

THE PRACTICING FREEMASON



ACCESSIBLE PHILOSOPHY FOR WORKING CLASS SCHLUBS

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How to be Ethical

What are ethics and why are they important?

The difference between morality and ethics is murky. This is mostly because there isn't a difference, in historic terms. Philosophers use them interchangeably. Ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which means "character" and morality from the Latin word *mos* which means "custom." There is, of course, a difference between character and custom. It may be the custom for all your friends to jump off a bridge, but a man of character may choose to go his own way, but in the philosophical schools of ancient Greece and Rome, the custom *was* to be a man of character, in the same way as it is for modern freemasons.

Colloquially, though, these words have come to have slightly different, but important means, and ethics today refers mainly to the ways and codes of conduct imposed and enforced on a person by their profession, society, or honor group. While we may try to adhere to the standards of right and wrong which we believe aligns with those of our personal conception of a Creator, in hopes of eternal reward, avoiding punishment, or assisting in the completion of a grand design, we most certainly will adhere to the standards of our group, because the rewards and punishments imposed by those groups are not ambiguous. They're a certainty.

In Freemasonry, ethics are about standing tall in agreed-upon beliefs when the rest of the world is demanding you kneel. These beliefs are outlined in our Ancient Landmarks and obligations, and if violated, there are consequences: reprimand, suspension, or expulsion. But there are also more personal consequences, like the loss of respect by your peers. This is why some believe the highest measure of one's goodness was to be thought well of by other men of virtue and honor.

Does that mean being seen as honorable by other honorable men actually means you're a man of honor? Not necessarily. We see examples all over history and pop culture where this is not the case (the entire plot of *The Karate Kid Part II*, for example). But this is why we as a people, and especially as a fraternity, separate the terms *ethics* and *morality*. Not because you can do with either one or the other, but because you need both.

Discovering personal ethics through values

Freemasonry does a great job outlining the ethics of the fraternity. Likewise, your

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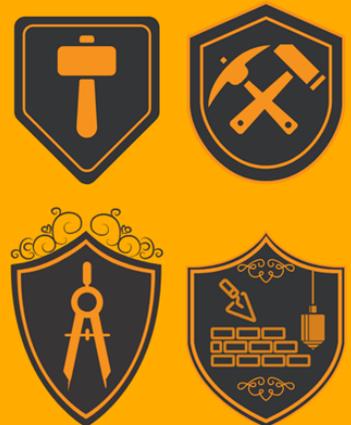
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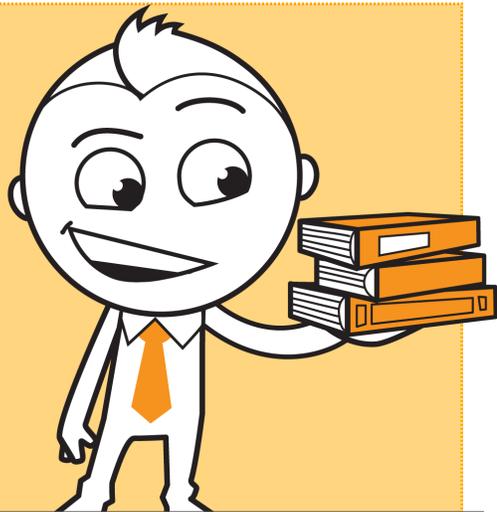
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Read This Book!

Successful Masonic Lodges & Grand Lodges: Learning to Thrive

By Bro. Martin G. McConnell

If this title doesn't pique your interest, it should! "Successful Masonic Lodges and Grand Lodges - Learning to Thrive" by Bro. Martin G. McConnell takes a philosophical approach to how we keep moving forward. Particularly as we struggle through the time of Covid, we're all looking for a way to rocket forward when (fingers crossed) we move back to the way it once was -- or, hopefully, far better. Some of Bro. McConnell's thoughts and ideas are ones you may have heard many times before but these address REAL issues and should concern us if we want our beloved organization to survive for another three centuries. A few sacred cows get

profession, school, church, or other groups probably also do a pretty good job outlining what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. As a society, our ethics are expressed in laws and constitutional rights. But one's individual ethics are possibly the most important of them all. If your fraternity shuns you, you will survive. If society punishes you, you will survive, albeit in jail. If you go against your god, you may have the benefit of grace and forgiveness. When you look in the mirror, however, and can't bear to lock eyes with the person staring back at you, that can have life-threatening consequences.

