

GRAND LODGE OF WASHINGTON

PUBLIC RELATIONS PLAYBOOK 2016



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Prologue

This Playbook represents a starting point. It should be a living document that is reviewed constantly and updated. If put on a shelf and dusted off a few times a year, we will never achieve our PR goals. The following outline and design represent a first step toward building a set of instructions and guidelines meeting the needs of individual lodges. Each Worshipful Master should appoint an interested member to:

1. Assemble facts, figures and specifics about his own lodge, to include short 'factoids' about the fraternity itself from Grand Lodge sources (There are several brochures available for ordering online);

2. Determine who the key contacts are at local radio/television stations and print media outlets. Contacts may also include important leaders in the community who impact public opinion (mayors, councilmembers, police chiefs, etc.);

3. Plan a 12-48 month public relations program for the local lodge based on activities already planned; and include new outreach programs to help recruit, retain and rejuvenate the membership;

4. Make every lodge member a stakeholder in the public relations process. Our fraternity needs to grow. It needs strong leadership at all levels to inspire good men to knock on the door.

May 1, 2006
Gary W. Emmons
Steilacoom Lodge #2

Grand Lodge's Vision Statement

Freemasons of Washington will be recognized as a relevant and respected Fraternity, committed to attracting and retaining all men of high quality, who strive for self-improvement and the opportunity to make a positive difference in their community.

Forward

Most folks think a public relations (PR) team should be feared, if not loathed. The 'loathing' part stems from the 1950s images of a backslapping, cocktail gulping, glad-handing guy in a gray flannel suit working his way through a crowd of other PR men doing the same thing!

The negative image of public relations, however, dates back hundreds of years ago to the days of British royalty when court jesters entertained kings and queens. These jesters would not only look foolish, but also impart bad news from some far-flung battlefield and couch it in a way that the royalty would not "shoot the messenger." In other words the jesters (early on PR men) would convey bad news in a foolish, oblique way to literally save their lives.

Current day jesters are called spin-doctors. They put a positive 'spin' on otherwise negative news, because even though no one really likes bad news, it's the only thing that sells newspapers. Today, public relations practitioners clearly understand there are many sides to a 'breaking story.' Even the best of intentions do not necessarily convey the right word or image to the public about an organization and its membership.

The Masonic lodges of the State of Washington-in one way or another-are faced with this challenge. Each lodge may not have breaking news to deal with on a daily basis, but each lodge does have an active membership that interacts with its community in ways about which the public needs to be informed. By and large, the membership is out in the community doing all kinds of good things that too often go unnoticed.

The ultimate responsibility for good public relations rests with the Lodge Master. But each member should also have a working knowledge of how good public relations works. That's what this playbook is about.

Masonic Hotline for Extreme Public Relations Concerns

Every once in a while something of major consequence occurs that could have far reaching effects for our fraternity.

If you think this is the case, please call toll free, 1-800-628-4732, 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

If you get the answering machine, that's OK. Just leave your name and a way to contact you and state the nature of the PR-media concern. A Grand Lodge representative will get in touch with you as soon as possible.

In today's hard-hitting media world, it is usually best to have one voice (a trained spokesperson) speak on an issue rather than some well meaning folks who, inadvertently, could make the matter worse.

External Public Relations

If you think our external public relations target includes anyone who is not a Mason or has never heard about us, you're right! This is the audience that we want to reach as much as possible and with as much good news about our fraternity as possible.

Ways to reach this audience are through lodge news releases to local media--TV, radio and the printed press; open houses at your lodge; lodge outreach programs at fairs, parades, local celebrations, and patriotic events; cornerstone laying events, and other civic activities that a Mason and his family would be proud to be a part of. Look around and be ready to tell our fantastic fraternal story to anyone and everyone!

Internal Audiences

Our internal public (members of the Blue Lodge and other concordant bodies) is just as important - if not more - than our external (non-masons) public.

By definition our internal public relations program should target:

1. Our current Masonic Brethren;
2. Their wives, widows and children;
3. Members who are not current in their dues, or for other reasons, have dropped out and;
4. Other Masonic affiliated organizations.

Typical ways of communicating with our internal audiences are through newsletters, telephone calls, e-mails, stated meetings and informal get-togethers.

