"Trend Analysis In and About the Lodge"

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Summary. Why is your doctor interested in your vital signs and lab work? The answer, obviously is because numbers can be very revealing and can provide indications and warnings of potential threats to your overall health. Shouldn't we be equally concerned about the overall health of our lodges? There are vital signs and "lab work" to be found in our annual numbers that also reveal the state or health of our lodges and they can reveal developing trends that may be positive or negative. Like annual health examinations by your doctor, the lodge vitals and lab work numbers should be examined on a regular basis to spot trends or problems as early as possible. It would be my recommendation that this become a primary task for every Junior Warden, Senior Warden, Secretary, and Treasurer *working as a committee* and separate from the audit. This particular group *must* be thoroughly familiar with the health and operations of your lodge and, in my mind, constitute a natural "*Lodge Health*" committee. I will explain in this article what the Trend Analysis is, how do to it, and how to interpret the results.

What Are We Doing and Why Are We Doing It?

Purpose. There are two purposes for this article: first, to encourage you to conduct trend analysis on your lodge on a scheduled, periodic basis, and second to walk you through the process of conducting such a Trend Analysis of your lodge vitals using two fictional examples I created for this article. Through these examples, I hope to show you how to identify an emerging "trend" in your lodge health, but my intention is NOT to tell you "this number is bad" or "this number is good". My overall and only objective is to help our brother lodge officer's spot trends – positive or negative – so they have time and can react accordingly. There are good trends and there are bad trends, but if you and the officers of your lodge don't know a trend emerging in your numbers – be it income, be it candidates, be it members, or whatever, you will miss the warning sign and perhaps miss the ideal – and perhaps only time and opportunity to address it. The earlier you spot a trend, the more control you might exert over it!

The Models. I have created two lodges out of thin air and my imagination to use in walking you through the fairly simple process of gathering your data, formatting it for your study, and then identifying any trends that may be present. In one of my imaginary lodges, things are fairly straight forward, but some things may pop out of the numbers at you while you peruse the statistics. The second lodge of my vivid imagination has some obvious issues – issues I've designed to demonstrate warning flags or even distress flares. I will lay out the data gathering and data formatting steps for you and explain the significance as I go. In reality, I've manufactured the data and organized it via Excel Spreadsheet to illustrate the data organization and analysis process.

Planning Factors to Consider

Planning Factors. There are certain factors that will affect your analysis and, therefore, your understanding of the numbers you are looking at, and there are also some factors that affected the way I had to develop and organize the examples. Those factors are provided here for you to keep in mind as you go through the rest of the article.

- A dataset (for the purpose of this article) is a type or category of data – for instance, "Total Members", "Initiated", "Raised", etc. are datasets that can be analyzed independently or in conjunction with other datasets.

- Data source. Your data source should be the same for each year of your analysis. The two best sources for this analysis are your local copies of your Annual Returns which has most of the essential data you will need, and the Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas under the section sometimes titled: "Masonic Districts & Secretary's Comparative Statement" where they lay out all of the data according to district and then according to lodge. (Warning: In the Grand Lodge Proceedings the data may not be consistently found under that section and title from year to year; you may need to search under different section titles from year to year. Lodge Annual Return data is categorized similarly but slightly differently than the Grand Lodge, but the essential information is there and you may just need to hunt for it. Regardless of which you prefer, try to use the same source for your study all the way through. If you have to blend data from two sources, ensure you categorize it consistently in your analysis. I personally prefer the data provided through the Grand Lodge Proceedings because I think it goes into a greater and more useful depth.

**NOTE 1: I believe it is particularly important to use the same source at least for each dataset (i.e. Initiated, Raised, Affiliated, etc.). For the integrity of your data, try to use the same source each dataset, even if you aren't able to use the same source for all data categories. For example you may need to get "Endowed Members" from your records, but totals for other datasets from Grand Lodge, or some variation.

**NOTE 2: Grand Lodge does not provide "Endowed Members" per lodge in their typical annual data tables, nor does it provided "Suspended for Non-Payment of Dues", so you will need local lodge data for that information – and I *strongly* recommend you include it!

- Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet provides the most convenient tool for organizing your data and, in certain categories it will automatically calculate your totals if needed.

