

# Ideas For Worshipful Masters



*I have received many requests for a copy of the posting I made on the Indiana Craft Mailing List. So here are some of the things we have done over the last few years at Broad Ripple Lodge, some of which were started by PGM Roger Van Gorden, our Master in 2000. Bear in mind that most of these suggestions are not original. Let me reiterate: our PMs and general membership have left us alone to have our way with the place, and the PMs and older members who regularly participate have been totally supportive of us. We have NOT had to deal with sideline insurrections over ANYTHING we have tried. I have heard horror stories from other Masters, and I am relieved to say I have none.*

**Chris Hodapp, PM**

**Broad Ripple Lodge #643**

**Lodge Vitruvian #767**

1. ALL Stated Meetings were Table Lodges for a year.
2. Redecorated Lobby and entry area. (Ratty furniture, no art, and accessories from when Truman was president make a terrible first impression on potential new members. If you think it's ugly, how will a new member see it? If you don't know, ASK YOUR WIFE!)
3. Landscaped front yard. (Ours was full of rocks and overgrown shrubs.). If your building looks tired, unkempt and decayed, what does that say about Freemasonry to a potential new member? What does it say about your own pride of membership?
4. Professionalized look of website and kept it up to date. If a potential member sees that your site is dated 1997 and none of the hyperlinks work, they'll move on.
5. Monthly Trestle Board with photos. Make Lodge look fun, and if they don't come, they're missing great experiences.
6. Stopped charging for meals, including Thanksgiving. Catered or convenience food rather than the same few brothers chained to the kitchen. They will burn out.
7. Added stereo system and big screen TV to dining room. (Football and basketball nights next year after Craft practice. Make Lodge a place to hang around in, not eat, meet and flee)
8. Purchased motorized stairclimbers to assist our older members (we have lots of steps)
9. Started Masonic Angel Fund for local kids (see our website for details)
10. Made \$100 donation to Masonic Home Foundation for every month a member (or members) died.

11. Poinsettias hand delivered to Lodge Widows at Christmastime by Master. They'll love you forever. Get them on your side and their grandson may join.
12. Started Annual Chili Cook-Off with permanent trophy at Lodge. The noisier the rivalry gets, the better. Encourage outlandish claims and bragging rights...
13. Presented Lifetime Achievement Award to older member 64 years a Mason who comes to every meeting and degree. These men built our Lodges. Acknowledge their achievements publicly.
14. Insisted on post-meeting gathering at local tavern for members, spouses, friends. Do NOT hang out in the parking lot of the Lodge bitching after meetings. That's not how to forge new friendships.
15. Regular dialogue with OES Matron. Kept them involved in our public events.
16. Sought out degree help from other Lodges. Liberal use of honorary memberships for regular visiting helpers.
17. If you are a young Master who does not know all ritual for all degrees, learn ONE of them well, and have your Wardens do the same for the other two. Performing a smaller number of parts well is more important than stumbling through many of them badly. Do NOT get pressured into doing more than you are able by the "*In MY year you had to know all of these degrees*" crowd. If they know it all, ask THEM to take a part. Remember: a man gets to hear each of his degrees for the first time ONLY ONCE. If you can't do it properly with feeling and meaning, GET SOMEONE WHO CAN.
18. Joint Lodge picnic with other Lodges
19. Let a Lodge from a Temple that goes dark in summer hold Craft practice at our place. Joined in with them.
20. **Dramatically expanded library.** Write book reviews of new ones and promote it in your Trestle Board.
21. **Started book exchange open to everyone in Lodge family.** Bookshelf in the dining room.
22. Officers chairs left empty for two years rather than push new members into them immediately.
23. Make sure Lodge name is seen out in the community. Business cards, pins, jackets with S&C and Lodge name, who to contact for info on door of Lodge along with web address. If the building is closed, how will a new man find someone to ask?

24. Always keep petitions in your car. Let me say that again: Always keep petitions in your car.

25. If 200 members stay away, get new ones who won't! If only seven show up, have fun with each other.

26. Made up a new member's notebook, containing:

- Introduction to Lodge etiquette
- **Lodge history**
- List of Masonic websites, research, recommended book list
- Lodge directory of all members, their addresses and phone numbers.
- Introduction to Freemasonry for a Mason's lady
- List of all Lodge widows
- List of all Lodge Committees
- List of area lodges to visit
- Lodge By-Laws.
- Brochures from the York Rite, Scottish Rite & Shrine - *not* petitions from them
- (discourage joining them for 1 year).
- Our Lodge Masonic Angel Fund brochure
- The latest Lodge Trestle Board (newsletter)
- Three petitions and Grand Lodge Masonic brochures and DVD
- Masonic License Plate form

27. Freemasonry IS NOT RITUAL. If you can do all parts flawlessly, yet never have candidates and no one comes to meetings, how will the ritual save your Lodge?

28. Plan with your Wardens so there is continuity for years to come - stop reinventing the wheel every year. Do NOT hide good ideas from your Master so you can claim victory during your year. Do NOT pass on problems to the next Master. Solve them now! One thing we shamelessly cribbed from another Lodge was to **make the three newest members of the Lodge the Junior Warden's Committee**, making them responsible for food and cleanup, in association with the Stewards. It rotates as you get new men in, instead of saddling the Stewards with the job for an entire year. If they like doing it, it develops camaraderie among the new guys. If they hate doing it, it encourages them to go out and get a new man to join. Our guys jumped in with vigor and tout themselves as the KFC (Knife and Fork Committee). They now meet together on Friday nights at area restaurants, and are promising restaurant reviews for the newsletter. Believing there are no small parts, only small actors, they have padded their parts and are having a ball. Be sure to buy them a knife and fork Mason tie clip.

