

THE MECHANICS OF FREEMASONRY

-written and delivered by John Kent at Templum Fidelis, June 21st, 2014

Worshipful Master, Right Worshipful, the District Deputy Grand Master and brethren all,

As many of you know, I have within the last eight months changed my vocation, trading in the suit and tie for grease stained jeans and short sleeved shirts. Though I still use the skills that I learned for the bank, I am learning new ones as I run the parts department at the local New Holland farm equipment dealership.

In my change I have observed several things at the dealership which I believe have a high correlation to Freemasonry in general and to our lodge in particular. To be specific, today I would like to illustrate a parallel between maintaining the body of freemasonry and maintaining a machine such as a farmer's tractor or combine. In the context of my argument, I am viewing Freemasonry in each of us a machine such as a tractor. We employ this machine to a specific reason, though each of us might not be using it for the same reason. Furthermore, the complexity of Freemasonry is such that though we speak of the machine operating within each of us, the lodge itself is a machine that must keep operating so we can grow our crop. Allegory and symbolism. Many of you have heard this before as defined by the temple of the lodge and the temple of your mind and body. As such, there will be a time that I need to explore the machine of the lodge. By servicing the lodge itself, it then becomes a viable support mechanism for our own machines.

I would further like to highlight how more structure in that maintenance and in defining the rolls we take within our lodge will lead to a stronger system that is more robust to weather the test of time and dynamic enough to keep brethren engaged whether new or old. My piece is not a road map of what we must do, but a series of questions I feel must be asked to our existing brethren and to any future ones to ensure the efficacy of what we hope to accomplish with Templum Fidelis. I hope that when I am finished you will recognize the need to ask these questions and perhaps one or more of you will take my work and write an answer such that the lodge will grow from our continued discourse.

Please realize, I only use TF as an obvious example. There are many other lodges and brethren who walk similar paths and we should support them in their quest of making positive change for the betterment of the fraternity.

First, I would like to define a few things for you before I head into my discussion. The first is a general definition of three concepts. A user is a person who employs a machine such as a tractor. They drive without understanding the technical or physical limitations of the tractor. The concepts of horse power and capacity are irrelevant as long as the tractor moves forwards and backwards. At the other end of the scale is a technician, someone who has honed their skills and understands the technical concepts of torque tolerances on bolts and error troubleshooting. These technicians are often employed by companies to fix machines that users don't have the capacity to. There are times however that some users learn the minutia of their tractor or combine so they can care for their own equipment. This subgroup of users I would define as operators, understanding the complexities of hydraulic pump capacities and tolerances among others.

To illustrate the correlation of a user in the Masonic context we would look at those new members who haven't been around long enough to learn the finer details of what the fraternity can accomplish as well as those who never care to learn. Though they have the capacity to become master of the lodge, some may choose never to do so, instead coming to lodge on a monthly basis and never fully exploring what potential there is. In contrast, the operator would be those who read as much information as they can either within lodge or without, honing their skills to a point where they maximize what the fraternity was designed for. Finally, the last group I would define as technicians are those brethren who progress in their Masonic journey to a point where while they might not be able to quote by-laws or rules, they certainly know where to find them and subsequently apply them to various situations. Furthermore, this group is privy to the inner workings of the lodge, going at length to making sure of its survival. Depending on their level of expertise, these brethren progress to Master of the lodge and sometimes on to become members of Grand Lodge.

An owner's manual is considered an instructional book supplied with almost all technologically advanced consumer products such as vehicles, home appliances and tractors. Information contained in the owner's manual typically includes: Safety instructions, Assembly instructions, normal usage, and maintenance among others. For instance, the safety instructions for a tractor are designed so you don't flip it on top of your head. The assembly instructions make it so we don't put the front wheels on the back and vice versa. Normal usage ensures that we don't rev the tractor so high as to blow the motor while maintenance ensures that we continue to have a tractor as the wear parts and the oil is replaced with fresh stock. All these are written in simple forms as most end users are not very technical. I can attest that even after they are given owner's manuals, many users still call, asking questions, many times because they didn't read the manual, others because they lost their manual, and still yet others because they don't trust the manual. The owner's manual is written in layman's terms so anyone can pick it up and mount at least a reasonable campaign to use the particular machine.