Most people don't think too deeply about their values, and how those values inform their ethics. We have gut reactions to things, and that mostly works, but sometimes you find yourself in a situation where your gut reaction to one thing conflicts with a previously stated or assumed value. Some people ignore that and others take a pause for self-reflection. The reason this happens though, is because one situation, far beneath the surface, tripped a core moral, need, or value and the other didn't. It's important, we see, to be aware of our foundational values.

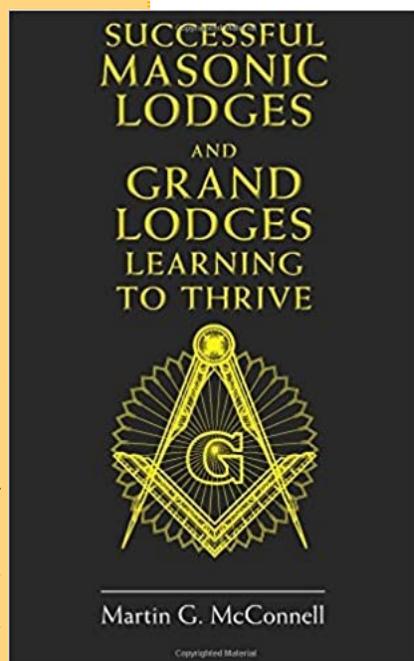
A fantastic, free resource for learning more about your core values is YourMorals.Org. Created by a team of psychologists including Jonathan Haidt, professor of business ethics at New York University's Stern School of Business and author of *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, YourMorals.Org offers a large selection of study surveys that can help you find where you stand on values like purity, fairness, loyalty, authority, harm, and others in the scope of these unusual political and cultural times in which we live.

Another great exercise is values ranking. It works like this: Sit down with a pen and paper and ask yourself *What are the most important things in your life?* It's a broad question but it's meant to be broad. You can always break them down to specifics later.

This can be anything. Don't judge yourself or feel pressured by societal influences (and if you can't help but judge yourself, maybe put down "good reputation" as one of them). Try to come up with a dozen or so. Your list could look like: love, wealth, health, friendship, self-esteem, character, success, family, kindness, respect, comfort, happiness, etc. They can be broad like "goodness" or specific like "being an author." If it came to you, it's not wrong.

Next, take the first one (love, for example), and compare it to a second one and ask yourself, if you could only choose one, which would you choose? Would you prefer love or wealth? Be honest. Listen to your mind, but also your body and your physiological reaction. Whichever value wins that bout, take the winner and compare it to the next one in the same way. Once you've gone through them all you'll know your highest value. Go through each value on your list in this same way, and eventually you'll have a ranked list of what your values are, from most important to least important.

Finally, when you've got your list, sit back and take a look at it. Are there any places of conflict? If your health and your comfort are too close together, or your career and love, those might be sources of personal conflict that is giving you guilt or an ethical crisis, as you try to do two seemingly different things at the same time. Knowing this better arms you for finding solutions to square those circles in



your life.

Like anything else, ethics must be practiced to be perfected. Here are some things you can do to become more ethical.

1. Surround yourself by people of similar values.

Freemasonry is designed for this purpose, but it needs to be infused in all parts of your life, from your work, to your friends, to your political affiliations. Some say you are an amalgam of the five closest people in your life, and that has a lot of science to back it up in terms of how human beings influence, and are influenced by each other. This doesn't mean you should surround yourself only by people with the same ideas or beliefs, as that creates stagnancy. Nor does this imply you should not interact with people of differing values, because we do, ultimately, all live in this world together, and we're bound to bump into each other at the supermarket, and we just can't afford for that to be too awkward. But when it comes to your core groups, being on the same page, values-wise, strengthens you.

2. Know how to decouple from an unethical person

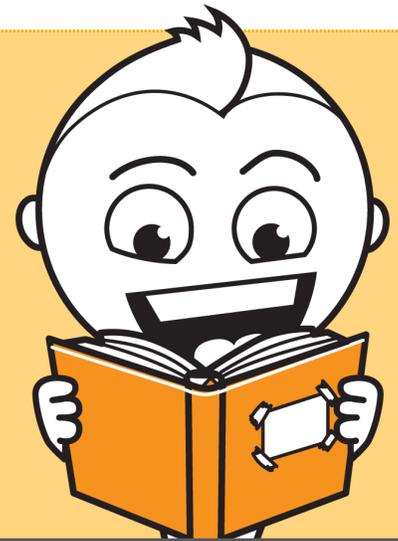
As we grow older we often find that our old friends become less and less critical in our lives as we diverge in actions and goals, and often this takes care of itself as we get married, get new jobs, find new hobbies, etc. But sometimes you have an old friend who has become incompatible with where you want your life to go. Or even worse, a close friend who begins to spiral away from you due to his own personal circumstances.

