

Twitter 101 for Odd Fellows

Generous deeds and unselfish purposes are the strongest bonds of union...

I do not know if Odd Fellowship has an "official" blogger but, if it does not, now it has me. Though, like most bloggers, I am not official. And I do not like to write or read endless blather. I reckon that if you cannot express a clear thought in 140 characters, you have not found the true essence of that notion. Across the planet people are sharing information, stories, links, and images for all things from jokes to national struggles in 140 characters or less on Twitter...

I am on Twitter talking about Odd Fellowship (@BelovedOrder) because I want people all over the world to know that the foundation principles and values of Odd Fellowship are universally true, timeless, and essential to our human affairs. This is not only true in your community. Odd Fellowship has a place in every village and neighborhood in the world, regardless of any beliefs that come out of culture, nationality, religion, or politics. I can imagine a world in which all people live and abide by the principles of Friendship, Love, and Truth...

Odd Fellows have choices. We can cling on to our past and pass into the mists of history like other fraternal organizations. Or we can redefine our purpose for and our relevance to a modern 21st Century world. Odd Fellows can take charge of our destiny and we can plan for a future that sets Friendship, Love, and Truth as the guiding lights for all peoples to strive for a better and happier existence...

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Creating a Global Conversation about Odd Fellowship

But Odd Fellows have to talk about this... in Friendship, Love, and Truth... and Twitter is a good forum for that conversation to take place. We have to understand that this will not be an easy discussion. We may come across moments with certain people who cannot or will not bring Friendship, Love, and Truth to our conversation. But like the good men and women of the Order always have, we must find a way to ignore those who would discourage us and we must continue to recreate the Order for modern times...

Twitter is unique and peculiar -- but an Odd Fellow should like that notion -- and Twitter does not take long to learn. Anyone can "tweet" including both individual Odd Fellows and Lodges. Yes, anyone can join this conversation. Anyone can talk about their dreams and aspirations for Odd Fellowship. We can write about our projects, our victories, our lessons learned, our events, our community engagement, our needs in a crisis. And it is better if we can do that in messages of 140 characters or less...

We can disagree and even belly-ache. The venting of frustration is human and sometimes our emotions are difficult to control. But after the anger passes, Odd Fellows know that Friendship, Love, and Truth will bring the conversations to a new and higher level. Twitter gives us personal choices in conversation. I have a personal policy that if any one of my Followers on Twitter is abusive on a continuous basis or un-Odd Fellow-like, I will "block" them and they will cease to exist in my part of Twitter. We can each choose the tweeters we wish to follow and we can "Un-Follow" the tweeters we no longer wish to hear. It is a choice that we all have...

So this is my guide to you as to how that is done with Twitter.

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How to Sign Up For a Twitter Account

The registration on Twitter is simple (and Twitter is also free to use). Twitter will push user suggestions (who to follow, how to make yourself followed like a celebrity, etc.) but there are ways to avoid this spam during a new account set-up if you do the following:

1. go to <http://twitter.com/>
2. enter "Sign up" information (name, email, password*)
3. click "Sign up for Twitter"
4. verify the information you used to sign up and, if needed, change it
5. choose a username (this is a unique name and cannot be shared)
6. record (the old-fashioned way with pen and paper) your user name and password
7. unclick "Tailor Twitter" option
8. click "Create my account" button

* Choose a password that is easy to remember but not easy to guess. You can use upper and lower case characters, numbers, and symbols. (for example, myPassWord#297!)

Your account is now created but you need to confirm that you wanted this account. An email will be sent to you asking you to confirm your account. Click on the confirmation link they provide...

You will notice now that Twitter wants to lead the new user through a tutorial that orients new users to the Twitter application. But in order to complete this tutorial, Twitter will require that you make choices in practice to "Follow" some other tweeters. If you are an experienced tweeter, you will not need this tutorial. If you are new to tweeting, refer to the information below as an alternative guide to learning about your Twitter account...

Now close your Internet browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, or similar) and reopen it...

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A Quick Tour of Your Twitter Page

Go to <http://twitter.com/> and you will find your Twitter "Home" page. We will talk about the "Home" page below.