A rule of thumb for any organization is that its leadership cannot communicate enough with its members!

Community Relations

Community Relations is a separate chapter for our PR program.

Its focus is on involvement and service; not on information and media news releases. When we Masons become involved in our local communities through churches, schools, businesses, government, military, etc., we don't need a news release to tell our non-Mason friends about who we are or what we represent.

We walk the walk and talk the talk.

We should wear our Masonic jewelry, for example, on our ties, suits and other outer garments in a subtle but proud way. When someone asks: "What does that compass and square mean?" be ready to tell them succinctly about the fraternity.

When the community needs fund raising volunteers, make sure your lodge members are there. When there is a tragedy in the community, be there. When that new city hall building needs a cornerstone ceremony, make the arrangements.

I hope you begin to see that your involvement and community actions as a Mason become paramount toward building and cementing your lodge's membership.

Simple Masonic News Releases

You don't need a degree in journalism to write a news release.

You just need to gather the facts - accurately - and convey them to a media outlet. Virtually every news release consists of four 'w's and an 'h.' The four 'w's are:

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?
4. Where?

The one 'h' that often gets neglected is HOW?

Be brief. Newsrooms are pressure cookers, by definition. If you bring a poorly worded, fact-starved story that requires a lot of research by the news reporter, city desk manager or TV anchorman, forget it. It will get tossed into file 13. And, by the way, don't forget to put your name and phone number boldly on the release so you can be called quickly if more details are needed.

Tell everything you can in the 'lead' or first sentence. For example:

{(Members of Masonic Lodge (specific lodge name) #435 (who) here in Jewel City will be on hand Tuesday December 15th from noon to midnight (when) to wrap gifts for shoppers (what) at Lakeville Mall (where). Just donate a canned good for the needy (how) at the Masonic gift-wrap booth in the mall and a member of the lodge will wrap your gift. For more information call the lodge at 253-555-5555.

The above is a news release suitable for print media - the newspaper.

If you want to make one for the electronic media - radio or TV, you can follow a similar format, but spell things like "#." In other words write the phrase "Masonic Lodge number 435 instead of #435."

Getting THE WORD Out:

Simple 'How-To' steps to help the Blue Lodges work the local press

Press releases are one of the easiest, least expensive and most effective ways for your lodge to keep the local media - and through them, the local community informed and up-to-date on your lodge and its events.

I. Press release overview:

- a.) Keep it short (300 word maximum)
- b.) Make the content relevant to the market/distribution area/community...always ask yourself: why should general readers care about this?
- c.) Editors are looking for : What, Where, When,

Why, Mission/Goal for event, Who, Date, Contact information and Time. If you are promoting an event/fundraiser, include a cost (and if appropriate, what benefit or entity the monies are going to, and why this is a good thing). If you include day and date, e.g. Wednesday, May 6, make sure day and date are correct.

d.) Include a photo of the lodge, lodge room, Officer Line or mug shot of the Master or person of interest.

II. Press Release format:

a.) Lodge Name/logo, and (If your lodge is granted permission by the Grand Master - see below): Square and Compass art.

b.) Your Name NEWS RELEASE*

c.) Business Name, Phone Number, E-mail address, Web and FB address.

d.) Headline here of what the topic is

e.) The first paragraph is the interesting lead that gets to the points. Everything of critical importance should be in the headline and in the first paragraph.

f.) Informational Paragraphs to follow.

g.) Use END at the end of your press release

III. Tips:

Newsworthy press release submissions should read like news - not sales or marketing promotions. If they read like advertising, most editors will ignore them.

Be Concise:

Keep press releases short, just one or two pages, if possible. Don't say in 300 words what can be said in a 150 to 200 word news brief or calendar item.

Be Current:

Include the release date or "For Immediate Release" at the top of page one under the contact information and write *"NEWS RELEASE" in the upper right hand corner.

Be Catchy:

Write an interesting lead that quickly gets to the point. Everything of critical importance should be in the headline and the first two paragraphs. If it doesn't pique the Editor (or the reader's) interest immediately, don't expect anyone to wade through the rest of the content.

Be Targeted:

Know your audience. Don't blindly send your press release to a wide audience. Develop a targeted list of the local journalists and publications that cover the geographic area that the lodge draws from and/or the subject matter, who are likely to be receptive.

