, towards the next city and the next hotel, as had become his daily routine. The blog post came when he finally hit a wall. He had cancelled his ticket at the airport, cancelled his meetings for the next week, and had boarded a flight for home in a split decision. The blog post began during that plane ride home as almost a plea for compassion from friends and loved ones in the face of the guilt that he felt in making what he viewed as this sacrifice. Several pages later however as the blog post neared an end, his message became one of confidence, relief, and above all, clarity.

In reflecting upon this subject, I am compelled to propose that the term "busy" is simply just a description of a life in a state of imbalance.

Work-Life balance, or in our case, Work-Family-and-Lodge balance is all very relative to what you have deemed as your norm, or the general flow of your lifestyle. Your ability to adapt and even recover is directly related to your willingness to accept change within your life.

In the first degree we are called on to derive a daily lesson of admonition and instruction from the 24 I.G., as the day is divided into 24 parts, so must we as Masons learn to apportion our own hours into their proper objects namely, P., L., R., and SI. It is at this time brethren that I commonly see the brother doing this Work marking out 6 hour increments on the 24 I.G.

It is to this slight movement brethren that I would like to particularly draw your attention. I would propose that the apportioning of the hours of the day were never meant to be depicted in such rigid terms, but rather that this piece of our ritual is speaking to the import of our careful attention in the apportioning of our hours to all aspects of our lives, or risk finding ourselves quickly in a state of imbalance, ridden with guilt, and quickly reaching a point of exhaustion.

I have had the great opportunity in my life to travel to China on several occasions both for business and pleasure. Balance makes up a significant portion of the foundations of any of my relationships over there. The Chinese believe that first we have the forces of Yin and Yang within all things which must be kept in balance, then the forces of Feng Shui are introduced as the environment that we live within, and then finally in the case of business, a *guan xi* network is established of the men and their associated family members comprising what ultimately becomes a long lasting relationship. These layers of the relationship are carefully fashioned over time and for good reason as they are all established around the focal point of maintaining balance in life.

Here in the West, we strive for an entirely different goal. We apportion our work life, our family life, time for our friends, and time for other activities all in separate buckets. Then as life happens and the buckets overflow into other buckets, our refreshment and sleep buckets become deprived, and ultimately we become what we commonly describe as “very busy” and “sleep deprived”.

To simplify the metaphor brethren, what I am suggesting is that these buckets may be combined into one. Brethren, let me be clear on this. I am not suggesting that you go home and announce to your wife that Devin said it’s a good idea to work at the dinner table. I am however suggesting that we need not be so literal in our reflection upon the 24 inch gauge. I myself grew up in a farming family. Farmers in the west have been blending their work and life hours for generations. In contrast, however, it has become somewhat of a taboo for work in other industries, to be dealt with after traditional work hours. I believe that with the removal of these barriers, and the reorganization of our time, a much happier life may be had in the modern day, provided the appropriate time is apportioned for family.

In closing brethren, we are quickly approaching that point in our Masonic year where our gatherings begin to include family, and holiday parties and the year soon winds down in favour of lively festivities with loved ones. I encourage you all to apportion a goodly sum of your time to family and loved ones in the coming weeks as we head into these holidays. I would also remind you that our time is precious and is most deservedly given to those who are in need, those who are sick, and those who are alone during this time of year.

Thank you,

R.W. Bro. Devin L. Tuinstra
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