Learning how to establish boundaries is a valuable tool in decoupling yourself from someone who might be pulling you in the wrong direction. These boundaries may be stated directly through appropriate confrontation, or they may be established more subtly by simply knowing ways to deflect unwelcome behaviors.

3. Establish standards at the beginning of a relationship and enforce those standards

As we enter any new group, friendship, or relationship, we can establish ethical standards easily by just discussing ethics. That's what the whole get-to-know-you phase is about. No one really cares whether they like the same colors or animals. Likewise, it's not that important that you like the same TV shows or games, though they can be great jumping-off points to asking why they like those TV shows, or what about those show or game characters, or plots, or game-play interest them so much, because that can provide an insight into the values that drive them.

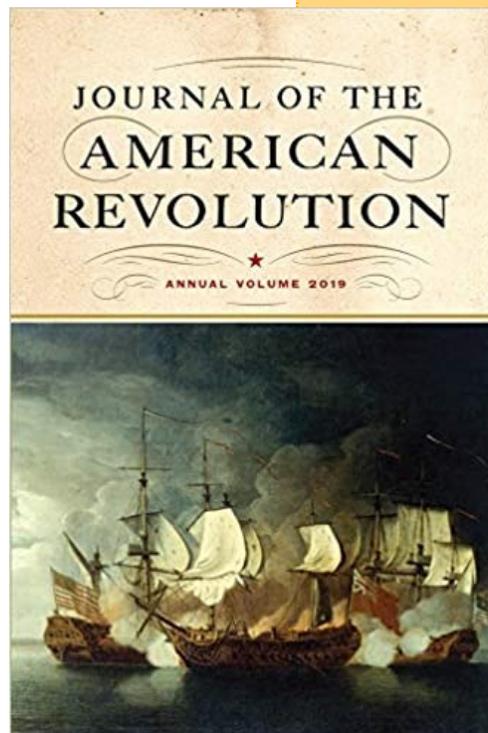
Mainly, though, we want to learn about the other person's life, and what they like or dislike about it, and the world at large. This is where politics can become such a wedge between people, but it's important to get past sad axioms we see on people's profiles of social media feeds, like "If you like Trump, don't bother messaging me" or "if you're a Commie-loving libtard, unfriend me now." Differing politics does not necessarily indicate differing



This Book Too!

Journal of the American Revolution

Annual Volume 2019



Reading short pieces is sometimes a lot easier than getting into a major book. If you like American History (even just a little bit), I think you'll like the "Journal of the American

Revolution". It's worth mentioning since it's one of those great 'snippet'-type books that you can pick up

and put down whenever you've got a few spare minutes. VERY readable, it's a bit heavy (physically - and, sadly, not available electronically yet) to keep in what might be a favored reading location (think: porcelain) but having it on a table beside your favorite chair will certainly prove to enrich your understanding of many a pivotal event in our coun-

Successful Lodges continued...

kicked (deservedly in this reviewer's opinion) and hopefully when you're done reading, you'll see that there is indeed work to be done in your own back yard.

- Ed King

Journal continued...

try's history. Lots of the stories indirectly touch on Freemasonry or Freemasons and it is truly entertaining. They're published annually so pick up any of the five that have come out so far: I'll bet you go back for more!

- Ed King

The Practical Freemason Welcomes Our New Book Reviewer!

Ed King...

...sometimes known as 'The Old Webmaster' is a Masonic scholar. He regularly does book reviews for a number of both print and online locations. There'll be more about him later.

If you have a book you'd like Ed to review, drop him a note at:

masonicreading@gmail.com

values. People's politics are mostly created through their personal lived experiences and we often view those experiences through filters which distort reality by deleting important facts that don't fit our personal narrative, or reframe a person's possibly inert behavior into something threatening, and then we race toward the tribes we feel will best protect us from these perceived dangers.

Truthfully, though, two people can reach completely opposite political positions, each fueled by the same core value. Likewise, you may find the people on your "team" may be fighting for the same goals as you, but for reasons that confuse and disturb you.

But whether friendship, love, or politics, if you find a companion, through fear or tribalism, is beginning to betray the values that brought you together in the first place, it's probably time for a conversation about why, and ultimately where this is going.

4. Practice communication

People change. Circumstances change. Ideas and beliefs change. It's lazy and unrealistic to assume that because you saw eye to eye with someone on ethical concerns, it will keep going in the same direction forever. Learning the best ways to communicate, without putting people on the defensive or giving up your own agency will help you better define your own ethics by testing them through discussion.

