

THE CRYPTIC COUNCIL CHALLENGE

Written and presented Richard A. Riepe, Missouri

Recently I attended the Region Seven York Rite Conference in Bolivar. It was well planned and organized. Hats off to those in charge!

Following an outstanding steak lunch some challenges appeared. One of the directors spoke to me of their dilemma. None of the Regional Lecturers were present. He asked if we should cancel the Cryptic Council ritual part and just move on to Commandery? My response was NO. I will take care of the ritual instruction.

“Be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourself.” James 1:22 ESV

I began: I have discovered that we often say one thing but do not do what we say. A case in point would be our Closing Prayer in the Cryptic Council.

“Supreme Architect of Heaven and Earth, accept our humble thanks for the mercies and blessings we have received from Thee, and as we are about to conclude another day of labor; wilt Thou be pleased so to influence our hearts and minds, that we may anxiously await another time to resume our labors in the Secret Vault. Amen”

That is a wonderful prayer. We thank our creator for His mercies and blessings that we have already received. That is good. God has done His part! Then the final two phrases. We ask God to do what we are not willing to do, our part!

We should always start with the end goal in mind.

How do we expect God to influence our hearts and minds when we have offered nothing to our Companions to think about. If there has been no meaningful education, how do we expect God to use what we have not been willing to give, to influence anyone?

Has our education involved them? Was it exciting and fun? What have we presented which would instill a desire for our Companions to anxiously await our next meeting?

“Whatever products and services you supply to your customers, the main purpose of your business is to train and develop your people.” *Dr. Peter Drucker*

“Tell me and I forget.

Teach me and I remember.

Involve me and I learn.” *Benjamin Franklin*

Which is easier, to find new York Rite Masons, or retain, and train our current members? Yes, that is a loaded question! I believe it is easier to bring back the Companions we have on our rosters than to find new ones.

We have several teachings “role plays” we can take to our Blue Lodges. They are very effective. They require a handful of dedicated men, who have an empty evening at their disposal.

Or we can so excite our current membership that they will anxiously await our next Council meeting. They, by word of mouth, will spread the word. They will tell everyone about what they have learned. Both options take work!

We must turn problems into growth opportunities! Members of our Councils should be mobilized to meet those needs. Thereby allowing our Companions to grow, mature and internalize our teachings, so they can lead others.

Illustration:

Some time ago, wolves were picking off the livestock of ranchers at an alarming rate. So, the state offered a bounty of \$5,000 for every wolf killed. It turned Sam and Jed into fortune hunters. Day and night they searched the mountains and forests looking for their valuable prey.

Exhausted one night, they fell asleep dreaming of their potential fortune. Suddenly, Sam awoke to see that they were surrounded by about 50 wolves with flaming eyes and bared teeth. He nudged his friend and said, “Jed, wake up! We are rich!” (Gary C. Payne, Leadership, Vol.11, no.1)

I like Sam’s attitude. He was surrounded with problems, which he saw as a huge opportunity.

Our councils, as well, are surrounded with opportunity, which some might call “problems” or “needs.” The question is:

How do we take advantage of those needs? How do we address the problems that surround us and turn those problems into opportunities?

Keep that story in mind. Just what if . . . What if those Companions you have not seen in your Council for years all showed up? What if fifty of them attend your next Council meeting? They are all hungry to learn something to improve themselves as York Rite Masons.

What is planned to educate and excite them that they will anxiously await the next meeting? Or, next month are you back to square one having missed a tremendous opportunity?

We say we would love to see our Secret Vaults full. However, we make no provisions for such an event! Yet we ask God to bless us when we have not done our part! How ludicrous.

Our real problem is we are not meeting their needs! Want to bring your Council back to life? Give them a boost of Excitement and Encouragement. Make it fun as well as a learning experience.

Speak in such a way that others love to listen to you. Listening in such a way that others love to speak to you!

Allow no one to just sit on the sidelines! Get everyone involved. Laugh, have fun, and teach valuable life lessons.

