

2017 Grand Oration

By John Fairlie, Grand Orator

Good morning, in preparing the Grand Oration for this 160th Annual Communication of the Most Worshipful the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, I first spent some time researching orations in different venues and their purpose. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, rhetoric, classically the theoretical basis for the art of oratory, is the art of using words effectively.

I would dare say that rhetoric, is something that most of us only associate with obstinate politicians, but yet, we learn about rhetoric in Freemasonry. So plainly put, rhetoric is the art of public speaking and it can take many forms. Now, I am not here to educate you all on the finer points of public speaking or go through the Fellow Craft Middle Chamber Lecture, but I do want you to know that orations are often times persuasive. So, no big surprise, I plan to orate a persuasive message that will hopefully strengthen your convictions and perhaps give you a new found perspective towards leadership.

Throughout this past year, I have enjoyed the opportunity to serve Freemasonry in the state of Nebraska, and through this service I have come to hold a respected and very humbled opinion of our Grand Lodge Officers, our dedicated support staff in Lincoln - without whom none of this would likely happen, and the Brethren of Nebraska Freemasonry. Each of which have displayed their own unique forms of leadership.

There are several examples of this leadership, far too many to cover in this Oration, but there are two primary examples I would like to briefly cover with you today because of their relevancy and impact on our beloved Fraternity.

But first, to frame the discussion I will quote Andrew Carnegie, considered to be one of the richest Americans of all time Carnegie stated: *"No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself or get all the credit for doing it."*

This statement takes me back to my experience when I was Worshipful Master of my Lodge. During that time it was amazing to me how little I could accomplish being the only person working towards a goal; and just as surprised to how much we could accomplish when everyone in the Lodge was working towards the same

goal. Sometimes leadership is hard and very rarely consists of telling people what to do, but rather it is to inspire and encourage those who will actually be doing the work.

With this introduction, I think an excellent example of leadership and the success of groups working towards the same common goal is our renewed program to learn and improve proficiency in the Ritual. This program and the new learning structure were developed by Grand Lodge Officers and Committees all working together to improve the overall proficiency in the Ritual throughout the state. Part of the real success of this effort is also due to the eager and honest yearning among Nebraska Masons to connect the teachings and wisdom of yesterday to the understandings and knowledge of today. However, it took leadership to identify the need, the desire, and put in place a plan of action that not only encourages learning, but inspires a fervent dedication taking a Brother through the full proficiency.

The reason I use this as an example of leadership is because of my realization of the enormous amount of time, preparation, hard work, and dedication it took to not only get this program up and running, but then to keep it going in order to turn out measurable results. Albeit with the assistance of the Brethren, the individual Brother had to dedicate substantial time and resources to complete this task and shows a willingness to embody and project good leadership traits.

As we have seen over the last few years these renewed efforts have resulted in dozens of new Deputy Grand Custodians and Apprentices who are able to go back into the Blue Lodges and help increase the proficiency in the Ritual. This increased proficiency not only helps to pass along the teachings of Freemasonry, but it elevates the caliber of our Degree work and gives something really special to our candidates.

The second example I want to share with you today is the Most Worshipful Grand Master's theme for this past year, "leading by example". I personally and genuinely cherish this trait in leadership and I know it is shared by the Grand Master, the Grand Lodge Officers, and many of the Brethren throughout the state as I have come to witness it firsthand. In order to lead by example I believe one of the principal aspects is that of being present and accessible. Another is empowering those around you through your encouragement and faith in their ability.

As your Grand Lodge Officers travel back and forth across the state of Nebraska and into other jurisdictions, the phrase “being present” takes on a whole new meaning. We are talking about attending multiple events every week, driving thousands of miles a year, covering several out of pocket hotel stays, and in most cases a serious amount of sleep deprivation.

In a similar fashion, look around the room to all the people who have traveled to be here today. Some driving hundreds of miles if not more, taking time off work, and bearing the out of pocket expenses just to attend this event. I believe the people who are here today stand as a living testimony that “leading by example” and “being present” are alive and well in Freemasonry, but we must take this dedication back to our Lodges and impart it to those Brothers who are not here today.

Empowering those around you can certainly have a variance from person to person. Giving a person the responsibility and encouragement they need to accomplish their job can have immeasurable impact on your Lodge, and it applies to Officers and Brethren alike regardless of their tenure or professional qualifications. Undoubtedly, this is yet another notable tool from our leadership kit-bag and it should be passed down to the next generation of Masonic leaders, for without it we will surely find ourselves as the lonely worker surrounded by utter disappointment.

I believe it is important to acknowledge these efforts are usually easier said than done, leading by example often times requires a certain level of self-sacrifice and is not always the prevalent thing to do.

- How many times have each one of us taken that long road trip to help a Brother or a Lodge;
- Missed a meal at home in order to attend a Lodge meeting;
- Made a decision that hurt someone’s feelings or was considered unpopular at the time;
- At the last minute learned a part in the Ritual so as to fill in on a Degree?

These are all illustrations of leading by example, but there other ways to lead by example that can have just as much impact. Consider the following:

- Dressing professionally for degrees, this can become an infectious behavior as it makes a Brother feel like they are part of something important making it worth their time
- Being properly prepared for Lodge business, be it a Regular Business meeting or an Investigation Committee – I challenge you to take charge and own the responsibility you have been given
- Learning a part of the Ritual, a lecture, or a Charge

These are aspects of Freemasonry that you can take on today without asking for permission or forgiveness and I encourage you take these steps to become a leader in your lodge.

By this time you have noticed there are a few common threads throughout this oration, they are service, duty, humility, and self-sacrifice. These are all traits of good leadership and when we lead by example we inspire others to get the job done resulting in more than just a simple accomplishment, but in a sense of teamwork, a sense of fulfillment, a sense of belonging. These are the reasons why candidates and new Brothers come back to Lodge, these are the feelings we should be trying to encourage with our actions as good leaders.

It only seems appropriate since we are on the eve of Super Bowl Sunday, to quote all-time great NFL Head Coach Tom Landry who said *“Leadership is getting someone to do what they don’t want to do, to achieve what they want to achieve.”* In an all-volunteer organization such as Freemasonry, dedication to duty and inspiration are the primary methods, and often times the only ones available, to get stuff done.

As we near the end of my rhetoric, I want to provide an observation to the audience, most of you here today are the leaders of your lodge, leaders in your community, or leaders in your profession. As such, I offer you these three questions for your consideration:

1. Are you taking ownership of your leadership position and the responsibility you bear? (*Pause*)
2. Are you well prepared for Lodge Business and the Ritual? (*Pause*)
3. Are you leading by example and empowering those around you? (*Pause*)

Your answers to these questions may differ, but they share an impact of commonality across every Lodge in the state. When good leadership, inspiring others and leading by example are present, then success is sure to follow. As the leaders of your Lodges, the leaders of committees, and the leaders of your community it is your actions that will directly foster failure or encourage accomplishment, which will you choose?

I want to thank you for your thoughtful consideration on this topic. I thank you for your time and your attention.