On the other hand, we have at the dealership have something called the service manual. A service manual is a handbook published by a manufacturer that contains instructions and specifications for the maintenance and repair of a tractor or combine. It may include wiring diagrams and troubleshooting guides. It is very specific to a model and best left to professionals or at the very least trained amateurs. The service manual still has sections on safety, assembly instructions, normal usage etc. etc., but those are for a different use. The service manual is used specifically to troubleshoot issues for a machine. The left door hinge doesn't work? Here are a few reasons for that and then here are some ways of dealing with them. The Electronic Control Unit, known as the ECU, isn't sending the information to start the vehicle? Perhaps it needs to be tested. The service manual is laid out in a particular manner so as to solve your more complex problems. It is not written in artful language in an attempt to placate or teach the right or wrong way to accomplish something. It is highly technical with terms and explanations that many untrained simply won't understand.

Knowing these two definitions, I will now argue that in the context of a Freemason, whether you are an Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, or Master Mason, a brother who has never sat in the seat of King Solomon and carried the collar of leadership, you should view the black book of the work as an owner's manual to your personal temple and the books of constitution and bylaws as a service manual first for yourself and also for the support machine of your lodge. I would even go so far as to say that the second portion of the book of installation is an addendum to be viewed in the same vein. This section could be viewed as the transition of a operator to a technician as the new Master of the Lodge takes the reins for the ensuing year.

The black book of ritual is designed to allow a candidate and anyone reading it, the opportunity to glimpse the divine. It is written in allegory and allusion, teaching us through story how to act with others. It teaches us the things we need to keep our temple spotless and unstained. It teaches us how to apply the principals to ourselves so that we can become better men. It is our owner's manual so we turn our Masonic machine on and tend it properly.

On the other hand, the book of constitution is not written in an artful language and doesn't have allegory or double meanings. The choice of words are preachy, bordering on demanding, straight from the first testament. Thou shalt do this and thou shalt do that. Each section is laid out like my service manual, part to the senior officers like they are control units, telling them what they must do to keep the lodge operating, part to the junior officers to show them the small nuances of keeping guests happy and candidates in line so their experience is maximized. It, along with the lodge's Bylaws, lay down the minutia of what we can and can't do. They apply the rules to such things as membership and dealing with unMasonic individuals as though troubleshooting an issue with our machine.

Although the installation itself is done through story much like a degree, the section afterwards for the investiture and charge is not; especially when viewed from the perspective of someone who has never seen the board of installed masters. The words are raw, but informative. They have but one purpose and that is to dump as much information on the brethren in as little a time as possible. It is an addendum sent out after you purchase your tractor and read the owner's manual, highlighting small nuances you must be made aware of. Once the ceremony of installation is complete, the Worshipful Master is called on to go through the rolls and inform the lodge who has been elected or appointed. Granted you can and should find these definitions in the book of constitution, yet in the installation guide, they are preformed for the brethren at large as a test for the new Master. There is no margin for error or latitude because we have such limited time.

To the observer, the book of installation can be viewed as the transition point for the user to become an operator. If we listen to the words, understand them for what they mean, we become aware of the world around us, the veil hiding the Wizard is drawn away and we see the old man for what he is. As such, I believe the hope is to impress upon us a need that is defined in the final charge, the charge being the penultimate list of what you shalt and shalt not do. To take it back to my analogy of the service manual, the general charge is the section on maintenance. It shows us how to keep the machine working so it will start the next time we want it. It keeps the lodge operating so it doesn't fall into the chaos of a multiheaded hydra, each head vying for a piece of the pie in hopes of wresting control of the body. The information may be the same as what is found in many sections of our Black book owner's manual, but it is written for a different audience.