All of this takes planning your work and working your plan. That was something my dad instilled in me. You, as an individual, may be the only one to buy into this. But it only takes a spark to start a forest fire. Ask questions. Read, Read, and Read.

If I may ask, how many books on leadership or the principles of Masonry did you read in the past twelve months? If none, why not? Our pledge is to make good men better, is it not? How are we, how are you doing that, if you are not improving yourself?

Charlie "Tremendous" Jones said: "You will be the same person in five years as you are today except for the people you meet and the books you read!"

Personally, I feel the goal, for each of us, individually should be twenty books or more each year. But you ask how? That part is simple. Close the computer. Stop the concern over everyone else's social media or surfing the web. Quit the endless watching of your favorite u-tube or TV channel. Give yourself a fighting chance. Only one hour a day of reading, and you should easily read twenty books a year. Ask yourself how you can apply what you are reading to improve yourself and help others?

Develop a reading list.

- We speak about our ancient landmarks. What do you know about them? What difference can they make in our life?
- Study the scriptures upon which our ritual is based. Ask yourself what lessons we should learn from our ancient Fathers. How do they apply to our current lifestyle?
- Leadership:
 - Stephen R. Covey, begin with The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. I purchase these at Half Price Bookstores or "thrift" stores and give them away! All of his books are tremendous.
 - Patrick Lencioni, Saint Mary's University offers an MA in Leadership based on his books. He writes about dysfunctional meetings and dysfunctional team members and how to overcome those challenges. (17 books)

- John Maxwell is a prolific writer on Leadership. I recommend all 30+ of his books.
- Dr. Peter Drucker (approximately 60 outstanding books)

I will stop there. There are over 120 books on Leadership with just those four men.

Gene Roddenberry, television screenwriter and creator of Star Trek, wrote this about the value of reading books:

"I consider reading the greatest bargain in the world. A shelf of books is a shelf of many lives, ideas, and imaginations which the reader can enjoy whenever he wishes and as often as he wishes. Instead of experiencing just one life, the booklover can experience hundreds or even thousands of lives. He can live any kind of adventure in the world. Books are his time machine into the past and into the future. Books are his "transporter" by which he can beam instantly to any part of the universe and explore what he finds there. Books are an instrument by which he can become any person for a while—a man, a woman, a child, a general, a farmer, a detective, a king, a doctor, anyone.

Great books are especially valuable because a great book often contains within its covers the wisdom of a man or woman's whole lifetime. But the true lover of books enjoys all kinds of books, even some nonsense now and then, because enjoying nonsense from others can teach us to also laugh at ourselves. A person who does not learn to laugh at his own problems and weaknesses and foolishness can never be a truly educated or a truly happy person. Also, probably the same thing could be said of a person who does not enjoy learning and growing all his life."

Source: Letters to Star Trek

IDEAS:

Steward: Guard the entrance of the Secret Vault with sleepless vigilance. When? From nine at night till twelve – when prying eyes are closed in sleep.

This is a Prime time to read and study. Begin the habit of reading and studying during this time before bed. Whatever you are studying before you retire for the night, which is what your mind works on while you sleep. The answers come in the morning. Be ready to write them down.

JOB 33:14-16

- 14 “Indeed God speaks once,
Or twice, yet no one notices it.
- 15 “In a dream, a vision of the night,
When sound sleep falls on men,
While they slumber in their beds,
- 16 Then He opens the ears of men,
And seals their instruction.

Recorder: He is responsible for public relations to all Blue Lodges, all Councils in their Region, as well as the Grand Bodies. Yes, record all such things as proper to be written. Flood the social media with everything the Council is doing in the community. Speak of the outstanding progress Dr. Michael Murphy is making in stem cell research at CMMRF.

Principle Conductor of the work: Provide refreshments for the Companions every meeting. This should be a crowd breaker experience. Assign tasks during this time. Such as discovering three things about a single companion you never knew before. After opening and a short business meeting he is in charge of a team-building exercise.

Also, in his year as P.C.W. he declares what his theme will be for his year as Illustrious Master.

Train our leaders – that is our challenge!

