

# Great Leaders

## Eat Last



By: R W Bro Richard Lacoursiere

JRC Evans Lecturer 2020-2021

## **MW Bro J.R.C. Evans**



This is the 54th year that the JRC Evans Memorial Lecture has been presented since being inaugurated in 1966. At this time I believe it fitting that each of us should know something of this Great Lecturer and Freemason to whom these lectures remember and honour.

Dr. John Robert Charles Evans was born in Nanaimo, B.C. on March 15, 1891. At the age of sixteen, Dr. Evans entered the Academic Department of Brandon College. He played an integral part at the College, participating in academics, sports, and various other college functions and organizations. In his final year he was Senior Stick, the highest position in the Student Government.

In 1913, Dr. Evans graduated from Brandon College. Immediately upon graduation he was hired to teach Science and Academic Mathematics. In 1917, he became Principal of

the Academic Department, while continuing to teach Mathematics and Science. Dr. Evans took leave in 1920 to do post graduate work at the University of Chicago where he received his Ph.D. in Geology. He returned to Brandon College as Professor of Geology in 1923. He took over as College Dean in 1928 after the position became vacant. In September of 1928, Dr. Evans accepted the position of President of Brandon College, thus becoming its fifth president. Dr. Evans was head of the college at a very difficult time. He guided the College through the Depression and repeated threats of closure. Dr. Evans resurrected the Department of Theology and led the reorganization of Brandon College into a non-denominational college in 1938 affiliated with the University of Manitoba.

On July 29, 1959, Dr. Evans died suddenly at his summer home in Robson, British Columbia. On his desk was the program for the sod-turning ceremony for the new Arts and Library Building and Lecture Theatre. When it was completed, the Lecture Theatre was christened the Dr. J.R.C. Evans Lecture Theatre on behalf of the man who had made sure that it would be built. The Theatre had been his dream, a place to hold Chapel and Assemblies, as the student body grew in number.

M Bro Evans was well known and highly respected throughout the country in the field of education and the Masonic fraternity. His ability to inspire, convince and persuade was beyond comparison. At the time of his passing to the Grand Lodge Above; MW Bro and Dr. John Robert Charles Evans was considered one of the three best lecturers in the nation.

Following his death in 1959, his good friend M.W.Bro Harry Donnelly; P.G.M. and Grand Librarian conceived the idea of perpetuating the memory of his dear friend and fellow mason through these memorial lectures.

I am deeply honoured to be this year's JRC Evans Lecture for my good friend and brother, our Grand Master the Most Worshipful Brother Gordon Fardoe.

## GREAT LEADERS EAT LAST

When one first knocks at that door, he is surrounded by the sounds of his own heart beating from within and overwhelming darkness, alluding to the journey towards enlightenment that he has chosen to begin. It is during the solemnity of that moment when we as neophytes seeking admission into the brotherhood of Freemasons are first greeted.

If one listens beyond the pounding of his heart, hopefully a good portion of the words spoken throughout that auspicious evening are heard and an eternal spark becomes ignited.

As leaders within our Community, our Jurisdiction, our Districts, our Lodges, it is time for us to rally the troops and get them back to labour, shore up the trenches, ready the sails in order to ensure the soundness and integrity of the pillars that support our great Fraternity. Guarding the West Gate from invasion of men lacking a masonic heart is key at this time in history. It is time to reorganize from within by building a defense system to preserve our order from those who could truly do our fraternity harm.

I recently was perusing the shelves at McNally Robinson at Grant Park when I noticed a book titled "Leaders eat last" bringing me immediately back to my days in the Infantry. First rule of thumb in leading your subordinates was to look after their welfare. Leadership 101 is basically looking after your troops and they in turn will look after you. In the field a good leader will ensure that his troops are fed before he is. A good leader will always eat last, set, and lead by example. A good leader will not ask anything of someone that they themselves would not do or have not done.

Leaders eat last refers to the uncomplicated theme that Great leaders, those placed in charge, will always put the best interests of those who follow in the forefront of all their

dealings and decision making while so entrusted. In our case, placing the best interest of the fraternity and its members first.