Once you arrive in the Twitter domain as a user, you should click on "Me" shown in the middle of the top of the page. This is the view of your tweets and related content and its relationships to others who use Twitter...

FOLLOWING -- The word "Following" refers to others on Twitter to whom we are actively paying attention. That is, we are following them. You will see them if you click on the word "Following". There are millions of users and so you should carefully select whom you wish to follow. It is simple: if you try to follow everybody, you will end up following nobody because you will become mired in too many messages and too much information...

Of course, as individuals, we can follow anyone and listen to anything. But I would suggest that Lodges opening accounts consider following these tweeters:

- Other lodges (anywhere)
- Lodge members (especially local)
- Local community tweeters (as appropriate for Lodge interests)
- Fraternal voices (anywhere)

At the top of the twitter page you will find menus:

HOME -- If you go to Home you will be able to see the conversations of those you are following. And you now find yourself plugged into their concerns, projects, and events...

TAGS -- There are only two special symbols that you should understand:

@ (as might be added to my user name: @BelovedOrder) is a way of tagging other tweeters in messages. Anyone who writes @BelovedOrder in the text of their message will be referring to me and I will be notified of this that this message refers to me. It is used in conversations to connect with others. For example, one could tweet "@BelovedOrder Hey, Robin! I have an even better idea than yours!" to bring this message to my attention (@BelovedOrder). I can then "re-tweet" (or "RT") that message to my followers to let them know about your clever idea...

(as might be added to a topic, say #GrandLodge or #GLSessions) is a way to "trend" a topic. Trending a topic is made up by users and # ("hash") labels a message with a tag so that a specific stream of messages with this tag can be listed chronologically. You will see current trends to the left on the "Me" page. There are millions of trends but these trends you find on this page are the ever-changing most popular ten trends, usually of national or international scope. Another use of the "hash" symbol is "#FF @username" with which you can tell people following you that they should start following whomever is named after the @ symbol. It is a good way to point people to good tweeters...

You do not need to worry about @Connect and #Discover in the menus at the top of the page for now. These allow you to connect with others and to discover topics (most of which is irrelevant to our mission). It is best to make careful choices in these options later when you feel comfortable with these two menu options.

SEARCHES -- The search at the top of the page allows you to perform key word searches. For example, if you search on "IOOF" (with quotes to make your search specific), you will find tweets ("Tweets") that specifically reference the term IOOF. You can also find other tweeters ("People") who use the term IOOF in their user names...

USER ADMIN -- The menu item that looks like a gear is the administrative menu. You may explore this without changing anything (unless you wish to change something -- it is possible to customize the background with colors and images). At some point you should explore all the user preferences to ensure that the application will work as you want it to work. But do not feel rushed to make any changes as most of the default settings are very reasonable...

COMPOSING A MESSAGE -- The blue button at the top right with the quill is clicked to create a new tweet entry. Entries or tweets may not be more than 140 characters except when media (e.g., photos or videos) are attached to the tweet in which case the text message is limited further to 117 characters...

With Twitter we can point to our websites and Facebook pages. We can write about our members, our projects, our victories, our lessons learned, our events, our community engagement, our needs in a crisis. We can share our stories, our pictures, our joy, and our concerns. The only requirement is that we find the right words in 140 characters or less. Try it. You cannot change the messages that you put up but you can always delete them if you have second thoughts. Of course, our tweets should all be created in the spirit of Odd Fellowship and in the spirit of Friendship, Love, and Truth...

FOLLOWERS -- We each may find over time that we are gathering Followers, that is our own audience. And that will be a good thing...

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This should be sufficient to allow you to get started. If you have any questions, let me know. Remember that it is not necessary or even desirable to tweet every day. We should not wish to contribute to the "noise" and "blather" on the Internet. In fact, to be a part of Twitter, one does not ever have to create one single tweet. But an Odd Fellow should always be willing to listen and learn what the rest of the Order is thinking and saying...

Offered to All in the Order in Friendship, Love, and Truth...

Robin Oliver
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