Be Orderly:

Write “more” at the bottom of the first page if there are multiple pages. Use END, or -30- at the end of the last page, even for one-page press releases.

Make it Actionable:

Include a contact name with telephone number and an e-mail address.

When reporters contact you, respond promptly. The reporter who calls you may be working on a story for this week’s publication or writing an article for an online news site that will be posted that day. If you call back too late, you won’t make it into the story.

Be Timely:

Take deadlines and lead times into account. Newspapers need copy daily, and wire services and Web sites can generate new copy hourly. Pay attention to editorial or special section calendars.

Include Attachments:

If sending photos, be sure to include a caption in a separate document. Include sources, contact and a release date.

Distribution:

Try to find out your local newspaper’s preferred method of contact. Most community newspapers/websites prefer you email your press release.

Follow up:

Every body wants free ink/bites. Editors receive numerous press releases from local organizations and non-profits on a daily basis. If you decide to follow up with a phone call, tell them immediately the topic of the release and the exact date you sent it to them. Don’t just ask if they received your press release.

IV. Additional Thoughts:

Calendar Submissions:

Most local newspapers have Community Event/Calendars that you can submit items to online. Take a look around at your own local newspaper website and submit away. Usually an Editor or Assistant Editor will review it in a day or two.

Here in Western Washington, Each Sound Publishing community newspaper title has a website.

a.) Go there.

b.) Below the ‘Masthead’, you will see a navigation bar with various categories of stories: ‘News, Calendar, Blog, Sports, Entertainment, Business, Lifestyles, Community, Business and About Us’.

c.) Click on “Calendar”

d.) Click on ‘Add an Event’

e.) Add your calendar event

f.) Submission Guidelines: Event submissions are free. Once your request is submitted, it can take up to 48 hours for the event to appear on the calendar.

Events may also appear in our print calendar at the editor’s discretion.

*In general, please do not submit events publicizing a business-oriented sale. Most publications also reserve the right to refuse any event or submission.

Letters to the Editor submission requirements:

a.) Copy should be 200-250 words in length (electronic submission is preferred).

b.) Typically require a name, a city of residence and a daytime phone number for verification.

c.) Typically publish only the writer’s name and city of residence.

d.) Letters should discuss issues, not personalities. Personal attacks will not be published.

e.) Typically do not accept letters that are part of letter-writing or petition campaigns.

f.) Letters become the property of the Reporter Newspapers/Sound Publishing, and may be edited. They may be republished in any format.

After an event that involves community or community support, or a community-oriented fund-raiser for a Non-Profit, it is possible that you may get some additional press by submitting a ‘Thank You’ letter to the Editor. I usually include some of the main community players or partners or donators, and end with what the event was for and who it benefitted and what the lodge is, or a Mission Statement.

Here are a few lodge topics that may be newsworthy:

a.) Officer installation

b.) Lodge open house or ceremony (Invite the public to visit your Lodge room. That also will give you a chance to talk about Freemasonry to any one who is interested).

c.) A special anniversary (person or lodge-oriented)

d.) Lodge programs that benefit the community at-large or a local non-profit or charity group:

e.) ‘Bikes for Books’ or other community enrichment programs the lodge is doing or partnering with another entity or group on.

f.) Guest Speakers and notable accomplishment of a Lodge member.

and Unity, are great at keeping the community informed of its events.

Here are a few samples and the headlines associated with the article or brief

Bikes for Books sample:

http://www.pnwlocalnews.com/east_king/svr/community/50738742.html

A generic article on The Craft:

http://www.pnwlocalnews.com/east_king/svr/news/30139679.html

Mystery of the Masons explored:

www.valleyrecord.com/news/30139679.html

North Bend's Unity Masonic Lodge re-lit for second century:

www.valleyrecord.com/lifestyle/222378841.html

North Bend's Unity Masonic Lodge holds 100th installation of officers:

www.valleyrecord.com/community/132558308.html

North Bend's Unity Masons to celebrate lodge centennial:

www.valleyrecord.com/community/219696871.html

Fall City Masons to install 2012 officers:

www.valleyrecord.com/community/136097968.html

The focal point: 117-year-old Falls City Masonic Hall:
www.valleyrecord.com/news/176282951.html?mobile=true

Bikes for books: Masons, Singletrack program gears up children to read:

www.valleyrecord.com/lifestyle/130440893.html

Taste secret chili rituals at Masonic cook-off:

www.valleyrecord.com/entertainment/147176255.html

Fall City Masons return with pancake breakfast, military vehicle display:

www.valleyrecord.com/community/211303621.html

Historic Fall City Masons to host education ceremony:

www.valleyrecord.com/news/30154219.html

V. More Ideas:

1. Some of the smaller local radio stations will make free announcements about things going on in their community. No harm in asking.

