

Living the Journey: Mentoring in Masonry

Bro. Bill Boyd, Past Master

Valley-Hi Lodge No. 1407

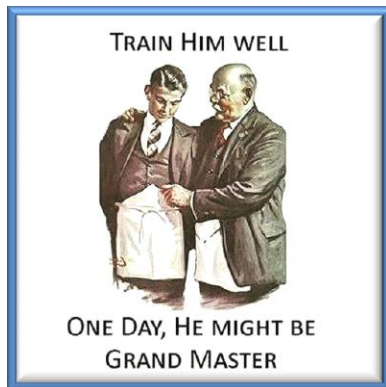
San Antonio, Texas

June 15, 2021

Preface

It is impossible to over-state the importance and centrality of mentoring in our education processes and the continuation of our masonic traditions. In a fraternal organization where knowledge is passed from instructive tongue-to-receptive ear, it is the most widely available, most widely employed, and potentially (if done properly) the most effective delivery method for masonic education, traditions, and protocols. When considering “mentoring”, most people automatically assume it is an intentional engagement with a student by an experienced, knowledgeable senior in a particular field, organization, fraternity, or career; unfortunately that is not always true as I will discuss in the following sections. This paper represents my opinions, developed over time through my military and post-military careers. This paper is not intended to represent my opinions as official positions or scientific determinations. It is merely the vehicle I’ve chosen to provide my observation-based opinions for your consideration to use or not use as you see fit but regardless, I hope you find something of interest within it.

Introduction



We are a fraternity founded on an oral instruction principle and practice we refer to as “from instructive tongue to the attentive ear”. That’s a pretty good starting point for a discussion of mentoring in masonry. When you think more deeply about it, mentoring goes well beyond what we say and what we teach through verbal instruction and in discussing mentoring we are reminded that we are founded as an institution on teaching our successors through both our words and actions. Theoretically, we should be and should have the most effective mentors in the history of mankind, or at least as far back as the 1300’s and 1400’s where

we see references to [what are today] masonic traditions and practices. But are we the most effective mentors?

I propose it is possible that we don’t actually employ or actively apply disciplined, intentional “mentoring” in our day-to-day interactions in our lodges. Occasionally we will have a Grand Master who makes mentorship one of his key programs or focus areas, and he will send out proclamations and edicts directing us to “go forth and mentor!” Unfortunately, an explanation of what mentoring is and instructions on how to mentor rarely (if ever) follows.

In 2017 and 2018 I developed an education manual¹ that a lodge might use in the creation of an organized lodge education process and infrastructure. In the manual, I specifically address mentoring

with an eye towards shortfalls and the resulting pitfalls for our lodges. Since that time I have also created a presentation on mentoring and have provided it by invitation at programs at some of our local lodges. I believe this topic is critical to freemasonry as it continues forward into the following generations of brothers upon whom our generation will depend on to protect our history and traditions.

Mentoring – The Fundamentals

For the purpose of this essay, a mentor is a brother who imparts knowledge – actively (intentionally) or passively (unintentionally) - based on his accumulated experience and his understanding of the masonic lessons he has learned and from the behavior he has come to believe and see as acceptable.

In my education manual, I identified mentoring as a separate delivery method for masonic education because of its criticality to the overall education process. It is a combination of live (in person) delivery of material and non-material educational subject matter that compliments and adds value to other forms of education that may be found in various masonic jurisdictions. In Texas we have a system for candidate instruction, programs for new master masons that provide additional light, and we have leadership programs through self-study and in-residence classroom instruction. When incorporated effectively, mentoring compliments and adds to these programs by providing a venue for the mason to seek further information or clarification of material and lessons.

Mentoring – The Forms

In the Needs Analysis I conducted to produce my Education Manual, I identified two forms of mentoring and they carry over into the non-masonic world as well. There is “active” mentoring which we do on purpose, and there is “passive” mentoring which we probably do not realize we are doing.

Active (or Intentional) Mentoring: this can be the most effective method for delivering knowledge because a willing, experienced, and invested brother shares knowledge through discussions, demonstrations, and through his example. The efficacy of this form is completely dependent on the experience and knowledge of the mentor and whether the information being shared is reasonably accurate, logical, and is also received, understood, and learned/retained by the candidate (or student).

Passive (or unintentional) Mentoring: this method demands being called out separately because of the potential for enduring good or lasting damage to our great fraternity. Passive mentoring is that mentoring that is received through observation by a student (or, in our case a brother) new to a situation, be it a job, organization, or – as in our case – a fraternity.

