



I've been involved with many different types organizations – businesses, non-profits, academic and, of course, fraternal. Freemasonry has one of the greatest organizational structures of all of these. It fosters structured development of leaders, features a process where business is managed (relatively) smoothly and presents many different aspects of the organization – ritual proficiency, opportunities for mentoring, fellowship, personal development, etc. – that members can find satisfaction in.

One of the greatest weaknesses of our organization's structure, however, tends to be the lack multi-year planning. What results is that incoming leaders tend to have little idea of what to do during their year other than convening business meetings and conferring degrees when needed. Some might say that this – making new members – is the sole intent of Freemasonry. While this might be true, an organization that does not offer more to its members is one that will experience less and less participation.

What I am proposing then is that a Chapter desiring to prosper and grow consider establishing a Strategic Planning Committee. The four principal committee members would be the immediate Past High Priest (to offer advice), the current High Priest, the current King (as "his" year will be quickly coming up) and the current Scribe. By including these four members, the strategic plan for the Chapter now encompasses not only the current year, but the two following ones.

When it first convenes, the strategic planning committee has a big job ahead of it: It must lay out plans for the current year and the two after that. It's recommended that the committee meet at least three more times during the year to make adjustments in the current year's plans as well as modify the plan for the two years thereafter. Then, when the current High Priest goes out of office (and, presumably, the King is elected in his place), meet again to review the upcoming year and set the schedule for the third year (which the new, incoming Scribe would presumably preside over).

So, what should go into a strategic plan for a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons? Well, our Grand Chapter's Arch of Excellence Award lays out an excellent roadmap for a well-run Chapter that is thriving and growing. Taking a look at the requirements of that award, you'll quickly find some ideas:

- Attendance at Grand Convocation: Not only is this a wonderful experience for the three principal Officers (and any Past High Priests), but it shows your Companions that your Chapter is taking an interest in the overall affairs of the state-wide organization and our Brotherhood in general.

- Open Installation of Officers: What better way to show new members – and especially the younger ones – just how special and fantastic it is to be known as a Mason? And this is a great opportunity to get your Chapters better known in the community.
- Dinner Meetings: My experience as a leader in Freemasonry – and other organizations – is that nothing brings people together better than a meal. Plan on serving dinner before – or after – every meeting and you'll see attendance increase. Guaranteed.
- Degree Work: We tend to sometimes have a knee-jerk reaction to doing degree work. We have a petitioner so we schedule degree work. Why not think about conferring degrees a little less often, but with much more fanfare? Chapter Days are an excellent way to bring together candidates as a group or class – and you'll find they make a special bond that encourages them to attend and participate as a group as well.
- Educational Programs: Companions, I cannot stress how important these are. You may not have gone to many meetings where a speaker came in to talk on an interesting topic, but this is where you're really going to capture the attention of new Companions – as well as bring back those guys sitting at home. Your Grand Officers can give talks or recommend others who are excellent speakers. Also think outside the Chapter – in my own Lodge, we had a history professor from our local university who came in to talk about the Crusades. The room was packed with nearly 60 people in attendance!
- Degree and Opening/Closing Proficiency: Old timers tend to be pretty good with degree work though everyone struggles with opening and closing their Chapter. Why not schedule a couple of Capitular Standard Clubs throughout the year? Grand Chapter officers can help with training or assist in locating a certified instructor.
- Visiting Other Chapters and Lodges: The best way to gain members is to visit the Lodges your Chapter supports. Find out their meeting schedules and try to go to one or two each month. Spread out who visits so it's not always the three principal officers. And visiting a nearby sister Chapter is a great way to build – and support – mutual assistance.
- Picnics and Other Social Events: Some may say that there's no place for social activities in Freemasonry. But remember we are a band of brothers and nothing promotes that better than coming together and enjoying each other's company.

There are a couple of additional things you can plan throughout the year:

- Fundraising: All Chapters have a need to raise money – for expenses as well as charity. Beyond simply increasing the treasury, a fundraiser gives Companions purpose and pride. Common fund-

raisers are pork chop or steak dinners, pool or dart tournaments or the ever-present pancake dinners.

- Simplified Meetings: A large part of most meetings is reading of the minutes. Why not e-mail them out a day or two ahead of time and post them for all to read by the register? Then simply ask if there are corrections or additions, approve them as posted and -- boom! -- you've got 10 more minutes for something more interesting.
- Fun Nights: We've held themed evenings (Hawaiian Shirt Night was one with a pig roast) and events like Masonic Jeopardy. Can't think of something unusual to do? Hey, ask those new guys for ideas.

A Chapter that doesn't plan and simply convenes business meetings where minutes are read and announcements are given is a Chapter that is spiraling towards its eventual demise. Take the important step now to plan for the future – believe me, incoming leaders will be very thankful.