Every once in a while, when alone at home I like to listen to John Prine, a legendary folk singer, not one whose voice sits well with my wife's ear, but to me his songs bring me back to my youth and his words resonate with me. He wrote a song recently titled "Some Humans Ain't Human". To me there are a couple of lines that that resonate Masonically to me.

"JEALOUSY AND STUPIDITY  
DON'T EQUAL HARMONY"

Jealousy in someone else's position, of being overlooked for a position of perceived prestige.

Stupidity: Stupidity in not seeing the big picture. Stupidity in not seeing ourselves as part of the sum or part of the problem. More importantly- stupidity in not seeing we as part of the solution no matter the perceived and or real problem that exists today in Freemasonry.

In the book: "The Newly Made Mason," HL Haywood talks about the Masonic Lodge being a body of members that while the necessity for working as a body in unison was true for operative Masons: it is true today with Freemasonry. We as a lodge of men must keep focused and work together with the goals of Grand Lodge in mind. Reasoning being that Grand Lodge possesses the supreme superintending authority, and alone has the inherent power of enacting laws and regulations for the government of the Craft and of altering, repealing, and revoking them, while taking care that the Ancient Landmarks are preserved. With this authority and trust, it is extremely important that those entrusted with the care of our fraternity enforce those regulations without deviation from intent of those laws and regulations.

I remember one particular time while on parade doing a march past past the Battalion's Commanding Officer, a much older soldier said to me from the corner of his mouth " all these soldiers on parade and I am the only bloody one in step." Well perhaps not as politely put. I am sure there were a few added expletives.

This brings to my mind that **"THERE IS NO ROOM FOR INDIVIDUALITY IN FREEMASONRY"**

Operative Masons had a room that they called a Lodge, it was here that they were instructed and given direction to ensure that the plans on building Supreme Edifices were understood and carried out. Those glorious cathedrals would not be quite so spectacular if every Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason did their things their own way with disregard to the master plan.

Today our Fraternity is in chaos due to this very problem, individuality, members lying in wait to embarrass the Grand Master at his annual communication...and in turn all contribute towards the creation of a lingering toxic environment. We are supposed to be a Fraternity of Brotherly Love.

What we require is focus, we require direction from our Grand Lodge and commitment from each of us in order that we work together to ensure the survival of our beloved Fraternity.

I personally believe our efforts would be put to better use if we remembered that every night three ships sail through a Masonic Lodge. The three ships that traverse these Masonic waters are **Leadership, Membership, and Mentorship**. Each of these ships are important individually, however, as part of the sum, they are entirely dependent upon each other.

It is important that fellow brethren understand that while the leadership of the Lodge **should** be competent, however, without the combined efforts and additions of membership and mentorship of those Brethren, the ship will eventually falter in stormy waters that threaten to defeat us daily.

While the Lodge officers form the Leadership unit, they can only navigate the Lodges direction successfully so far, they still require a strong based membership (deckhands), to set the sails and square the rigging of an effective Lodge.

The Leadership and Membership are in turn responsible for mentoring, not just new brothers but existing ones as well. Ongoing mentorship will ensure that a Lodge is healthy and sustainable with continued growth. Growth can and will be constant, even without a flood of new members. The term quality and not quantity comes to mind, quality will put forth the fruits of a well-balanced Lodge. A ship well crafted, no matter its size, will survive the stormy weather it was constructed for.

Let us briefly discuss Leadership. Throughout time, a never-ending list of people have pursued for the precise alchemy of elements that constitute great leadership. Men like Churchill, General Eisenhower, General Robert E Lee, and Ulysses S. Grant. In measured proportions, great leaders are said to demonstrate daring but reasoned judgment, spirited but calculated risk-taking and an assertive but reflective disposition. Followers want leaders who not only make decisions decisively but also inclusively, interpret situations with rational and emotional intelligence and project confidence with humility.

A recent Harvard Business Review blog stated that we have series of books, articles, and studies that warn us of the perils of superiority and then added rather bluntly that the attribute of humility seems to be neglected in the progress of leadership development.