Malcolm Gladwell once wrote that to become a functional expert in a field you must have 10000 hours of practice. In other words, to go from being a user, someone who uses a machine, but doesn't care for it, to become an operator, someone who understands their equipment to maintain and operate with technical know-how. To break that down, for a technician it would take approximately five and a half years of 37.5 hours a week, 48 weeks a year to raise himself from being an apprentice to becoming a master. Can you say you were Masonic in full mind and body for that long? It's a process that takes time as we learn and glean information from our peers. In the world of tractors and combines there are some who have the desire to transition from user to operator. You can see it in some children as they collect toy tractors, pretending to be their parents as they farm the livingroom carpet. Some even get up at awful hours to prance around with their parents on harvest day while their siblings sleep in until

noon, not caring what happens on the farm or in the shed. The future operators take the time to ask questions, exploring what's possible.

For Masons you can see the transition as EA's progress, searching out and learning as they become more than they were when initiated. Let's use the vote as an example. The user views the vote as a someone pushing a box in their face so they can throw a ball in. They may look at their neighbour in hopes of seeing how everyone else is casting. In contrast, the operator understands the reason for the vote. To them it isn't a popularity contest. They take the time to question the integrity of the candidate and determine on their own whether they feel comfortable sitting in lodge with the newcomer. The technician has read the constitution and understands the rules behind the vote, how it will affect the lodge and the candidate should they be accepted or rejected. As you can see, by defining our members by their level of knowledge and expertise, we can see who is ready for the next steps in their Masonic journeys.

To compare this concept to our owners/service manual, it would fall well within the precepts established in this lodge that we try for at least three if not four years of masonry before applying ourselves to the minor leadership elements. We have our initiates become comfortable with the art before we tear the veil away to see the inner workings. In this process some could argue that the collar, meant to be a mantel of leadership is at times considered a shackle of perpetual punishment, especially for a lodge that doesn't have a critical mass of members to operate the machine from behind that veil. Put it this way, a technician works all day fixing cars or bikes or combines, but their own machinery, while operating well, aren't necessarily in perfect condition. There comes a time when you need to step away from the chair, letting others take on that position so you don't burn out, an element many shrinking lodges learn all too well near the end. The few cannot prop up the many for too long. This also becomes complicated when our users are forced into the roles of technicians too early before they can truly comprehend their actions. Imagine someone fixing the motor on a tractor who doesn't understand what a piston is. Without the fundamentals, the inexperienced technician will falter, unable to guide or fix machines properly. Within the lodge, those members who are pushed before they are ready are forced to take the reins before they understand the work, before they become comfortable with speaking in a crowd, before they learn the benefits and responsibilities of leadership. Simply put, they don't have the experience needed and though one could argue they can learn on the job, I ask, why do they have to? Why force them?

Let's look at the charge, the section of the book of installation that is written for the younger members of the lodge as a reminder to stay in line. In fact, it opens with one very important point, one that I believe many people miss and one which our lodge has a unique opportunity to address and consequently a very difficult time addressing.

Some must rule, while some must follow.

In one famous address, John F. Kennedy said, " ... ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

In any lodge, there is much to do that the general membership isn't aware of or privy to. That responsibility rests in a few, most notably, the Worshipful Master, his Wardens and the Secretary. Most of you present can attest to the difficulty of leading when there are so many elements pulling you in different directions. This doesn't just apply to masonry, but to all of our daily lives, whether you operate your own business, manage a team of specialists or coach a hockey team. If we were to apply the

complexity to those Masonic lodges that many of our members belong to outside of TF then we can appreciate that there is a breadth of experience here. To those initiates who have only known the walls of this building, look around you and you will primarily see past masters, past district deputy grand masters, and past grand masters. While I said earlier this gives us a fantastic opportunity, it also leads to some potential pitfalls, but more on that later.

The general charge is a glimpse of or link to the service manual, a doorway behind the Magnificent Oz's veil. To the initiated, you will see the work that must be done as the charge lays out the tasks in a succinct manner. It is this bland matter-of-fact way that is its only allegory as it points out the daily grind that leadership of any kind can be. Not every day is a bed of roses. Hard decisions have to be made and we will have to do things that we don't find at all entertaining. It is a sacrifice that a few must make for the many to enjoy. As such, the rules established by our proverbial manual dictate that we must adhere to the gavel striking of our Worshipful Master, whomever he shall be from year to year.