5. Be consistent and predictable

Predictability in relationships gets a bad rap. We associate it with being boring, and we associate being boring to being abandoned. All the relationship experts say it's important to mix things up, and be spontaneous. But it's one thing to spring a surprise kayaking trip on your spouse. It's another thing to follow your ethics in one situation or with one specific person, and seemingly abandon them in or with another. If you're living your ethics and values, someone should be able to predict your response to their behavior.

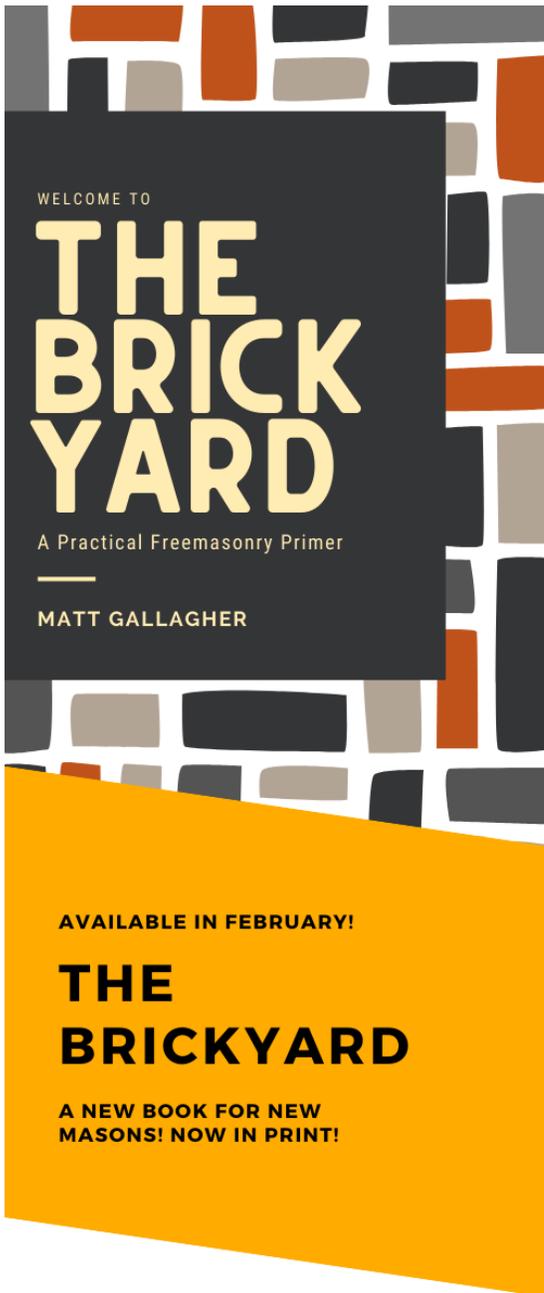
If they can't predict your response, and you're sure you are being consistent, then there's probably more to you than you've made them aware, and that's an opening for more communication and understanding.

6. Be appropriately confrontational when group ethics are violated

When in a group, more especially a lodge, we can't let ethical lapses go. It's incredibly tempting to let some behaviors go because as masons we value harmony and friendship. But harmony requires predictability and consistency on the part of lodge leadership, and brotherhood requires living for something above friendship. Of course this doesn't mean that we harp on every single mistake or misstep, but when something happens that requires masonic response, especially between two brothers, sweeping it under the checkered rug will only shake the trust the other brothers have in the institution.

7. But be just as confrontational in praising someone who has done the right thing

Likewise, we must be just as open and upfront about praising righteous acts, because we will always get more of the behavior we reward, and less



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of the behavior we punish. Always. So it is critical that we reward and criticize appropriately.

Because it's the right thing to do. And a Mason is ethical.

Matt Gallagher

Practical Freemasonry

coffee talk



- ◆ To what groups (lodge, family, friends, etc) do you belong that have a spoken or unspoken code of ethics?
- ◆ What are the spoken ethical requirements of your lodge?
- ◆ How well do you adhere to them? Where do you fall short?
- ◆ What are the unspoken ethical requirements of your lodge?
- ◆ How well do you adhere to them? Where do you fall short?
- ◆ Can you share a personal set of ethics you have which may differ from those stated above?
- ◆ What are your responsibilities to inform people of your ethical standards?
- ◆ What are the consequences of breaking them?



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AND IF YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO MAINTAIN YOUR HONOR, WHAT ARE YOU EVEN DOING HERE?