

# Do We Need to Rethink the Approach to the East by Jason Hicks

DO WE NEED TO RETHINK THE APPROACH TO THE EAST?

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There has been much ink spilt over the years about the years leading up to when a man take the oath and is installed as master of his blue lodge. Some men spend years on the sideline before going through the line, some have a much faster ascensions, some talk to many past masters about their years, some read books, some attend trainings and some are installed and then figure out what to do because as many books as you can read or no matter how many past masters you talk to nothing can fully prepare you for the job.

In Tennessee, pursuant to Tennessee Masonic Code § 4.401 the only requirements to become master is that you have either served as a master of a Tennessee Lodge or served as a Warden. For a job as weighty as this we would think there might be some required training, a correspondence course, or something but to date there has never been an additional requirement added to the Tennessee Masonic Code. In the Installation Ceremony the elected master agrees to the following duties:

- I. You agree to be a good man and true, and strictly to obey the moral law?
- II. You agree to be a peaceful citizen, and cheerfully to conform to the laws of the country in which you reside?
- III. You promise not to be concerned in plots or conspiracies against the government, but patiently to submit to the law and the constituted authorities?
- IV. You agree to pay a proper respect to the civil magistrates, to work diligently, live creditably, and act honorably by all men?
- V. You agree to hold in veneration the original rules and patrons of the Order of Masonry, and their regular successors, supreme and subordinate, according to their stations, and to submit to the awards and resolutions of your brethren, in Lodge convened, in every case consistent with the Constitution of the Order?
- VI. You agree to avoid private piques and quarrels, and to guard against intemperance and excess?
- VII. You agree to be cautious in carriage and behavior, courteous to your brethren, and faithful to your Lodge?
- VIII. You promise to respect genuine brethren, and to discountenance imposters, and all dissenters from the original plan of Masonry?
- IX. You agree to promote the general good of society, to cultivate the social virtues, and to propagate the knowledge of the art.
- X. You promise to pay homage to the Grand Master for the time being, and to his officers when duly installed, and strictly to conform to every edict of the Grand Lodge, that is not subversive of the principles and ground-work of Masonry.
- XI. You admit that it is not the power of any man, or body of men, to make innovations in the body of Masonry.
- XII. You promise a regular attendance on the committees and communications of the Grand Lodge, on receiving proper notice, and to pay a proper attention to all the duties of Masonry, on convenient occasions?

- XIII. You admit that no new lodge shall be formed without permission of the Grand Lodge; and that no countenance shall be given to any irregular Lodge, or to any person clandestinely made a Mason therein, being contrary to the ancient usages of the Order?
- XIV. You admit that no person can be made a Mason in, nor admitted a member of, any regular lodge, without previous notice, and due inquiry into his character?
- XV. You agree that no visitors shall be received into your Lodge without due examination, and producing proper vouchers of their having been initiated in a regular Lodge?<sup>1</sup>

I can remember at my installation ceremony listening to these responsibilities and that the Charter was being given to me and I was to preserve it and thinking "am I ready for this?" Of course, at that point the train had left the station and there was no turning around.<sup>2</sup>

With such a weighty and serious obligation it is mystifying that we require nothing more of them than a year of service as a warden. We offer no formal education to them and do not require it. It is past time that we consider formalizing education for warden and masters in Tennessee, give them bi-monthly/quarterly district meetings, and require them to ready to "give good and wholesome instruction or cause the same to be done."

We must formalize education in Tennessee as our sister state North Carolina has done with their William R. Davie Academy.<sup>3</sup> This is a progressive series of classes that is a day of education and at their end the participants are given a certificate for their efforts. The topics of the four classes are: Introduction to Freemasonry: History and Tradition, Introduction to Masonic Leadership; The Lodge Officer, Intermediate Topics in Masonic Leadership: Approaching the East, and Advanced Topics in Masonic Leadership: The Master's Station. All broad topics that help to educate the officer so that they can impart correct and timely knowledge to other brethren and most importantly to newly made masons. Four classes over the course over one to two years while serving as a warden or before is not an onerous requirement on a brother if he wishes to serve as master. Furthermore, it shows the lodge that a brother is interested and engaged in the fraternity not just one that shows up. It is high time that we as a fraternity look to those who show interest and engagement and not merely attendance to be leaders of this fraternity. Numerous other states have these programs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a brother should be required to have completed at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the sessions to be elected master.

Next, the district chairman and their county deputy chairman need to host monthly/bi-monthly meetings to facilitate district education programs and free forums for the wardens and masters of the district to share ideas, discuss problems, and collaborate on projects. In most districts today, the lodges get together once a year in the district for a district meeting (banquet). While this is a great time to fellowship and meet the new grand officers, we need a greater presence. A more seasoned mason once told me this idea would never work because there were already too many meetings and my only response was that maybe we needed more meetings that contained substance and our fraternity would be in a better place. Our fraternity undoubtedly loves meetings, but we have to meet with a purpose and not just for the sake of meeting. In Virginia, the Grand Lodge holds district meetings but the Grand Master discusses his plans for the year, there is an education program for the brethren, and the Grand Lodge officers meet with different officers to discuss their positions.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, we must have leaders ready to "give good and wholesome instruction or cause the same to be done." If we do not have officers who can explain the basics of our fraternity in a coherent way then how can we expect him to talk about the fraternity with a new brother? We must update all of our

literature to meet the demands of today and the brethren of today. In Virginia, their literature is available on their website for download in .pdf format.<sup>6</sup> There is no esoteric material in these publications and they are publically available albeit covered in dust in many lodges across this state and we should make them available online for those interested to be able to find them.

In closing, we have willing brethren every year that are installed in the east willing to be leaders of their lodges. It is our responsibility that they are ready for their year as master. If they are ready and prepared they will be successful; if they are not, then we have another year of getting by. For our fraternity to survive and grow, we must have leaders ready and equipped to lead instead of maintaining the status quo.

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<sup>1</sup> Tennessee Craftsman, Large Print Signature Edition, pp. 54-55 (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Id. at 56.

<sup>3</sup> <http://grandlodge-nc.org/william-r-davie-academy>

<sup>4</sup> California (<https://www.freemason.org/events/leadershipRetreats.htm>) and they offer an additional program, Lodge Management Certification Program (<https://www.freemason.org/events/lmcp.htm>).

Pennsylvania (<https://pamasons.org/seminars/>); Texas ([http://grandlodgeoftexas.org/masonic\\_education\\_and\\_service\\_committee/summer-2017-leadership-training-program/](http://grandlodgeoftexas.org/masonic_education_and_service_committee/summer-2017-leadership-training-program/));

<sup>5</sup> <https://grandlodgeofvirginia.org/education/division-leadership-conferences>

<sup>6</sup> <https://grandlodgeofvirginia.org/education/masonic-publications>