

RULES OF MASONIC ETIQUETTE

THE MASTER'S AUTHORITY:

During his term in office, the Brother who has been elected as Master is the most powerful member of the Lodge. He also shoulders all of its many responsibilities.

The Worshipful Master has the authority to:

1. Rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time.
2. Decide what can and cannot be discussed. Should a Brother believe that the Master has acted in an arbitrary, unjust, unfair, or illegal manner, he can appeal to the Grand Master.

If, however, that Brother insists on speaking after the Master has ruled that he is out of order, he may be committing a Masonic offense.

Courteous Brethren accept the requests made by the Master to serve on various committees; such as the examination committee, the investigating committee, and other duties that require attention.

The following items are not Masonic offenses, they are simply a lack of Masonic Etiquette...or in other words, considered to be "bad form" or bad manners.

So... Let's begin:

1. WALKING BETWEEN THE ALTAR AND THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER:

Brethren do not pass between the Altar and the East when the lodge is open. (The only exception is during the circumambulation during degree work)

Why? As a courtesy to the Master, it is necessary that the three Great Lights which shine their eternal light and wisdom upon the Master to help him govern the lodge should never be in shadow.

2. STAND WHEN YOU SPEAK:

No man sits while speaking in the lodge room, no matter if he addresses an officer or another Brother. (Except the Secretary, who may remain seated while reading the minutes or while communicating with the Master in the performance of his secretarial duties. Lodge Officers Handbook, page 73)

Why? All lodge activity is based on each man in the lodge being a servant of the Brethren. This includes the Worshipful Master and his officers. While the man, himself, who has been elected Worshipful Master does not gain any special honor, personally, as the Worshipful Master, it is to the Worshipful Master as the Master of the Lodge that a member stands to address.

It is simply a form of respect ...and no different than attending a shareholder's meeting or a City Council meeting.

It is expected that if you wish to address the audience, you will stand so all may see who is speaking.

3. TALKING:

"Side" talk while a degree is being conferred is considered bad manners. (Lodge Officers Handbook page 16)

Why? The lodge room is a Temple of the Great Architect of the Universe. The Brethren within are working to make the best ashlar (stones) for His spiritual building.

Just as it is impolite to talk in a church, synagogue or mosque service, so it is improper to distract the officers, the workers in the degree or the candidate.

Talking without asking to do so shows irreverence for the proceedings. Every Mason is charged to observe, with dignity, the solemnity of our ceremonies; yet there are those who will carry on conversations in a loud whisper during degrees and at other times when their attention is required in the business of the Lodge. This is very discourteous to the candidate, the Officers, and the Brethren who are interested in the affairs of the Lodge.

Unless you have requested of the Master to speak, silence is the rule. This also means no whispering.

HOW? If you have something of interest to say, raise your hand. When the Master recognizes you, you must stand up, and be recognized by the Master to speak. To address the Brethren, you should request permission from the Worshipful Master. You should also request permission to address an individual Brother during discussion. Example: Worshipful Master, I have a question for Brother _____.

4. OBEY THE GAVEL:

You must immediately obey the gavel.

Why? Failure to immediately obey the gavel is a GRAVE DISCOURTESY and VERY poor Masonic Etiquette.

The Master is all powerful in the lodge and his word is final.

He can put forward or refuse to put any motion.

He can rule any Brother out of order on any subject at any time.

He can say what he will, and what he will not, permit to be discussed.

Brethren who think him unfair, arbitrary, unjust, or acting illegally have redress.

The Grand Lodge can be appealed to on any such matter. However, in the lodge, the Master's gavel, which is his emblem of authority, is supreme.

When a Brother is rapped down, he should obey at once, without any further discussion. It is VERY bad manners to do otherwise. In fact, it is perilously close to the line between bad manners and a Masonic offense.

Masonic etiquette decries anyone who does not obey the gavel.

5. TURNING YOUR BACK:

Never turn one's back on the Master to address the lodge without first receiving permission from the Master to speak.

Why? Any debates that are in motion must be conducted using proper Masonic etiquette. One always stands to order when addressing the chair.

Two brethren, both on their feet, simultaneously arguing a motion, who are facing each other and ignoring the Master is unacceptable.

6. SALUTE:

Each of the Brethren will salute the Master when they enter and when they leave the lodge room. (While it is appropriate in some jurisdictions to salute the Master when rising to address him, or when responding to a gavel rap from him, IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE IN THE JURISDICTION OF ALASKA. Lodge Officers Handbook, page 74)

Why? The Masonic etiquette of saluting the Master is your renewed pledge of fealty and service. It is your public display of decorum before all other Brothers of your obligation.

It shows your courteous respect for all that the Master stands for and shows that you acknowledge his authority.

Salutes should reflect your heart-felt respect for all that for which he stands.