- I found that my baseline of "5-year increments", or as I sometimes refer to them as "slices", provides the most convenient results without drowning you in data, particularly if your lodge is 50 years old or older. A true trend probably extends beyond five years in length if it is already a factor in your lodge health and it should emerge in your analysis. You should see a true trend overlap two 5-year increments or slices and continue on beyond that. If your lodge is under 50

years of age, you *might* consider three year increments for your baseline to surface and bring potential trends to light.

- Remember, a word of caution for you whether you use 5-year or 3-year slices or increments, it's easy to misinterpret the data you are looking at as being year-to-year so the numbers may not seem to make sense when you spot an odd disconnect or gap between one column of data and the next. Each slice is a snapshot of one year of data at five or three year intervals – much can go on in your lodges between the slice that will ripple through subsequent years and show up in your data and that is precisely what you are looking for. The most common distraction is confusing the Net Change total at the end of one column of data with the Total Members total at the top of the next. Remember there are five (or three) years between those totals. You may find you need to remind yourself of this more than once as you study your data.

- Rather than create a new data line in my examples for "Suspended NPD", I used the "Demit" line. You are free (and encouraged) to separate those categories into their own data lines and you will probably find it advantageous to do so. That's your call.

- Not all data in the data slices are totaled into the membership category totals, but may independently reveal interesting trends. For instance, the totals in the data lines for "Plural" are NOT totaled into the overall member totals because they only represent the number of members you have that joined that year as dual members in *other* lodges – it does not change your member numbers. On the other hand you never know where a trend may pop up and what it may tell you. Also, "Initiated" are not totaled into "With Gains", "Gain", or "Net Change" because they are not members, yet you may find interesting trends in numbers of initiations your lodge conducts, especially versus how many are actually raised.

- Trends or oddities in the totals you find through this study are coming from 5-year (or 3-year) snapshots and may require deeper investigation. This is the purpose of this analysis, to spot those oddities and anomalies so that you know where you need to dig deeper to identify true problems that need your attention. When you investigate, you may find legitimate or unique causes that do not represent a growing trend, or, you may find the beginning of a trend that could threaten the health of your lodge. Trend Analysis is intended to point you to potential problem areas and alert you to the possibility of trouble growing in certain areas of your lodge operation and administration.

A Simple Process

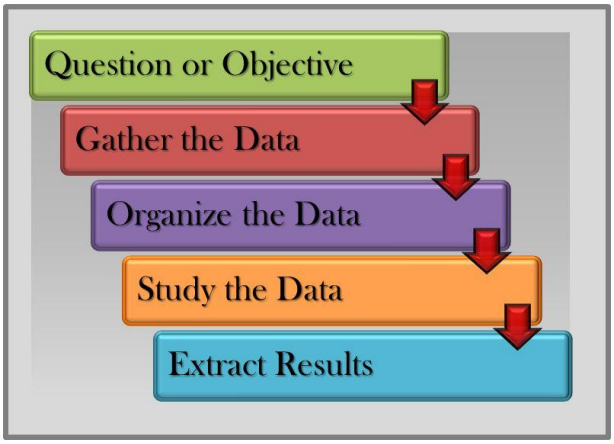

Illustration 1. Tailored Lodge Trend Analysis Process

The Process. The process is relatively simple. Figure out what you want to know or accomplish, figure out what kind of data will show you what you want to know, gather it, organize it, and study it. That's really essentially it. The first three steps will set you up for success (or failure if ignored), so pay close attention to the first three important actions:

- **Determine your objective.** First, you need to define what you want to learn, this will prevent you from spending time gathering unneeded and unrelated data. Your objective might be "I want to understand our membership numbers", or "I want to understand our lodge spending habits", or something similar. Perhaps your first Trend Analysis will be "to determine and assess the overall health of "My Lodge No. XX".

- **Gather your data.** Next, locate and gather that data according to the time frame you are interested in.

- **Organize your data.** Organize your data into a logical presentation so you can read and understanding the meaning. I have found Microsoft Excel is an excellent tool for many types of analysis and allows you to format and present the data in the manner most convenient for you. Once completed, you are ready to get to the heart of the matter.