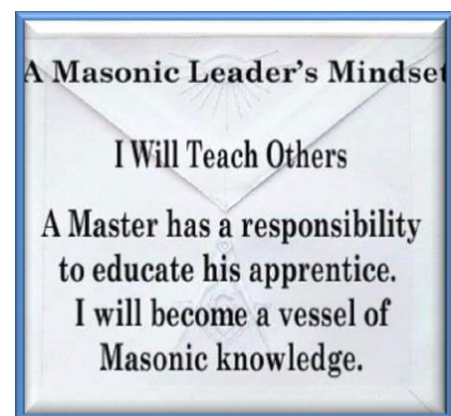
Mentors – Who Are They?

Who are these brothers we call mentors? Can you train a mentor? Or is it something that is a natural characteristic of some brothers? The answer is yes. We have assigned mentors and we can provide them some form of education or training to improve their skills, and there are natural mentors who tend to form bonds and relationships naturally, passing knowledge through the course of a relationship.

Every few years, a Grand Master, or maybe a lodge Worshipful Master, will be elected and mentoring will be one of his key “gotta have” programs. And it will be treated as such; a program or maybe a checklist item. Mentors will be assigned and sent off to mentor their assigned protégé or protégé’s. In another world or another time I would shy away from this and recommend against it. It tends to create forced relationships that can have an artificial feel to it among the mentor and mentee. But, two factors convince me to accept these situations and press ahead, and try to make the situation work for our fraternity. First, our system of candidate instruction in the catechisms lends itself to forming an initial bond for a new brother in the fraternity. A new candidate has a brother, his instructor, who he will get to know and hopefully form a bond with as too the instructor may also bond with his candidate. You frequently hear brothers bragging about brothers whom they instructed when they achieve some masonic milestone, and likewise you hear brothers talking admiringly about their instructors from “back in the day”. Statements such as those indicate a bond between instructor and candidate formed and, to some extent, may remain intact. Second, we are an institution founded on passing knowledge from mouth to ear which is a central element (but not sole element) of mentoring. If anyone can make the concept of assigned mentors work, freemasons are certainly the ones to do it.

When it comes to assigning mentors, a Worshipful Master can and should do a few things to support and assist the brothers he selects for this important work. First and most important, in addition to “go forth and help your candidate learn the ropes of the lodge and learn about masonry”, the Worshipful Master should set at least some achievable expectations and objectives so the brother has a clear picture of the types of things he should be doing. A Worshipful Master might, for example, tell the mentor that his candidate should learn at least one degree role, must be able to recite the “Charge to the Candidate” for all three degrees, should visit at least two other lodges, or possibly deliver one educational program at a stated meeting. The possibilities are almost boundless and are only limited by the current degree level of the candidate or mentee. The Worshipful Master should make sure the mentor knows he is to help his candidate with these tasks, not do them for him, and not “*task and forget*” (meaning task the candidate and leave him on his own to figure it out). The goal of mentoring is to help younger, less experienced masons and teach them! Clear objectives, clear expectations will help the new or inexperienced mentor understand his duties and meet the needs of the candidate and lodge. On the other hand, don’t bind the mentor into “here is your list, just do this”. Make sure the mentor knows that once he has established his relationship with his candidate or mentee, it is up to him to learn his needs and interests and to help where he can. The objectives provided by the Worshipful Master should serve as initial milestones or measures of progress the mentor can use to judge his own progress in his role and to spur further interest and questions by his candidate or mentee.

We can also help assigned mentors improve their skills by providing them specialized informative and educational material to help them build their knowledge base. We can make them aware of the



dynamics of relationships so they understand how a young mason observes, interprets, and internalizes actions he observes (i.e. “Bro. Smith frequently whispers and holds ‘private lodge’ on the sideline during degrees, so this must be acceptable”). And we can remind and emphasize to our assigned mentors the concept of “leadership by example”; if there are things we want new masons to learn and do, it will be much easier to teach them if they see their instructors and mentors doing them.

If you boil down the theory of “assigned mentors” as normally implemented, it is essentially the desire of senior leaders to provide a type of a “first responder” for new masons, to spot problems, provide growing levels of education, demonstrate protocols, take them to other lodges to familiarize them with lodge visitation, and maybe point their mentees to good sources of educational material – all good and noble objectives. Assigned mentors may never establish a bond with his mentee that goes beyond the lodge relationship as natural mentors often form or already have with younger brothers, but that’s okay, especially if the assigned mentor is achieving positive results.

In my experience, the most effective type of mentorship is by natural mentors who pass experience, knowledge, and information through a direct relationship to a new or young mason. This differs from the directed mentorship in that the relationship stems from a natural bond of some sort between the mentor and mentee. This can be a friendship, a familial relationship, or some other personal association. It could well grow out of a friendship formed within lodge, but becomes a close, trusting relationship. It is also possible in this case the mentor has no idea that a brother trusts him and looks up to him as a brother to admire and who therefore is inclined to put a lot of weight in his words and deeds. Because this possibility exists, brothers should always consider that younger masons and candidates could be watching them and listening closely to them for the elusive “light” they are told to seek. It is through these mentor-mentee relationships that the best education tends to flow because it is more likely it will be taken to heart and internalized by the mentee.