2. Many cities and towns have a place on their website to post times and places for local clubs and associations.

3. Most towns have an entrance sign showing the time and date of service club meetings, usually sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce or the Businessmen's Association.

Ask them if you can hang your Lodge sign there too.

4. Local Visitor Centers and Chamber of Commerce offices are often asked about local clubs and lodges by visitors and new residents. Make sure they know you exist, and have your meeting dates and contact information. They often publish a city or town directory on social media. Make sure your Lodge is in it.

5. Be sure that the Lodge meeting dates and times are clearly posted on the outside of the Lodge building.

6. If you have a tenant be sure that he/she knows your Lodge meeting date and time. A sojourner or potential member may ask.

~ the above six points are kindly submitted by
WB Brian Thomas

Suggestion : As a promoter of The Craft with a background in advertising and marketing, I have always personally balked at the restrictive GLWA statute that says each lodge has to have prior permission of the Grand Master to use the Masonic Square and compass logo on Signage, advertisements, brochures, stationery, website, social media, business cards, etc. I suggest the GM pick five or eight versions that he approves and let each lodge choose which (preapproved) one fits its individual style. The eight can be reviewed every five years or so by the current GM.

Here is a recent article on The Craft on NPR :

http://www.npr.org/2014/08/27/342209139/freemasonry-still-alive-and-well-and-mostly-men-only?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20140828

In one of my publications, the Snoqualmie Valley Record, the two lodges in my circulation area, Falls City

Most local news publications also have a Facebook page. Feel free to submit something on that as well. You can also try submitting posts on the local FB pages of:

Chamber of Commerce or Downtown Business Associations (of which most lodges are probably also members of, or brothers are active in).

Respectfully Submitted:

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Media/Centers of Influence (COIs)
Network, network, network.

How many times have we heard that in our lives? Well, it's true. If you don't know who the 'movers and shakers' are in your community, you'll never know how to get anything done and promote your lodge.

We've talked about writing a news release that has impact and meets the needs of the media. But before you run down to the local paper with your release, it would be great if you already knew a key column writer or reporter beforehand.

In a similar manner, you should know key players in the community.

You don't have to be buddy-buddy with the mayor, but you might want to attend a few council meetings and find out who the mayor's aid

(right hand person) is and get to know him or her.

Same thing for key folks in the school district, fire/police and financial community.

You'd be surprised at the results and the good chance of having these folks asking to become Masons!

Masonic Lodge Elected Officers, Names and Phone Numbers, e-mail Addresses

There's no magic here. But, you would be surprised that there probably is not a roster for current elected members and how to get a hold of them at your lodge.

Make sure this page stays current at all times in this book and perhaps expand it to include all members and spouses!

Annual Public Relations Plan

Plan your work and work your plan - probably an over used phrase. But it does have some merit. Your updated or new plan should coincide with the installation of new officers. It should reflect the desire of the new Master and his team. It should assign a member of your lodge who has an interest in public relations activities and he should select some teammates.

The plan should cover the major topics outlined in this playbook, be reviewed at each stated meeting as an agenda item and have specific goals.

The Master should hold the PR team accountable for making progress in the areas of recruitment, retention and rejuvenation of the membership. Subsequent years PR plans should be built on the successes of the previous year's plan and successes of other lodges.

The local lodge should also be aware of the Grand Lodge's PR efforts and be 'in step' with the Grand Master's vision and the Long Range Plan (Pillars of Progress).

Visit the Grand Lodge website at least once a week for new ideas and other useful information.

When all is said and done, we are all stakeholders and are all PR people when it comes to putting our individual best image forward to the general public and to our Brethren.