The salute to the Master is your pledge of honor and service, your publicly shown obligation. A lazy, sloppy or improper salute is to be Masonically impolite and, thus, to exhibit poor Masonic etiquette.

7. BALLOTING:

Do not enter or leave the lodge room during a ballot. (Lodge Officers Handbook, page 75)

Why? It is Masonic Etiquette that all Brethren are expected to vote when requested to do so. Failure to cast your ballot not only results in your failure to share in your duties, but it is in direct disobedience of the Master's request.

Additionally, and more importantly, The Alaska Masonic Code, Section 14.04, requires all members present to ballot on petitions for degrees or affiliation, the acceptance or rejection of Masonic Charges, and the suspension or expulsion of a member. A vote of all members is not required on other business matters, but it is recommended.

8. VOTING IS NOT MANDATORY, BUT:

When an issue is put to a vote, all Brethren should vote.

Why? A Brother who does not vote is discourteous because he skews the ballot. He becomes the weak link in a strong chain.

No matter what the reason of his non-vote, he injures the lodge's ballot, its value and its secrecy. Failure to vote can injure a lodge's feeling of brotherhood, and by that injury, can injure the Masonic fraternity.

No matter what reason you may privately hold about voting, it is poor Masonic Etiquette to fail to vote when requested to do so by the Master.

9. SHOULDERING THE WORK:

It is good Masonic Etiquette to accept a request made in the name of the lodge if it is within your abilities, or rather, "if within the length of your cable-tow."

Why? A lodge is a working "beehive of industry". A request made of you from your lodge acknowledges that the lodge trusts you to competently fulfill such a request based upon your knowledge, your commitment, and your obligation.

10. CORRECTION OF VERBAL ERRORS:

Lodge customs state that no one except for the Worshipful Master or his prearranged designee, may correct any mistake that may occur during the course of a Ceremony, and even he does so only when the error is a serious one.

Why? It is discourteous to point out others mistakes in open lodge. We are obligated to "whisper kind counsel in the ear of an erring Brother," not to blurt out his error and embarrass him in front of the group. If you are in possession of a mind which allows you to be able to perform each and every degree and ceremony, perfectly, please advise the Worshipful Master of such that he may take advantage of your services to mentor others.

11. NO PRACTICAL JOKES OR OFF-COLOR STORIES:

Why? The great lessons of Masonry, which are taught by our ritual, should never be demeaned by levity or pranks.

The lodge room is not a proper location for the telling of practical jokes, pranks, horseplay or off-color stories.

12. USE PROPER MASONIC NAMES:

Why? It is common courtesy to be accurate in speaking a Brother's name, so it is proper Masonic etiquette to address officers, members, and visitors by their correct

Masonic titles.

13. TURN CELL PHONES OFF:

All cell phones should be turned off before entering the lodge room so as not to disrupt the proceedings. This requires no further explanation.

14. THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER NEVER REMOVES HIS HAT:

Why? During his installation the Worshipful Master is told I now “cover you with that distinction which, in this lodge, it is your privilege alone to wear.” The Alaska Lodge Officers Handbook further states on page 62 that “The Master’s hat is a distinction peculiar to his station and should always be worn, except during prayer and the flag ceremonies.” In recent years many lodges have developed a practice of the Worshipful Master removing his hat every time he mentions the word “God.” The simple mention of the word “God” does not constitute prayer and therefore it is not appropriate for the Master to remove, or tip, his hat.

Masonic Etiquette Summary: Masonic etiquette is simply the rules of good manners which make lodge meetings pleasant for everyone. The position of Worshipful Master in the East occupies the most exalted position within the lodge. A lodge which does not honor its Master, no matter how they personally feel about the man, himself, lacks Masonic courtesy.

The honor conveyed by the brethren in electing him, (in other words, the historical traditions and the men who have gone before you) must be given the utmost respect if the traditions of the Fraternity are to be observed and proper Masonic etiquette is to be maintained. Masonic etiquette comprises lodge courtesies and proprieties.

Good manners imply observance of the formal requirements governing man's behavior in polite society and a sense of what is appropriate for a person of good breeding with high morals and good taste. The spirit of Brotherly love and affection, by which we are bound together, will be exemplified in our conduct, our carriage and our behavior at all times.

We should use the trowel to cement the stones of brotherly love for the “More Noble and Glorious Purpose” of exhibiting these rules of Masonic Etiquette toward one and all within our Lodge.

With permission from the Masonic Lodge of Education, <http://www.masonic-lodge-of-education.com/masonic-etiquette.html>, and modified for Alaska Masonic Code, Monitor and Lodge Officers Handbook.

Questions and considerations:

1. Does the Master’s duty of Service not extend to all the Brothers to serve one Another?
2. How does Etiquette relate to respect?

3. What is respect?
For other
For the Lodge
For ourselves?