- **Study the data.** This is where we will begin the discussion using my imaginary lodges and fictional data I have created for them. This is the heart and the purpose of this article, but the previous three steps are critical to finding and identifying meaningful results that can be used to improve your lodge administration. Once you are comfortable your data is complete and that the manner in which you've organized it will allow you to understand what the numbers indicate

regarding the health of your lodge, study the datasets, increment-by-increment and compared to or against the other datasets. What are the numbers telling you? What did you find when you compared the data from increment-to-increment and in comparison between datasets?

- **Extract and document your results.** You are now ready to prepare whatever the vehicle is that you plan to use to present the results. You might use Power Point slides, you might use a written report to present to the lodge, or perhaps you might prepare some version(s) of storyboards. You should tailor the presentation to your purpose in a form that will clearly convey the results. I recommend you include a written report or summary to include as an attachment to the minutes of the meeting where you present your results.

Thus far I have provided my purpose, a description of my models, factors to consider in planning, and the steps in the Trend Analysis process as I propose it for use in our lodges. It is now time to begin the "Study the data" step.

Our Fictional Exemplar Lodges

The Data. We are ready to do some analysis. Imagine that we've been tasked by our lodge to: "assess the overall health of the lodge and determine if there are any trends to be concerned about".

We have gathered the data we need using the Grand Lodge data extracted from the Annual Proceedings for the years of our interest and our own NPD data from our lodge records. We gathered our data starting in 1970 and then at five-year intervals up through 2020. It would be logical for you to start with the year your lodge was set to labor so that you can understand the full history of your lodge.

We then organized our data into an Excel Spreadsheet for our analysis. For the purpose of this example 2020 was a normal year – *this example does not account for the irregularities caused by the pandemic and the resulting shut downs*. You will need to account for that year and determine if it is appropriate to exclude that data from your own analysis, or perhaps included it and footnote it. *This will be your call*. I might recommend using 2019 data for that increment if 2020 falls into one of your 5- or 3-year increments.

In this initial review we will familiarize ourselves with the data, familiarize ourselves with the fields and categories, and understand how the data for each of the 5-year increments relate to the row categories. Review the planning factors from above that clarify which fields will be totaled and calculated and which are simply (what I call) stand-alone indicators.

Example #1 – A generic, presumably healthy lodge.

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2020		
Total Members	250	275	305	312	323	325	337	335	339	337	338	337		
Initiated	5	6	4	5	5	4	6	5	5	4	3	4	56	
Raised	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	2	42	75.00%
Affiliated	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	0	1		
Plural	6	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0		
With Gains	256	280	312	316	329	329	343	339	346	342	341	340		
Deceased	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	2		
Demit	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3 (NPD)	1 (NPD)	1		
Gain	6	5	7	4	6	4	6	4	7	5	3	3		
Net Change	252	283	310	314	327	326	342	337	343	336	338	337		
50-Year Exempt						3	4	5	6	8	11	12		
Rejected	3	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0		

Healthy Lodge #1

Illustration 2. Data Organized into Excel Spreadsheet for Analysis

First, glance over the data line-by-line, top-to-bottom to see if any trends become immediately apparent. Sometimes trends pop right out at you; sometimes you have to do some correlation between datasets to find trends that might not be obvious.

At first glance, “Total Members” looks fairly stable. There was a gradual incline from 1970 to about 1995 and then it seems to have stabilized at about 335(-ish).

Then we look at “Initiated”. This row does not calculate (is not included) in your gains because they are not members of your lodge. However, as “Stand Alone” data, it can indicate trends by itself, independent of other data or datasets. In this case, our lodge seems to have a steady level of petitioners and initiations, but there *may* be a gentle slowing in the late years.

Our “Raised” data set does calculate into gains since they are now members of your lodge. This row also works hand-in-hand with your “Initiated” data set. Of all of the men you initiate, how many seem to be finishing their work and end up being raised? In the case of this imaginary lodge, they seem to be running a flat 75%. Remember, these numbers come only from the particular years that fall on your 5-year increment – it does not include the four years between in the calculation. If you had a percentage of 40% or 50%, or if the numbers used changed somewhere in your data set that indicates a possible trend, you might need to dig deeper into your lodge’s degree data and do a separate analysis on numbers of men initiated, passed, and raised. But from an initial glance at this data, “Healthy Lodge #1” seems to be okay.

The “Affiliated” data set does calculate and add into your totals because they represent gains in your overall numbers. No immediate problems jump out at us in the “Affiliated” row in our example here, but again, at the end in the later years, there *may* be a slowing or tapering.

