

Guarding the Westgate...Preserving Our Standards

While we seek to attract men to our gentle craft and increase our membership, at the same time we *must not* lower our standards. Thus, each of us takes on a serious responsibility when we decide to become an endorser on a petition. Fortunately, we are assisted in our efforts to guard the West Gate by the Investigating Committee.

Our Methodical Digest provides all the basic details about establishing the Investigating Committee. The Worshipful Master refers the petition to a committee of not less than three members of the Lodge, none of whom shall have been a first or second line endorser on the petition. The committee makes an investigational visit and reports to the Master and the Lodge on the moral and physical qualifications of the petitioner no later than the first stated communication after the expiration of eight weeks from the date the petition was presented in the Lodge.

But there is a lot more to know about appointing an effective Investigating Committee. The Master should appoint members who are both knowledgeable and personable and, in order to avoid bias, he should select members who don't know the candidate. More specifically, he should consider brethren who have a good understanding of Freemasonry, and can explain it clearly; are active in the Lodge, and able to speak enthusiastically about our activities; are diplomatic and prudent, and convey a feeling of warmth and understanding to the potential new member; are dedicated to doing a careful and thorough job, and will present an accurate and unbiased report to the Lodge; and, it's a good idea to ensure that at least one member of the Committee is about the same age as the petitioner. It's also recommended to include a newer member, so he can learn the proper way to conduct an investigation. All of these factors are important because the members of the Committee will make a lasting impression on the petitioner and his family, and we want them to project a favorable image of our Lodge and Fraternity. They are also important because the Lodge will rely upon the recommendation of the Committee.

The primary job of the Committee is to report on the moral and physical qualifications of the candidate, and that he has a belief in a Supreme Being. They should determine that the petitioner understands what our Fraternity is all about and that he is joining for the right reasons. As a minimum, the Committee is expected to conduct an interview in the petitioner's home to get a better sense of the person, his family, and lifestyle. If he is married, the interview should, of course, include his wife. The Committee should begin preparations for the interview by talking with the petition signers to determine how they know the petitioner and to find out additional details about him. This advance preparation will be of use when the Committee meets with the petitioner.

Each member of the Committee should prepare for the interview by becoming familiar with the information supplied on the petition, taking particular note of: the petitioner's occupation and place of employment; marital status; number and ages of children; and whether he stands convicted of an offense in a civil, federal, or military court trial, other than minor traffic offenses.

The Committee chair should call the petitioner to schedule a convenient time for the visit. Again, if the petitioner is married, be sure to pick a time when his wife can be present. And it's a good idea to call the petitioner the night before the interview to confirm the appointment.

We only have one chance to make a good first impression so the appearance of the Committee members is important. Although a jacket and tie isn't mandatory, it is recommended. Be sure to arrive on time, and politely decline an alcoholic drink if it is offered; you are making an official visit – not a social call. Make the meeting as brief as possible; don't overstay your welcome, but make sure all questions are answered satisfactorily before you leave.

The Committee should start with introductions and a few pleasantries to break the ice and build rapport. Convey the regards and best wishes of the Worshipful Master and then give a very brief explanation about Freemasonry, the nature of the Lodge and what it does. Make it clear when the meetings are held, that we are family-friendly with activities for the whole family such as picnics and other social events. Finally, explain that because we take on obligations to help each other, we want to know a bit about the people we will be obligated to help. Moreover, since we are the kind of organization that you can be proud to join and one that our wives are proud to have us be members of, we have to be certain that the people who become a part of our organization are moral and upstanding individuals.

With this as background, the Committee can then begin the conversation with the petitioner. At the meeting the Committee should inquire about the petitioner's occupation, as well as his religious and community involvement to get a sense of the person and family and to determine that he believes in a Supreme Being and is not an atheist. Establish that the petitioner is of high moral character. Inquire if the petitioner has any serious physical disabilities – so, if necessary we can seek a waiver from Grand Lodge. Ask why he petitioned in order to determine that his motives for joining are proper.

The Committee should not only be attentive to the reactions of his wife and family, but also ask whether the petitioner or his wife have any questions, and then be ready to answer those questions. Determine if she is supportive of her husband joining the Fraternity. There also might be an opportunity to speak about the Order of the Eastern Star, DeMolay, Rainbow, and Job's Daughters, as these organizations may be of interest to others in the family.

The Committee should focus on the fraternal and social, the moral and philosophical, and the charitable aspects of Freemasonry. Explain that Freemasonry is not a religion, but open to men of all religions, with a philosophy that is in keeping with religious devotion and good morals. It is not a political organization. Freemasonry endorses no candidates or political party, and permits no partisan political discussions within its Lodges. It does, however, instill patriotism and foster good citizenship. In all matters, Freemasonry teaches men to think for themselves. Before you leave, ensure that the petitioner is informed of the: Meeting dates of the Lodge; cost of yearly dues; cost to receive the three Degrees; the commitment he must make when receiving the degrees and doing the required memory work, or meeting with his mentor.

If during the investigation process, the Committee discovers a major character flaw or an effort to deceive by providing false information on the petition, there should be no hesitation to

recommend rejection. And, if, as a result of what you have learned, you are not able to favorably endorse the petitioner, it is appropriate to give the Brethren who signed the petition the courtesy of a factual, private explanation. The recommendation for or against the petitioner should be presented to the Master, who in turn will report to the Lodge.

Finally, the members of the Committee, along with the endorsers, should make every effort to be present and if possible take part when the candidate is receiving his Degrees. This ensures that the candidate sees some people in Lodge that he already knows and, thus, will feel more comfortable. They also can make him feel welcome by introducing him to the other Lodge members.

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