Deputy Master: How are you exhibiting fellowship? What are you doing to engage with other Cryptic Councils across the State? Teach about the memorials of the ancient craft and how they should make a difference for us today.

Illustrious Master: What secret traditions are you reciting? From what books are you quoting? How are you illustrating the moral principles of our Order? Do you publicly recognize the worthy companions of your council? Determine what you will do every month to present a practical application of your theme for the year.

My year as Illustrious Master I based my theme on a song sung by Tennessee Ernie Ford: “If I Can Help Somebody as I Travel along, then my living will not be in vain.” Each meeting we took a lesson from the book The 7 Habits of Effective People. Everyone got out of their chair and was involved!

If your council is in a time of rebuilding, your theme could be built on the song: To Dream the Impossible dream. Study the lyrics of the song and apply them.

Remember what Seneca said? That the greatest empire is within us? That no one is fit to rule who is not first master of themselves?

Illustration:

A farmer decided he knew as much as any doctor. So, he opened up a doctor's office in town. He charged \$500 a visit, but he promised that if he could not cure you, he would give you \$1,000.

The town's regular doctor was offended by that and decided to expose him as a fraud. So, he went to the farmer's office and said "Doc, I seem to have lost my ability to taste. Can you cure me?" The farmer called out, "Nurse, give him 3 drops from that little blue bottle." She administered the drops, and the real doctor began to choke. "That's gasoline!" The farmer smiled and said "Congratulations! Your taste has been restored. That will be \$500!" The real Doctor realized he had been had. But he paid up and stalked out of the office.

A few days later he came back and said "Doctor, I think I have lost my short-term memory; can you cure me?" "Sure. Nurse give him 3 drops from that little blue bottle." "NO! That is gasoline!" cried the Doctor. "Congratulations! Your memory is cured. That will be \$500!" The Doctor got out his checkbook and paid up.

A week later, he thought of one more thing that might stump presumptuous farmer. He walked into the office with a white cane. Staring off into space he said "Doctor, I think I might be going blind. Can you restore my sight?"

The farmer looked at him, and then he looked at the floor and sadly said "No, I am afraid I cannot do that... so I guess I will have to pay you the \$1,000. Hold out your hand please."

The doctor smiled and thought to himself, "At last I have beaten him!" Then the farmer put a \$50 bill in it. Seeing that, the doctor shouted, "Hey! That is only a \$50!" The farmer smiled... and said: "Congratulations! Your eyesight has been restored!... That will be \$500!"

Now, of course that is just a joke. But notice - that farmer always knew just what to say to the doctor. He had planned ahead for each possible scenario.

What do you do when only two or three show for a meeting? Don't go home! Have some education and ask questions of each other. Have something prepared ahead of time. Make it exciting with lots of ideas and discuss it together. Then send out emails, post them on Facebook, talk about the lively discussion and excitement that was generated. Make others wish they had been there.

For those of us who were in scouting our motto was "Be prepared." That should be our motto for each of our meetings as well.

1 PETER 3:15

15 . . . always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

When I was a counselor with the Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation, we taught the high school sophomores this little chant.

"To be enthusiastic, you must act enthusiastic.

To act enthusiastic, you must be enthusiastic.

Oh boy, am I enthusiastic."

Are you enthusiastic about the Cryptic Council?

"For him who knows to do right, and does it not, to him it is a sin." James 4:17

Status Quo is killing Masonry. Think outside of the box. Strive to meet other people's needs, not just your own.

The Survival reality shows are popular now. I must admit there are some contestants, I personally wonder how they made the cut for the show. What you or I would call common knowledge, they have no clue.

They have not toned their muscle skills enough to make them instincts. Some have in their mind what they want for shelter. However, they lack the skills to safely cut down a tree. They may have watched a video or U-tube about it but never practiced. Practice, practice, practice, which is how we each improve.

Either ask for volunteers or appoint three Companions as your Education Committee. The Illustrious Master can choose the topic for each meeting or have the committee members decide. Plan out the entire year ahead of time.

Then have three companions research the topic and have a group presentation. This brings about "synergistic" thoughts! Select a different group of companions to do the research and presentation for each of the coming months. Ask your council members what they are interested in learning.

