The Law of Least Effort

An integral being knows without going, sees without looking, and accomplishes without doing.
— Lao Tzu

Shankar Vedantam, author and host of the Hidden Brain podcast series, had a recent program about the "Law of least effort." This is similar to the "Law of least resistance." People and even animals inherently, almost automatically, follow the path of least effort.

There are numerous publications, training programs, webinars, and education opportunities that teach you how to get the best results with the least effort, the most money with the least investment, the best physical results with the least effort, etc.

In our Masonic lives that path could be the rationale for reading our degree work from the book. Why go to the effort (work) of memorizing and refining the ritual work, when it is so much easier to read it from the book? We know the stories anyway. We can fill in the right word or name for the misread or mispronounced one. Masonry should be made easier, not harder.

It turns out there is another law that people have come to understand. This is the Law of appreciation or goal satisfaction. When we accomplish something that took effort, we feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

There has been a study called "The Ikea Effect." If we put together a set of shelves, we feel a sense of accomplishment. We even value that set of shelves more than if we had purchased the same shelves factory assembled. There becomes a sense of a part of ourselves has been infused into that set of shelves.

Expanding on this slightly, we understand that as we pass a test in school, graduate and get a degree, get certified at work, all these measures of our accomplishments matter to us. Each extended effort results in a satisfying jolt to the sense of self-worth.

Does the Ikea Effect work in Masonry? Interestingly, it does.

As we learn a new part of the ritual, no matter how small, we seem to take ownership of it. It becomes part of that which we can do; that which we are. That learned accomplishment increases our sense of self.

Although we have a propensity to take the easiest path, often the harder path is more enriching, more enlightening. And isn't that what Masonry is all about?

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