Effective leaders must be comfortable asking for input and can just as easily be decisive when the situation calls for it. I believe that the morale within a Lodge is typically much higher when the Brethren believe leaders are truly looking out for the Lodges best interests.

As human beings we all make mistakes. When we are willing to share our own missteps, and how we have dealt with and recovered from them, and if need be, ask for help and guidance, we will earn the trust of our membership. Being controlling **assassinates morale**—and it is not very humble. The Master must choose good people, mentor them, then get out of the way and let them do their jobs while remaining accessible to right the ship /course if you would. It takes a great deal of humility to admit that your way is not the only way or even that some people are better at certain roles than you. For example, when leaders make decisions that affect the lives of many, they are wise to listen to intelligence reports, the opinions of many before making the final decision.

The effective and successful leader accepts these truths and allow others' strengths to work for the well-being of the Lodge. American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker Jim Rohn says the challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude; be kind, but not weak; be bold, but not a bully; be thoughtful, but not lazy; be humble, but not timid; be proud, but not arrogant; have humor, but without folly.

**In a nutshell Great leaders encourage rather than discourage.**

I believe that Clarity in **leadership** requires executing the following three things.

- **Be clear about purpose:** Purpose isn't a slogan or a set of values. Purpose is strategic. It captures the vision of where the Lodge is heading towards, the potential pitfalls and the areas of growth required to right itself.
- **Make the tough decisions:** To do one thing well you may have to forfeit being good at other things. To do one thing you may have to give up another. Many



leaders and Lodges with unrealistic goals try to be many things and end up without purpose and fall into the murky middle, a kind of no man's land of existence. For example, to be a social Lodge or a Ritualistic one is a problem that hinders many lodges of today. Let us be known for doing one thing well. Let us be clear in our purpose.

- **Have a clear purpose:** When communicating one's expectations to the Brethren it is important that a "so that" statement is used in every statement of intention. It's simple, powerful, and clarifies the intended action and end goal in one sentence. It provides the Purpose!

I believe that Courage is the one leadership characteristic that shores up and strengthens all others. Aristotle called courage the first virtue, because it makes all the other virtues possible. Courage is the most important human virtue. **Think about that for a moment.** Leadership takes courage. Contrary to popular belief, courage is a teachable and learnable skill, and most everyone has the capacity to be courageous. Moreover, nearly all courageous acts represent one or more of three types of courage:

**TRY:** The courage of initiative and action— making first attempts, pursuing ground-breaking efforts, and stepping up to the plate.

**TRUST:** The courage of confidence in others— letting go of the need to control situations or outcomes, having faith in people and being open to direction and change.

**TELL:** The courage of voice— raising difficult issues, providing tough feedback, and sharing unpopular opinions. These could be summed up as **Hard truths.**

**Here is where I believe many of us fail. Fail for the fear of confrontation, putting ripples of action in a sea of inaction. Again, I say be bold ...but don't be a bully. "Let us rally to the bugle call and let us work together with fervency and zeal."**

The good news is that everyone has the capacity for being courageous. I know this firsthand as from an early age, I have had a gripping fear of speaking in public. My capability, so I thought for speaking in public was no more than my being a former Infantry Instructor, loud and to the point, no room for deviation. How did I overcome this fear? I joined an immensely helpful Toastmaster group for a year then became the 2012 JRC EVANS MEMORIAL LECTURER. They say that **Fear** is an invitation to courage, and we all are able to conquer fear and in doing so we can also become courageous. Mastering humility, clarity and courage will ensure the ship is in “**ship shape**” and as they say in Newfoundland “**may yer big jib will draw**” (Translated into Up Canada way English, it translates, “may your sails catch wind.”)

The importance of **mentorship** cannot be understated. In Homer's Odyssey, Mentor was the trusted friend of Odysseus, who asked him to watch over his son, Telemakhos. Mentor then aided as a guide to Telemakhos in his search for reunion with his father. Since then, time and time again in the pages of literature, the mentor appeared at the outset of the journey as a helper, equipping one in some way for what is to come.