The charge reminds us that Masonry is an art for the convenience of mankind. It is established as a tool or machine to help us achieve our stated goals of making ourselves better, but we must follow the rules to make sure that the machine continues to work properly. We can't run off willy nilly, otherwise we would have spark, but no fuel to propel us, we could engage our transmission, but it might send us careening in the opposite direction.

The charge states that Masonry "has been the steady unvarying friend of man ... the constant messenger of peace and love; never weary, never forgetful of its holy mission," to comfort, enlighten, lead, promising a brighter future and a better life. It goes on to say specifically that we should never forget the duties that we owe to the order. Granted we may not all be able to serve in the same capacity, but like any machine, there are cogs as well as shafts. There is much work to be done within the lodge and behind the curtain to keep that enjoyment possible.

As such, I would like to point out to our newer brethren that we cannot show up and expect everything to be ok. Like the working tools of the first, we must continue to work to make sure our vision becomes reality.

To apply this to the real world, we cannot expect that clicking like on a facebook post is the same as standing in front of city hall and protesting a grave injustice. We can't expect that because we sit in a lodge it is enough to say we participated. There is no right without parallel duty. Imagine what the world would be like if there were no convictions and no one stood up for what they believed in.

Though many people tired of the lasting effects of the "Occupy movement" At least we can say they exercised their duty to participate so their voice was heard. It can be argued further that those young people were far more engaged in their quest than the voting public in Canada. Our voter participation rate ranged from almost 80% in 1963 to around 60% in the last five federal elections. The numbers in the United States track even lower. Compare this to Australia or Belgium with a 93% turnout for the latter, both of which have mandatory voting laws.

When viewing this through the lens of my established categories of members you can see that users, those members that are either too inexperienced or don't care, will never stand up for what they believe in because they don't know what to believe in. Their knowledge isn't yet sufficient to have any convictions. As operators, we can have convictions as I do here, recognizing that there is a problem and

standing up to speak, effectively naked without a shield. A technician, is what I would define to be those members among us who established this lodge, first recognizing something that could be better and then having the conviction to step out of the status quo to create something new. TF comes from that conviction. It then breeds the conviction in our new members, ironically an experience those founding brethren can never have.

We can see that by requiring a brother to vote, we know that everyone's voice has been heard. It is not coincidence that the requirement is dictated in our constitution and bylaws. Because a lodge is a temple of peace, harmony and brotherly love, however, nothing enters that can disturb this so we aren't laden down by the politicking that could destroy families and friendships. Your neighbour can vote with his conscience and still be able to break bread in our hall here.

To explore this further, Steven Dafoe of Masonicdictionary.com wrote in 2008 that the single worst thing attacking masonry and the world at large was apathy. Lodges and our members lack the conviction to explore, proceed, and decide. We aren't camping out on lawns because we aren't even showing up to lodge. Dafoe goes on to highlight that everyone complains that the older members simply don't show up to Lodge anymore yet those same members say they wish they could come, but they physically can't get out. The blame doesn't lie in the older members not attempting, but the younger members not caring enough to ask if they need help getting to Lodge. Is it that lack of caring, the definition of apathy, that is bleeding the soul from masonry? Imagine how well a tractor would run if it wasn't greased or had the oil changed. There is no question that once a machine is no longer cared for it starts to break down. When we fail to employ the owner's manual, we are forced to use the service manual to correct. In a Masonic sense, if we don't use the black book, eventually the blue book will have to come out to deal with the consequences.

The Charge goes on to dictate how the perfect mason will appear, the mannerisms he will portray and the elements of his character that are desirable to recreate. The verbiage is very lacklustre; quiet, modest, free from infidelity, severe judge of himself, yet tolerant of others, humble and an all around decent guy. You have all heard the charge so I don't need to regurgitate it here. Suffice to say that for us is laid out the easiest path to making ourselves useful to the lodge.

As I said earlier, there are times you must address the machine of the lodge so it becomes a more robust support mechanism for our personal machines. To draw correlation, there are many times we must bring in a farmer's tractor to the dealership so we can fix his harvester because they work in unison, neither able to accomplish the stated goal without the other. The tractor would drive in circles with nothing harvested. The harvester would sit inert, unable to propel itself forward.