Masonry isn't just about food <grin>. These guys want knowledge, information, and STUFF! They are proud of their membership. They want medals, aprons, regalia, certificates, books, jewelry... Ours is a Craft with a long heritage, and they WANT things that will make their friends and family envious and - more important - curious about Masonry too. That's what first made THEM notice us to begin with. Don't think it's

shallow to interest potential new members with a "made you look" brashness. Rings, jackets, license plates - all of these things attract attention and at least nudge men into asking what it's all about. Remember, I said INTEREST new members. It's up to your Lodge to get them through their degrees and keep them interested after that. The point is, they want their friends to join with them, and the "stuff" might get those friends to at least ask.

**Upon raising, we give a new Master Mason a S&C lapel pin, a commemorative pin for our Lodge, an engraved pocket name badge, and a boxed set of miniature working tools.**

For a year on Masonic 'birthdays' we also passed out a small, brass trowel. These things don't cost much, but go a long way towards making a man feel that the Lodge is immediately investing in them.

I became an Entered Apprentice in November 1998, and was raised in March 1999. So it was with no little terror that I found myself installed in the East for the year 2001. We had lost 5 officers from the Line in 1999 for a variety of circumstances. A wise Past Master agreed to step in at the VERY last minute to be Master that year, but as 2000 wound to a close, the sentiment was that we should look into selling our building and closing, moving or merging. We were lucky to have seven guys come to Stated Meetings and we did virtually no degree work that year.

The most important thing our outgoing Master taught me was to stop dwelling on the numbers game. Our Lodge has regular income, a paid-for building and some assets. If 220 members never set foot in the place, didn't participate, didn't communicate, IT DIDN'T MATTER. If some of the officer's chairs went unfilled, IT DIDN'T MATTER.

What DID matter was that the little group of Masons who DID come had a good time with each other. We held every Stated Meeting as a Table Lodge, paid our bills, always had a great meal (paid for by the Lodge - no hat passing), maybe had a guest speaker, voted money to charities, and had a couple of hours of true fellowship. THAT was what was important. A year ago, we had seven guys who truly liked each other's company, who got along, who cared about what was going on in each other's lives, and maybe went for a beer afterwards. And the other 200 members were paying for us to have a great time and practice Freemasonry. What a deal!

My year, we raised eight men, all under 40 (and most under 30), had two more being voted on, three transferring in from out of state lodges, and more petitions on the way. Sure, we still need the help of brothers from other Lodges to help us put on degrees, but they come if we ask, and they have a good time with us. They come to our Lodge because we have new candidates all the time now, and why just practice when you can be conferring a degree?

**We redecorated to make sure our Lodge no longer looks and smells like Grandma's front parlor.** We had picnics and dinners and cook offs and events with other Lodges. We've tried hard to let young men know that their input is welcome and that we will

change our activities to reflect what THEY want out of Lodge, instead of demanding that we adhere to the same annual events planned during the Coolidge Administration. We publish a monthly newsletter that doesn't look like it was surreptitiously Xeroxed after hours at work. In it, we thank those brothers who have helped or showed up or contributed because people like to see their name in print and like to be acknowledged for doing a good job. We try to keep our website up to date and looking fresh and professional, and it has become the electronic front door that so many of our newest members first knocked on. Those new members are enthusiastic and want to dive right into our activities and degree work - and we encourage them. They are telling their friends about Lodge and some of those friends are asking for petitions. And our post-meeting gatherings at the local watering hole have gotten larger and last a lot longer now. My Senior Warden and I were too new at this to know the "way it's always been done in past" so we were willing to try whatever works. And guess what? Those same 200 members still stay home, don't participate, and don't communicate. But then, they didn't show up at meetings to vote down big expenditures, or veto by-law changes, or stop us from starting a Masonic Angel Fund, or any of the other things we did my year that I was told would cause heart attacks within the membership. So, those same 200 guys are now paying for 15 or 20 of us to have a good time. We had a full officer's line the next year, and some disappointed men who we didn't have chairs for. I don't know if we have truly turned our Lodge around in the long term - only time will tell. But it's a far cry from the year before, and no one is talking about selling our building now.

Before I became Master, I was privately told to take my time, rock no boats, hide good ideas from the Master ahead of me, pass problems along to the Warden behind me, just learn my ritual, read my Blue Book rules, and I'd get along just fine. Otherwise, I risked insurrection and eternal damnation from the Old Guard. I was just too stupid to listen. As a Mason I may have been wet behind the ears, but I was smart enough to know that the only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.

The ultimate point I'm making is that if you are disappointed by your Lodge and it is not living up to the lofty goals of the fraternity you thought you joined (as I morosely thought just a year ago), GET IN THERE AND CHANGE IT. Be the Master of your Lodge. Lead with a vision and MAKE IT STICK. If you enrage a lineup of cranky Past Masters who are forcing your lodge to remain mired in the 19th century, what will they do? If you are afraid your lodge is shrinking and failing at its mission, yet you allow "buzzard's row" to keep you going down that same path year after year, you are doing a great disservice to your Lodge and those men who built it to begin with. The men who started your Lodge had ideas and strength and they were the leaders of your community. If they saw their Lodge losing members and failing now, I promise you they would not be complacent. They would try everything they could.

They would be Builders, Masters of their Craft. They would give their workmen good and wholesome instruction for their labor. Accept no less from yourself.