How fitting in Freemasonry to have an effective mentor as we set out on our journey in Freemasonry. While it implies that an older or experienced guide will mentor a younger or newly made Freemason fresh from the North East Corner. Mentoring can and does occur from younger men with certain skill sets that are of aide to well experienced Freemasons desiring to learn and strengthen new skill sets. I believe I have several mentors in this fraternity, young and old, experienced, and inexperienced, leaning on their individual strengths to shape my ashlar and strengthen mine in return, they unknowingly assist me in shaping my character for the better.

Effective mentors want to be mentors. They have a sincere desire to share their knowledge and experience and to give something of themselves back to another. As a

result, they gain personal satisfaction from serving as a guide on another person's journey. In turn they also exhibit three critical capabilities.

**First**, effective mentors give support to the people they take under their wing by committing time, showing empathy, and serving as their mentee's promoter. This in turn builds trust. By demonstrating these capabilities, mentors make those they guide feel uniquely seen, allowing for an open and mutually trusting relationship to develop.

**Second**, effective mentors offer challenges to create an environment of learning by expanding the candidates comfort zone and having them take on new roles and responsibilities. Create situations that require the demonstration of new thinking and the development of new skills. This becomes an opportunity to question their assumptions and allow them reflection. Also, providing candid and constructive feedback to help the newly minted Freemason assess their own strengths and weaknesses. It is important to probe teachable moments. Looking for these rare opportunities provides powerful new insights. Teachable moments may occur unexpectedly, and the perceptive mentor will make the most of them when they happen.

I can recall a time when I was Commanding Officer of The Winnipeg Grenadiers Cadet Corps, I had a RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) whom I would promenade with along the left side of the Parade Square while the Officers and cadets readied themselves for parade.

It was during this time that we would discuss her leadership of the core and we would discuss required decisions and situations concerning her and the core. It was the perfect time for mentoring and encouragement.

In today's Freemasonry I believe we often settle for mediocracy rather than seeking the high standards of yesterday. It is important to clearly communicate what is expected and the quality of desired results. Holding a candidate to high standards of performance will ensure their growth and level of confidence, as well as the strength of the lodge and our fraternity.

When I was with the Royal Canadian Regiment, The Regiments motto was then and now "Never Pass a Fault". Which simply means if you see something wrong - correct it, for if you do not nip the fault, you have just set a new standard, and not a desirable one.

**Third**, effective mentors provide a vision that helps the new member catch a glimpse of his or her own possible future. It is vital that we serve as a model as our own position or role serves as a powerful example of what may be possible for others. The presence of the mentor in turn gives proof that the journey can be made. The mentor as a role model provides a realizable goal for the mentee. We ourselves must be worthy of imitation. Looking at you, the mentee should see something of himself or something desired in that reflection. Lastly as mentors we must assist in charting their course and make it obtainable in small achievable steps. Play a key role in helping the person being mentored look ahead and chart his or her own course in life. By helping people understand and appreciate their own unique gifts, you assist them in overcoming obstacles and taking advantage of opportunities.

In 1905 A report from the Grand lodge of Canada in Ontario ***expressed "that in this age when so many societies exist and fraternalism is in the air, the Masonic Body which values quality, not quantity, should set it's face as flint against anything tending to make Masonry cheap"***

The last of the three ships I cited is **membership**, is there truly a conflict between quantity and quality? Are we trying to improve all of society or are we seeking new

blood to defer costs of crumbling temples? Two questions come to mind, what are we looking for in these men and what are these men looking for in Freemasonry?

According to Article 2 of the Grand Lodge of Belgium: "Freemasonry is an initiatic association, which through its education in symbolism, uplifts man spiritually and morally and thereby contributes to practising the ideal of peace, love and fraternity."

This resonates in my mind an understanding that Freemasonry is a way to find a meaning in our existence and to make our lives a work of art, a composition, or simpler put, the construction of a good man. I believe we are looking for men already of good character who wish to continue to build upon the foundations of goodness and spirituality, men who have a sense of duty, and accountability. Has not freemasonry since its very origin been a society steeped in respect for oaths and a clear sense to meeting one's commitments? Strong mentorship will instill these values in our membership.