Let's take a look at the constitution. Laid out in headings and subheadings, it actually reads like a service manual. If this happens, do this. If you have a brother who isn't fulfilling their obligation to remain a positive pillar of society, here are the methods of dealing with him. Here is how you run your elections. Within the book of constitution and the bylaws that accompany lies our greatest strength and simultaneously our greatest potential weakness.

For centuries before there was any concept of a service manual telling people how to troubleshoot the issues that would arise, how-to questions were passed down from father to son, master to apprentice. So too was it within Freemasonry, the written word forbidden. Now, much like many other groups, we are having a crisis of history in our membership. There are fewer and fewer of our older brethren, their memories of feats long since accomplished faltering into the depths of age. We

have lodges celebrating one hundred, even two hundred years of existence. In the mother lodges of those brethren not initiated here, we look back at the founding brethren and ask what were they thinking when they did this, or why did they do it that way.... we idealize them with celebrations of 150 and 200 years.

At TF however, those legends walk among us. We can turn to our neighbour and ask, why did you do it that way? What were you thinking? As someone who has never carried the collar of King Solomon, I will hopefully be the master here, but in a way, I have some trepidation to stand among you your leader because we are a lodge of leaders. You all still have that desire and will to ensure YOUR original thoughts and wants are still imposed on the lodge. I say this and I consider myself an operator, aware of the core rules and minutia of what happens behind the scenes to keep the lodge operating. I am curious to see what our younger brethren would say as they gain experience. You see what's happening around you, but does it have meaning until you gain context?

But much like our machine, we have many small computers, responsible for our own small worlds, and yet there is still the need for the ECU, the control unit. To return to the charge, some must lead, while others follow. We have seen it in many lodges where the older brethren have a difficult time letting go. They are fathers holding onto their son's bicycle as he pedals down the dirt path. We understand the desire to keep hold of that bike, but at some point, the little boy needs to propel himself forward, keeping aloft by his own inertia. That said, we cannot ignore the possibility that some of our younger brethren have been put forward too quickly and they aren't ready. But is it possible that they are content to sit in the seat while others do the work? Is it possible they're afraid to make mistakes? Is it possible they don't care enough about the lodge to do the work? Is it possible they don't know what to do and so they let the other children in the class answer the teacher's questions as they look away?

So in that context, I ask you, where do we go from here? Can our living legends with the rosettes and the dark blue collars simply stand back like some believe God did when he created the universe, letting the world turn around on its own? Perhaps we must achieve a critical mass of initiates and then slowly fade away. Granted our bylaws indicate that once we hit 72 we split, but who goes where? Do the founding brethren remain en masse or leave to create anew?

Whether it's this lodge or any other however, we cannot simply open the door like the older generation of masons were old stray cats and let them out, never to be seen again. For our fledgling users to become operators, we must soak up the knowledge of our elders while we can in the hopes of making good men better.

The fascinating thing about Freemasonry however is that it isn't just a machine, but a living one. Just as we cannot compare an 8n Ford built in 53 to a T4.115 built last week, we cannot compare the lodges of yesterday to those of today. The 8n was built for simpler times when the world didn't have specific regulations for fuel economy and emissions. The implements have different uses today and as such require different methods of operation. Economies of scale effect the building of today's tractors in ways the original creators couldn't imagine. So too, do our lodges operate for different reasons. There are so many reasons that we cannot say the lodge today is filling the same purpose it did last decade when the religious demands were different or 70 years ago when the social demands of soldiers returning from war were different. These small nuances give individual lodges their own character. What matters is that the foundation still remains to build upon.

We cannot forget that for our personal temples to be strong, we need our lodges strong. I would argue that one way is for us to recognize the lodge as a living service manual for our future technicians. But can our ministrations keep it going, replacing outdated concepts with ones more appropriate for our training? Perhaps the best path is to remake? Just as TF was created for a purpose that was missing in the community, a retrospective of the old ways, perhaps we should take a look at the new traditional manner in which lodges work. Many people believe that to make things better, the world must hit the wall, learning from its mistakes. One could counter this argument by saying TF isn't new, but a return to the fundamentals. Strip away the character that some lodges have evolved so we return to the framework that was originally created centuries ago. You have to ask though, is it possible to shift all of the lodges back to earlier times? Or should we embrace each lodge for what it offers, making sure our candidates are aligned with the lodge that suits them best as opposed to the one that's closest? Not every tractor was built for the same reason. Consequently, not every tractor has the same manual.

