

## "What If?" Not "Why Me?"

Matt Mattson | Innova Marketing | @PhiredUpMatt

A few years ago, my least favorite thing on the internet was how everyone ended their social media posts with "FML." Seriously? F your L? Stop whining. I mean seriously, just stop it. You have a job. You work in higher ed. You work with fraternities and sororities for a living, which is supposed to be fun. You get to be inventive. You get to work with energetic, imaginative, and fascinating young people who have the potential to turn the world upside down if we could just make it a little easier for them. What are you whining about? Get to work! GAAA!

I'm glad the "FML" trend has mostly passed. But, I have to be honest. There's still a bunch of whining in our industry. And I'm kind of sick of it. What are you waiting for? There's work to be done and about a million undergrads just waiting for you to help them. You have the education. You have an industry begging for answers to giant problems. You have students and alumni who will worship you if you help solve their problems. Stop whining. Get to work! GAAA!

Okay, I'm done with my rant. But, I'll share the root of the rant comes from about 16 years of choosing not to whine. Sure, I grumble, grouse, whimper, and complain every once in a while, but then I remember I'm the person who is supposed to fix these problems. You, me, us... we're those people. *If there's something to whine about, it's because we haven't fixed it yet.*

Instead of crying "Why me?!" "FML!" "Why don't they 'get it?'" How about replacing those tired old gripes with a little sprinkle of "What if?" and "Let's try this..."

What are the problems you can solve with a little creativity on your campus? For your organization? For the movement?

Back in 2002, my fraternity brother (Josh Orendi) and I – who were just finishing our time on our headquarters staff – decided to quit whining. We have told the story many times that we were kind of pissed off nobody was teaching fraternity men the basic skills every other industry was employing to attract, recruit, and retain high quality members. So, we said, "What if we just decided to try to fix the recruitment problem?" We started teaching a new brand of recruitment. Anyone who was around back then can tell you that our methods, curriculum, and ideas were crude. But they were a real solution to a real problem in the lives of our members. We didn't just sit on the sidelines and complain. We didn't just post in our AOL IM groups about the problem. We didn't just send long emails to the old AFA listserv bellowing with our disappointment at an industry gone wrong. We thought up a solution and we tried it.

Since then we (and our teams) have asked "What if?" and said, "Let's try this..." a bunch of other times. Not every idea has been a winner, but I think we've helped. All our "What ifs" have been based on one big question, "What if we could shape the future of fraternities and sororities by improving the way we attract high quality people to our organizations?"

*So as not to pat ourselves on the back too firmly, and so as not to bore you, dear reader, we've listed our other "What ifs" at the bottom of the article. Feel free to skip ahead and be impressed by our amazingness, or just keep rolling along if you've had enough of our self-congratulations.*

I've been impressed with other pros in our industry who've boldly asked "What if" throughout the years:

- I was in awe as Mark Koepsell and a group of thoughtful leaders asked, "What if we reimagined our industry's associations and built them into a powerful force for good, not just some conferences and committees?"
- I loved watching as Deb Ensor and Zeta Tau Alpha consistently said, "What if we demonstrated our values by investing our money in the entrepreneurial solutions we believe in throughout the industry?"
- I've been proud to be a fraternity man every time I've seen the evidence of Justin Kirk and Delta Upsilon asking "What if we made international service a central experience of fraternity men?"
- Matt Deeg said, "What if we had a podcast for fraternity/sorority life that allowed us to have deeper, more informed conversations about our industry?" and he did something about it!
- Ginny Carroll asked, "What if we leverage the collective power of sorority women to educate girls all over the world?" Well, I still haven't stopped my slow clap for this game-changer.
- T.J. Sullivan has said before, "What if we make it easy for FSL pros to find top speakers and educators for the good of fraternities and sororities?" And he's doing it again!
- I'm wildly impressed as Jud Horras and company are asking, "What if we completely reengineered the NIC to better meet the objectives and priorities of our member groups?"
- I've watched with admiration as Gentry McCreary and Josh Schutts have born the results of asking, "What if we brought an example of academic and research chops to an industry desperately in need of that example?"

There are far too many examples to list. But to me, there are whiners and there are do-ers in our profession. I'm not the captain of the do-ers, but I sure am glad to be on their team (most days).

And that's just the pros. What about our members?

- What about the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity men who said, "What if we led the effort to erect a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in its rightful place among our nation's most important monuments?"
- What about the members of Delta Delta Delta who must have said, "What if we take full ownership for saving kids with devastating childhood diseases?" as they pledged to send tens of millions of dollars to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.
- What about the brave students who have said, "What if I am the first to come out as gay, lesbian, bi, transgender in an archaic fraternal world?"

- What about the fraternity and sorority members who have said, "What if our community is supposed to start the rally, protest the injustice, or do something more than post about our discontent on social media?"

Don't whine. Do.

Don't ask, "Why me?" Ask, "What if" and say, "Let's try this..." Remember, *if there's something to whine about, it's because we haven't fixed it yet.*

This article was so hard to write. FML.

*Now here is the rest of our company's "What ifs" list. If you're curious about some of the questions we've asked ourselves over the years – and some of the successes and failures we've enjoyed along the way – check out the bonus section below!*

- *What if we wrote a book about fraternity recruitment? (Good Guys, 2006)*
- *What if we admitted our then high level of ignorance about sorority recruitment and found someone smarter than us to help? (Jessica Gendron Williams, now CEO of all our companies)*
- *What if Jessica and our first intern, Colleen Coffey, wrote a book about sorority recruitment? (I Heart Recruitment, 2007)*
- *What if fraternity and sorority chapters (and headquarters) had a professional recruitment coach? (Woody Woodcock invents recruitment coaching)*
- *What if we had an online tool to manage recruitment (failed PhireBook launch)*
- *What if we taught not only the "science" of recruitment, but also the "art of relationships"? (Social Excellence: We Dare You, 2011)*
- *What if we created an extreme learning experience in the streets of Chicago to teach Social Excellence and Bystander Intervention? (#BeThePerson2012 with Mike Dilbeck)*
- *What if we put all our lessons on DVD's? (mostly failed DVDs)*
- *What if we had an online tool to manage recruitment (again)? (ChapterBuilder launched, TechniPhi started)*
- *What if we educated PNMs to force values into the sorority recruitment process? (iValU launched)*
- *What if we could support formal recruitment with the best technology and customer service? (CampusDirector acquired)*
- *What if we could help the industry reimagine how to do marketing to grow Greek Life? (Innova acquired)*
- *What if we launched a radical marketing campaign for the entire fraternity/sorority industry? (ReThink Greek launched)*
- *What if we created an easy-to-use voting app for membership selection? (MyVote launched by TechniPhi)*