

Hi, Welcome to Wal-Mart!

That's probably not what you were expecting for the opening line of an educational nugget, was it? I have taken a close look at the way this company runs their business; they are doing very well in these tough economic times. I believe that the Wal-Mart metaphor has great relevance to Masonry in Virginia in five areas: the feeling of being welcome, the value of enthusiasm, the necessity for knowledge, willingness to serve, and the necessity of providing 'something for everyone'.

Have you ever rushed in to Wal-Mart in a hurry, really hassled, not caring whether you talk to anyone or not? You just want to get what you came for and get the heck outta there...right? As you pass through the doorway, someone says to you "Hi...Welcome to Wal-Mart." I don't know about you, but I am hard pressed to ignore a simple greeting like that. It slams into whatever mood I happen to be in and pleasantly smacks me back to reality. In the midst of everything else that is going on, that greeting gives me at least a small feeling of 'welcomeness'. I don't think that's really a word....so, how about we call it 'a feeling of being included'.

Now, do you get that feeling when you walk into your Lodge? If not, *you* can help fix it! Everyone wants to be included in the activities of the Lodge and wants to feel welcome. I think we do a good a really good job of welcoming members and visitors to Tuckahoe. We do have a designated group of 'greeters', but that doesn't mean they are the only ones who can welcome the Brethren. You can promote that feeling when you walk up to each Brother who came to Lodge, shake his hand and say "Welcome to Lodge." Notice I said *each* Brother, not just some of the Brethren, or those that you know best. It's essential that you make an effort to greet all the Brethren. Only then can you be assured that they all can feel appropriately welcomed to the Lodge. Did you ever notice how a politician works a room full of guests? You are the politician for your Lodge if you want your Lodge to be a place of feeling welcome, and being included.

My Wal-Mart greeter didn't offer his 'welcome' with a downcast, angry, or a sullen voice. The greeter said it with enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is catching. I recall a phrase from one of my Dale Carnegie classes from a long time ago...'Act enthusiastic, and you'll be enthusiastic....and so will those around you'. When you greet your Brethren with enthusiasm and talk about Lodge activities with enthusiasm, they can't help but pay closer attention to what you are saying so they aren't missing anything. We all want to be a part of the group – that's one of the reasons why we joined Masonry in the first place. But we all need to be reassured that we are a valued member of the group, and this is one of the ways to communicate that reassurance. That's why I think following the Wal-Mart model is a really good idea for Masonry.

A couple of months ago I had the opportunity to visit Winchester-Hiram Lodge No. 21. It's been over 30 years since I had been in that Lodge, so I didn't expect that there would be anyone there who could vouch for me. No problem...I approached several Brethren standing in the hallway before the meeting and introduced myself, told them I was a sojourning Mason and would need to be examined. Almost immediately three of the Brethren present began talking about the Lodge and its history, what projects they were doing in the community, how proud they were of their unusually decorated Lodge room....and they made me feel very welcome...just like at the local Wal-Mart.

When you enter a Wal-Mart, especially a “Super Wal-Mart,” you can wander around looking for the items you came to find, or you can ask a “Wal-Mart Associate” for help...they’re not employees – they’re “Associates”. My experience with Wal-Mart Associates is that they know where stuff is in the store and in the rare instance when they don’t know where your item is, they do everything possible to find someone who does know. They don’t wander away from you leaving you to fend for yourself. The Masonic relevance here is knowledge, and the willingness to serve. We are charged as Entered Apprentices that during our leisure hours we are to converse with well informed Brethren who will be as willing to give as we will be to receive instruction.

So I ask you: Are you prepared to be a knowledge source for visitors and members? Wal-Mart requires that their “Associates” be knowledgeable. Shouldn’t we require that our Masonic ‘movers and shakers’ be knowledgeable? We have found that the Brethren who knocked on the door of Freemasonry did so for philosophical reasons. Our philosophical teachings come initially from our degrees, but there are layers upon layers of additional sources of Masonic education that expand and deepen the history and meaning of our symbols and teachings. I think it is incumbent upon our Lodges to provide this philosophical teaching to our Brethren. In order to do that, we’re going to have to devote time to our Lodge. You can’t wait around for someone else to get the ball rolling. If we are to put this teaching in place, we must be willing to serve. It is up to each one of us to do it.

Wal-Mart is an interesting place; it pretty much has something for everyone. Masonry is kind of like that. We have philosophy, ritual, community service, fund raising, and charity. If our Lodges are stuck in the “cruise control” phase – annual charity at Christmas, gifts to the community once or twice a year, scheduled ritual practices, and so forth, maybe we need to examine what we are doing and jack up our goals and enthusiasm and provide more outlets for the energies of more Brethren.

So...if you were wondering how to get more participation and excitement in your Lodge, providing more opportunities to serve sounds like a fertile avenue of approach. I believe the Brethren are willing to spend the time. It’s up to the leaders and influencers of Masonry to give our Brethren the reasons they seek to spend more time with us, make us more vibrant, make us grow...to act and be enthusiastic.

That’s my “Welcome to Wal-Mart” story, and how I believe it relates to Masonry in Virginia. I think it can work...at least in terms of making everyone feel welcome, the value of enthusiasm, the necessity for knowledge, the willingness to serve, and the necessity of providing ‘something for everyone’. Wal-Mart’s got their act together...does Masonry? Can we do better?

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Portions adapted from other sources, including:
Grand Lodge of Utah web site,
Wal-Mart associate’s handbook-2008
Tom Richardson, PM, Grand Lodge of Australia