We have the opportunity to create a service manual, to codify what works for the machine of our lodge AND the machine of our persons. By observing the world around us, we can see what we need to do. By creating the service manual today, our initiates of tomorrow and next year won't have to. They can spend time doing what they joined the lodge for, making themselves better men.

Some thoughts to consider when we write, or rather edit our service manual, producing the second draft. As I suggested earlier, we suffer from the abject apathy. Members don't show up. Some barely communicate and certainly don't gain the benefits of our fundamental tenants. In the same breath that I ask if we should be doing and asking more of our older Brethren, I say we need more engagement in the newer brethren. We need to create more operators. Here at TF I observe that we have more engagement with our candidates through the modified process of advancement, but is that enough? We certainly can't go in the opposite direction by putting too much on the shoulders of our newest members, throwing them into a position of technician before they have the knowledge or capacity to actually do the work. Too often we see someone initiated and raised in the same calendar year and then skipping seats on their way to the Master's chair. Does that help the lodge with an inexperienced Master? Does it help the brother thrown behind the veil to operate the great machine before they've become a functional expert and become ready on their own. Masonry like geometry is a progressive science, so why aren't we adhering to that concept? To put it this way, many Masons of today don't fully understand their own machines and yet we expect them to lead others.

One could observe that we are forced to do this because our members aren't coming out. Would we not gain more from engaging our current members? In farming, you spend far less time, energy, and money maintaining your current tractor than you would obtaining a new one. Can we address our issues in the same way? Perhaps one method is to establish a welcome home project, something we may not yet need in our lodge because of its young age, but who knows how the winds of change will blow one or two hundred years from now. We have the ability and responsibility to write our service manual today so our future brethren aren't forced to reinvent the wheel generations from now. A welcome home project of engaging our brethren as they finish their path through the chairs could keep them engaged so they don't fall away, burnt out from carrying the heavy load or feeling like they have done their duty so no one wants them anymore. We would retain the history that we see now bleeding from our system.

You can recognize that in its fledgling state TF is no different than a lodge faltering from a lack of membership. Yes, we have new initiates, but by our own rules it will take as long as 8 years yet before one sits in the chair. In the meantime, we will trade chairs holding up the lodge like Atlas holds the

world as we try to create something better. I would hope that the founding brethren didn't just create the lodge so they would have a better experience five times a year. Did you? Or did you create it so eleven or twelve years later you will be creating an army of better men who will go forth and spread the fundamentals of Freemasonry to the world, thus making the world a little better in the process? As I said, those who created it will never be able to experience the fruits of their labour like the initiates coming through the reflective chamber.

Conventional wisdom says it costs as much as five times more to gain a customer than it does to retain one. To address this towards our membership, think of the costs we incur for our members. We invest in our members so they can progress from user to operator and then on to technicians, from EA's to Master Masons to Past Masters. Our mission isn't to gain membership, our mission is to support our members. The constitution dictates that we do not recruit. Why then would we spend any effort or energy on increasing membership when we are losing them on the tail end? Why don't we focus our resources, employing our older brethren, primarily Past Masters, for such programs as the mentoring and other committee work? And then, when we do that, how can we not give them a framework to do their work, give them a service manual to achieve their goals?

I leave you with this. Do you consider yourself a user, making use of Freemasonry for yourself, never caring to become a master of the trade or an operator who recognizes the need for a balance for the black book of owning your trade and servicing for the future generations? Will you look behind the veil at the great wizard and help him as he tries to do good for the world? Not everyone can become the master of the lodge, but everyone can and should do their part, offering the lodge what capacity they have, not because of what you can get out of your lodge, but what your lodge can get out of you. Why? Because the goal is to take the users of tomorrow and turn them into operators and thus make the world a better place.