The “Plural” data set does not calculate into your membership numbers, but might indicate trends. This category of date reflects the number of members in your lodge that obtained “Plural” membership with another lodge during that given year. Nothing really jumps out at us from this example, but something was going on in 1970. This singular bump might indicate that six members of our exemplar lodge helped charter a new lodge, or perhaps joined another lodge to help keep that lodge afloat. Since we only see the one spike, there is apparently no real trend here to be concerned about.

The “With Gains” data does calculate and is added into your totals, but it is not the key row of data. Here we use it just to track what we think the norm is for gains in a year. In this case we see the gains every year seem to keep the lodge right around 330 – 345 (which is not the determinant number). The only reason I would use this row independently would be just to see if there is some trend that is not accounted for in our other datasets. I do not see a problem, necessarily in these numbers. Now, having said that, let me ask this hypothetical question – if your lodge members are growing older, moving away, or passing away, are the gains reflected here in “With Gains” sufficient to account for losses that tend to increase over time due to natural, uncontrollable causes? Just a thought…

The “Deceased” data obviously provides you some insight into the overall “age” of your membership, not a complete understanding perhaps, but at least some insight as to possible developing trends. In our example, our lodge seems to maintain an average of 2 – 3 per year but if you look at the early years, it fluctuated generally from 1 – 2 (with one exception), but by 2005 the fluctuation was from 2 – 3. This *might* indicate the onset of a trend. You might put this on a list to keep an eye on over time (are you bringing in enough new members to compensate for the losses? In our example, up until 2015 (at least) the “Raised” numbers easily compensated for the losses, but look back now at that “Raised” data and look at the years 2017 and 2020 – a ten-year span. If you find multiple years where the number Raised meets/equals the number of “Deceased”; you may want to go back and dig deeper into your “Initiated”, “Passed”, and “Raised” lodge records – this lodge is initiating enough to cover the current number of members that are lost each year through death, but those numbers do not carry through from Initiated to “Raised”. Is this lodge losing the necessary members between “Initiation” and “Raising”? *I believe this lodge should dig deeper into their degree conferral numbers*.

The “Demit” data is used with your losses and does calculate into your totals. In this example, I chose to include NPD’s in the Demit data set simply for convenience. You may need or want to separate these datasets into separate rows if you run high numbers in both categories. This is your call. You should note that when you do it the way I did here, you cannot have Excel “auto calculate” those rows or columns of data for you, so that may be an important factor for you to consider. In our example, we *do* see a potential trend emerging. Demits from 1970 through 2005 fluctuated between 0 -1. Starting in 2010 we see a significant change in this pattern with losses fluctuating from 1 – 3. This data set absolutely deserves some further attention and some focus. If your lodge has a Membership Committee, perhaps

they can retrieve the necessary data and do some analysis and identify details that might be influencing the trend and make recommendations.

Our “Net Change” data presents a good, high-level glance at what your lodge membership numbers are doing. First, just going straight across, you might see a trend that pops right out. In our example here we see steady increases in the Net Change up through 2000, and then the trend turns down. This might be the early alarm for problems that may be developing. If our gains are going down every year, will we be able to compensate for our losses in membership going forward?

Finally, for Texas masons, the “50-Year Exempt” data set is one of those “Stand Alone” datasets to be used as a potential factor in conjunction with other data and other datasets. It reflects *total per lodge* at that increment, year, NOT new 50-Year members in those individual years. At a glance at our data for our imaginary lodge, we see a clear and steady increase in members that are exempt from paying dues to their lodges under the jurisdiction of The Grand Lodge of Texas. This data set becomes a planning factor for your budget and finance committees who must account for the loss of the dues from these members. While it is true they are exempt from per-capita assessments every year, the lodge also likely loses the remaining dues that help lodges cover expenses.

I would look at the growing number of 50-Year Exempt members who no longer pay dues and first compare that to the number initiated, and then the number raised. Is the lodge bringing in enough members to compensate not only for losses reflected in the datasets above, but to compensate for the growing number of dues-exempt brothers? In this case, look at the number of 50-Year Exempt in 2005 compared to the Net Change number in 2005; then look at the 50-Year Exempt number in 2020 compared to the Net Change Number in 2020. We find that in 2005 that 1.48% of the lodge membership is dues exempt under the 50-Year program. In 2020 that number rises to 3.56%; that, my brothers is a *trend*.