Cryptic Masons Medical Research Foundation (C.M.M.R.F). Assign someone to report each meeting on the research of Dr. Murphy at Indiana University. Discuss fund-raising ideas. This is a "Hot Button" for some.

We often ask if anyone knows of someone in sickness and distress. Someone will stand and give a report. In most cases that is all that takes place. We go right on into the next topic on our agenda.

I would suggest that the chaplain listen intently to those requests and concerns. When everyone has spoken the Illustrious Master should call upon the chaplain to pray for each Companion and situation, by name. The Recorder should have a card for the Companions to sign and mail to the individuals for which you prayed.

“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much we care.” Show it! This builds great bonds between us and our Companions.

Back to the Region Seven meeting. After my short presentation, a couple Companions pulled me aside. I could see it in their eyes and by the expression on their faces that they were not happy. With a trembling lower lip, one of them expressed how angry he was about what I said. He felt as though he had been cheated, deprived of education, and insulted by his Council. He said none of the things I spoke of were happening in his Council. How SAD! If you are the Illustrious Master of the Council, make it happen.

I like what entrepreneur and author Derek Sivers writes on how to build a business: we can apply it to Masonry.

"Never forget that absolutely everything you do is for your customers. Make every decision — even decisions about whether to expand the business, raise money, or promote someone — according to what is best for your customers.

If you are ever unsure what to prioritize, just ask your customers the open-ended question, "How can I best help you now?" Then focus on satisfying those requests...

It is counterintuitive, but the way to grow your business is to focus entirely on your existing customers. Just thrill them, and they will tell everyone."

You may well have said it yesterday, or overheard someone else saying it, "Oh, I will do it in the morning...I will do it after I wake up...I will get to it later...I just need to do this other thing first."

It is one of the oldest, most insidious lies in the world. Yet it is so common that we do not even notice it. We do not even realize that it is a vicious untruth that deprives us and the world of potential, of awareness, of understanding.

As Marcus Aurelius observed 2,000 years ago, it is the lie that we will be good tomorrow. It is what Seneca said all fools—and all of us are fools—have in common: That we are getting ready to start.

You will not get to it tomorrow. You are deceiving yourself. And even if you somehow were not, if you were truly sincere, who is to say you are guaranteed to get a tomorrow?

Procrastination is not just dishonest, it is arrogant. It is an old, timeless, and terrible vice. You must crush it. Not tomorrow. But today. Now.

Practice your learning habits each day!

"It is not that hard on any given day, but the trick is you cannot skip days. Your workouts can be reasonable and still deliver results—if you do not skip days. Your writing sessions can be short, and the work will still accumulate—if you do not skip days. As long as you are working, you will get there."

As Seneca said, fortune behaves as she pleases. So why did they try then? Why did they work hard on stuff when it might not work out? Why did they invest and sacrifice? Why did they form relationships and attachments, set goals or make plans? Especially when success and rewards were so uncertain.

Because, to quote a line from the famous play about Cato—one that was often quoted in the uncertain days of the American Revolution by Washington and Adams—

"We cannot ensure success, but we can deserve it."

The former is outside our control, the latter is not. Deserving success is up to us, getting it not necessarily so.

If we are so bold to ask God to bless our Councils, then we must be doing our part to deserve success, with God's help!

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard A. Riepe

Grand Lecturer of the Cryptic Council of Missouri

ps. Start Today!

Marshal: Examine visitors. This could also include being in contact with all our Companions who refuse to learn their part or attend our meetings. Find out why? Encourage them.

Conductor of the Council:

Let them be a part of the team which determines if a companion is worth to continue in the advancing line. If you demand nothing from them. That is what we get, Nothing.

Captain of the Guard: If someone is disruptive or out of order, let him deal with them. Remember he is responsible for allowing only the select, faithful and worthy to pass his station.

Treasurer: Have him explain just how is it that he is weighing out shekels for the Sanctuary? What Sanctuary, where? Even better, how is he providing for the helpless orphans?