As in the workforce of today, a multi generation is at work within our Fraternity and many of these new Initiates are looking for an immediate experience rather than believing in the values of the past. This I believe is where Lodges require strong mentoring to ensure the new Initiate is put to work and involve him deeply in the fraternal structure and understanding of the Lodge and Freemasonry as a whole. A Past Grand Senior Warden from the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario mentions fewer members and fewer Lodges is not all gloom and doom, as it is a natural cycle throughout history. He mentions that some Lodges will go dark and surprisingly more members are retained when a Lodge goes dark rather than amalgamating, this is due to Brethren searching out a new Lodge they are comfortable with.

Ruby Barbosa Levy, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Masonic Confederation suggests that the present situation today is that Freemasonry lives in a state of déjà vu

rather than in the present and in turn advancing the Fraternity. He believes that the fraternity is marching toward extinction due to technological advancements, ease of access to information and the diversity of resources at our fingertips. Is our model too old and unable to renovate itself? Is our Fraternity showing signs of fatigue and remaining static? Is the problem only a Masonic one or are other organizations experiencing the same rapid decline of membership? He believes that the Fraternity in order to survive must change the way it communicates to the men of today, not the other way around. I ask you, Are we not a progressive society? Is this not something we are capable of?

This then is the challenge I believe that we must overcome. Let us have the courage to lead and like the workplace of today learn to work/operate in a multi-generational functionality. It does not surprise me that when asking several Brethren, the question of membership, one readily receives several answers similar yet dissimilar. The state of quality versus quantity in respect to membership is an individual state of mind. I believe the first step is to truly engage the members we have today and anchor them to the Craft Degrees before allowing them to advance to Concordant Bodies so that the Brethren understand their duty to their Mother Lodge and to Freemasonry in particular. Perhaps that is a discussion for a later time, another ship, relationships between the Craft Lodges and Concordant Bodies.

As I referred at the beginning of this paper, “Great Leaders Eat Last”, promoting the well-being of the Fraternity and putting the Fraternity’s interest at the forefront before their own. I also suggested that three ships traverse a Masonic Lodge each night, namely Leadership, Membership, and Mentorship. I also implied that each ship is vital individually, but only as part of the whole, each is entirely dependent on each other.

Taking these three ships to bear, the Master prior to his installation should hew his plan with manageable steps to build the strengths of the Lodge while simultaneously

identifying areas of weakness, a practice that is in line with the Basic Tenets of Freemasonry- Striving for Perfection. The Master of the Lodge must strive to take small steps with tangible goals that ensure success rather than failure. This in turn will go a long way towards ensuring the sustainability of our Lodges.

In closing let me quote the words of renowned scholar Bro Joseph Fort Newton:

“Those sturdy men who set up the altar of Masonry on the frontier of this commonwealth were prophetic souls. They were men of faith who built better than they knew, as men of faith always do. They believed in the future, in the growth of large things from small beginnings, and in the principles of Masonry as the true foundation of society and the fortress of a free state. They knew that the Masonic Lodge is a silent partner of the home, the church, and the schoolhouse, toiling on behalf of law and order, without which neither industry nor art can flourish, and that its benign influence would help to build this commonwealth in strength, wisdom and beauty. Therefore, they erected their altar and kindled its flame; and, having wrought in faithfulness, they died in the faith, obeying the injunction of the master poet who said:

“Keep the young generations in hail,  
Bequeath to them no tumbled house.”

***This continues to be our battle cry....***

***“Keep the young generations in hail,  
Bequeath to them no tumbled house.”***

Let us then look carefully to ourselves and our Masonic peripheries and ask that question.

Is our house tumbled, have we tottered off the well-chosen path to weakness, temptation, and adversity?

As I leave this discourse, let us not forget to whom this lecture is not only named after,  
but also dedicated to:

**Most Worshipful Dr. John Robert Charles Evans: Grand Master of Manitoba 1955-56**