Even in seemingly healthy lodges, trends do emerge and they provide us warning signs of trouble approaching! I did not specify a “peak” for my example “Healthy Lodge #1”, that being where the lodge health stopped increasing and then began clearly decreasing. But if I had to try to pinpoint the peak for this lodge I would put it somewhere between 2005 and 2010 based on the “Total Members”, “Gain”, and ‘With Gains” numbers. When peaks in the life of a lodge occur, it is incumbent on the lodge officers to act to turn the numbers around; but, if they don’t know they peak has occurred, how can they be expected to take action?

Now that you’ve determined what you want to learn, gathered the data, organized it, and performed an initial review of the numbers, you can now focus in on the specific areas that may have emerged as possible trends. Review the troubling numbers in context with other relative numbers as we did with the 50-Year Exempt numbers. Now, prepare your committee report and whatever presentation you may be planning to provide to your lodge to share the results. Always turn in a written report at a Stated Meeting to be attached to the minutes!

Analyzing a Lodge in Trouble

We've looked at the numbers of a lodge that is presumed to be relatively healthy and discovered some interesting data that might indicate emerging trends, so now let's look at one that lodge leaders already presume may be in some trouble. Spotting the trends in this example should be relatively easy. The reason for doing this is to illustrate the danger of waiting too long to do your first Trend Analysis on your lodge. I didn't specify in the first example if that lodge performed regular Trend Analysis's or not, but regardless of the frequency of prior analysis, we still found potential trends that might eventually threaten the health of that lodge. In this example, we will look at numbers for a lodge that has not performed any previous Trend Analysis and, therefore, taken no corrective actions over the course of many years.

A Lodge in Trouble

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2020		
Total Members	275	301	322	329	324	315	298	291	285	274	265	252		
Initiated	5	6	5	4	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	41	
Raised	4	3	5	4	3	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	26	63.41%
Affiliated	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0		
Plural	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	4	5	8	13		
With Gains	281	305	328	334	327	318	300	293	286	276	265	252		
Deceased	2	1	0	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1		
Demit	0	0	1	1	2	2	3 (NPD)	2	1 + 1 (NPD)	2 (NPD)	3 (NPD)	2 + (4 NPD)		
Gain	6	5	6	6	3	4	2	4	1	2	0	0		
Net Change	279	305	327	331	323	315	295	292	281	273	260	245		
50-Year Exempt						3	5	6	9	10	12	15		
Rejected	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

Troubled Lodge #2

Illustration 3. A Troubled Lodge

Using the same approach as in the first example, let's take our initial glance at the numbers. When we look at "Total Members" which is the beginning number for the year when the data was provided. In this example we clearly see indications of a potential peak – not proof, but a warning sign – between 1985 and 1995. We'll need to look and see if other numbers bear this out. Don't be hasty and proclaim peaks or trends in isolated data or datasets rather look at the other numbers to see if there is support or other possible explanations for the numbers.

Somewhere between 2000 and 2010, the average number of initiations dropped and the trend is declining.

The percentage of brothers who were initiated and eventually raised is 63%, however if you look at the early years of 1970 through 1990, the lodge was raising many more master masons on average. The

drop off after 1990 was so severe that it affected the overall average for the entire span of years. Our eyes are drawn again to the period between 1990 and 1995 and then the following years.

We see another indication in the drop in the number of affiliations which, again seems to have begun in the years following 1995.

In the case of this particular lodge, let's take a closer look at the "Plural" data set. Remember, this is the number of members of your lodge that affiliate and become a plural member of a second (or more) lodges in that year. In this example, 2005 grabs our attention. Something was going on that was beginning to entice brothers to affiliate with other lodges, but there's a hidden hazard here – that hazard is that this is an ambiguous number that could have *negative* or *positive* meaning! Perhaps this lodge has several brothers that are helping another lodge that needs line officers or esoteric instructors. The important aspects of this trend in this example is the emergence of the trend itself and the fact that it continues to steadily grow beyond two consecutive 5-year increments which may point to something larger going on. You may already know the reason, or perhaps a quick investigation of other facts will reveal the cause, but you have, in this case, successfully surfaced the trend for attention.