Mentoring ~ Effects



New and prospective brothers watch everyone for cues and clues, things to do, things not to do, addressing brothers, how to address the lodge, volunteering or not volunteering for committees and duties; the list is long. All brothers (foot stomp) ALL brothers are mentors whether they intend it or not. We send intentional signals to new brothers, but most importantly we send unintentional signals that new brothers receive and internalize. A new brother will

quickly begin to mimic behavior they see as acceptable and this education can have either a positive or negative effect within a lodge.

Unfortunately, many do not consider or see themselves to be mentoring as they go about their regular activities and interactions but education does occur – education on masonic protocols, laws, rules, respect, expectations, and so much more. Poor behavior by a few brothers around new masons can

cause lasting damage to a lodge because those new brothers will eventually pass along what they've learned through their own activities and interactions. If we are passing down poor protocols, and diluting them more and more with every generational passing, we will eventually lose all of the traditions that separate us from a frat house or other social club.

Mentoring – What about EA's and FC's? They Aren't Mentors, Right?

When I say everyone is a mentor, you might assume that I don't really intend to include Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft masons right? Wrong. *Everyone* is a mentor. If you are a member of a lodge that frequently initiates new masons, then you may find yourself and your lodge with several EA's and FC's working at any given time. You can be assured of two things: first, a brand new, newly-initiated EA will look to the other EA's to gauge their own progress and learn how they should be interacting with master masons, instructors, and lodge officers. EA's will also look to the FC's who are working to see what they can learn about the path that lies ahead. With this in mind, instructors and mentors should be very pro-active in educating their candidates on not only their catechism's, but on protocols, traditions, and lodge bylaws, rules, and regulations.

Mentoring – Make it Work for your Lodge and for Masonry!

We knocked upon the door seeking to join a distinctive organization, different than all of the options a man has to choose from such as veterans' organizations, civic organizations, and even special interest associations. The fraternity we joined has no equal in terms of history, symbolism, and traditions. If we want to keep those things that make our great fraternity unique among all, then it is up to us to mentor our coming and subsequent generations appropriately and *effectively*. It is up to us to make sure that behavioral mentoring is a positive force in the lodge and in our interactions outside the lodge! How do we do that? It's really very simple. Here are three actions a Worshipful Master can take to assess the type of mentoring that is taking place among the brethren.

1. Talk to your EA's. Get to know them and find out their thoughts and opinions. Through these discussions you will learn directly from them who is influencing them (who are their natural mentors) and what knowledge and behaviors they are picking up.
2. Talk to your new master masons. Have good, lengthy conversations about their likes and dislikes, their thoughts on masonry, what they think of the degrees and work, and if they enjoy coming to lodge. If you have these discussions with new master masons, you will find out what catches their attention and what the positive and negative influences are. Have they themselves identified any natural mentors? They may not call them that, but it could become apparent during your conversation(s).
3. Finally, look around and observe your lodge. Who's huddled with who, how the brothers are interacting, who are they interacting with. Do the brothers seem to be in good spirits and are they treating each other as brothers? Do brothers mimic actions and statements of other brothers?

Any Worshipful Master can gain a sense of whether mentoring is occurring among the members of his lodge using the three methods above. The attuned leader can determine to some degree the extent of

active and passive mentoring at play in the lodge and if the brethren are being mentored in a positive or negative direction. Armed with this information, the master can then determine what, if any actions are necessary to adjust the mentoring to gain more favorable results.

Mentoring – A Conclusion



Mentoring is occurring in our lodges, either in an intended (active) or unintended (passive) fashion. With a basic awareness of the mentoring that is happening in his lodge, a Worshipful Master will be positioned to influence the types and quality of mentoring and manage the effects. It is also crucial for a Worshipful Master to provide support to the brothers he may assign as mentors, setting at least some specific and achievable expectations and objectives to guide the mentor's efforts, and also provide educational resources and specialized materials for his mentor's knowledge and personal growth. My personal bottom line on mentoring is this: *"mentoring should never be a completely passive process"*. If left to its own, with no human intervention, direction, or controls, mentoring might be almost completely ineffective at best, or, at worst, an unguided

force within a lodge, unleashing poor masonic protocols, poor discipline, and questionable educational material and information that is lacking in credibility, and value. It is up to us to take control – to the extent possible – of the mentoring in our lodges and ensure it is a positive and effective element benefiting our lodges and masonry into future generations!

¹ "Lodge Education Manual; A Tool for Lodges to use to Develop and Implement a Structured Education Program"; 3rd Edition; March, 2019; available for download on www.amasonsjourney.com