Looking at the "With Gains" data set, our eyes are drawn to the 1985 to 1995 data slices. Something seems to have happened or changed in that period of time that affected "Gains". As I emphasized above in several places, true trends probably extend and overlap two or more 5-year data increments. 1986 would be a good year to start a more in depth analysis of what was going on in the lodge because as of the data collection in 1985, the numbers were still increasing and healthy; it is beyond 1986 where something occurred or began to happen that impacted the numbers as early as 1990. Sometimes your numbers used in isolation will only provide you a starting point for further investigation, but often you can use the numbers in one data set to understand the numbers in another.

Looking at the numbers for "Deceased" brothers, there does not seem to be anything out of the normal. The numbers are relatively steady for this data set.

When we look at "Demit" which, again, includes suspension for NPD, we see real problems in both real demits and in NPD's. Until 1985 this lodge experienced no more than one demit in any one year. By 1990 the overall number had spiked up to a minimum of two, and beyond 2009 there is a significant and dangerous trend. I would recommend we consider this data in conjunction with the increase in the "Plural" data set which revealed a potential trend of members obtaining plural memberships with other lodges. When we look at the "Plural" and "Demit" datasets together, we have to ask what was going on beyond 2001 that might have fed those trends and a deeper investigation would be required to get to the roots of whatever the particular problem might have been.

In the "Gain" data set we see that the average dropped after 2005 to new lows and seem to have stayed there and perhaps even flattened.

Looking next at the "Net Change" numbers, we see the first indication of some type of a trend in the 1995 slice which appears to be just beyond the lodge health "peak". There is obviously a clear trend which began after 2001 and has not deviated in any of the subsequent 5-year slices. Many brothers may

look at their numbers, go directly to this line and say (to themselves) “ah ha”! That’s the problem. I encourage you to remember the examples we’ve examined so far that interpreting numbers in isolation from the other datasets can be misleading or even dangerous. You must consider these numbers in context with the other numbers and datasets if you want to a) find the real problems and b) correctly diagnose and define the boundaries of the trend.

Finally, we look at the 50-Year Exempt numbers and see the rapid growth in numbers of dues-exempt brothers. When the 50-Year Exempt program began in 1995, this lodge had .95% of brothers exempt from paying dues, but by 2020 that percentage had grown to 6.12%. The percentage of dues exempt brothers continues to grow while the “Net Change” continues to decrease from year to year. This is obviously a problem. This clearly demonstrates the need to examine a dataset in comparison or in context with other datasets to confirm and possibly understand emerging trends.

There are numbers I did not include but you might, and probably *should* include in your analysis. These are the numbers of Texas Masons who are “Endowed Members” and “Life Members” in our example lodges and who also do not pay dues. It’s very simple to add lines in Excel Spreadsheet and I highly recommend the inclusion of these datasets. I limited the datasets in my examples to the data found in the Grand Lodge Annual Proceedings to provide a simple baseline to demonstrate the basics of trend analysis. Texas masons should add the number of “Endowed” members because they don’t pay dues and the income lost from the annual dues of these members must be made up somewhere. Also, there is a landmine hidden in the numbers of dues paying members versus non-dues paying members. When a lodge approaches or surpasses the tipping point where there are more non-dues paying members, the lodge is on the verge of negative cash flow if they are not compensating through fundraising efforts. The Trend Analysis can – and will – provide a lodge the warning when this point is approaching.

Conclusion

Brethren, I believe this simple practice of conducting a periodic “Trend Analysis” will yield your lodge vital information on the health of your lodge and will help you forecast approaching problems. I truly believe the Senior and Junior Wardens along with the Secretary and Treasurer should be charged as a committee to assess your lodge’s health at least every other year; perhaps your lodge can specify even numbered year or odd numbered years.

If you and your lodge choose to conduct a Trend Analysis on the health of your lodge, please remember – this is actually only step number one in understanding the state of your lodge’s health. Once you identify a trend, or perhaps other troublesome indicators, it is then incumbent on you, your committee, or some other designee to follow up on that indicator and determine not only the cause, but the ramifications that might come from ignoring the warning. It is one thing to employ the Trend Analysis working tool, and it is quite another to act on your findings.

Thank you my brothers for the time you have taken to read and consider this article and may your lodges thrive and may you go in peace and enjoy harmony among your brothers!