

## Put Another Log On the Fire

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The title of this article has nothing to do with the song. The title is simply a phrase to capture the essence of the spirit in which this article is written for *Essentials* this month. Professionals who have been in the field perhaps seven or more years might be considered "seasoned." What does that really mean? For starters, it could sum up years of talking and hearing about hazing, alcohol, drugs, new initiative du jour, relationship statements, partnering, and benchmarking, just to name a few. Seasoned professionals have a tendency to ask on more than one occasion, "Am I really making a difference in this profession? Why is my passion not as strong as it was five years ago? How do I get the fire back?"

How does one find the motivation to continue? It does appear that the turnover in the field of fraternity/sorority advising is high. We make a few new friends at the Annual Meeting and we learn that they've left to start their own business, moved to another area of student affairs or changed careers completely and you wonder, "how long can I last?"

So we begin questioning, "Do I stay in fraternity/sorority advising? Do I work to move up? Do I look for a similar position at another institution? Do I start my own business?"

What happens in those five to seven years? What happens to that flame that burned so brightly as a new professional?

Perhaps no one really prepared us for the journey of this profession. They didn't tell us that we will be working 50 hours or more a week (and don't forget weekends); we will have limited areas and space to socialize because every student we work with attends the same establishments; we will spend more time with students than with people our own age and even though they are fun to work with, we can't befriend them outside of work; we will be questioned and often targeted by everyone to include our institutions and the collegians and alumni that we serve; we will feel underappreciated in the area of salary compensation; and, we usually have limited access to resources.

When those things begin to dawn on us, we begin questioning our choice. We begin adding up the time we spend being reactive versus proactive and we recognize that reactive mode can lead to high burnout.

Advising a fraternity/sorority community is uniquely different because it presents consequences that do not exist in other areas of student affairs. Yet, a positive fraternity/sorority community can be a tremendous asset to a college/university. The approach and advising style must be different with the focus on addressing the compelling issues every day while improving the image and attractiveness of the community. The constituents, chapters, advisors, alumni, and college/university expect that. Spending considerable time on details that students are absolutely capable of, with the proper training, is a time waster. It might feel good, but the community will not advance in addressing risky behaviors, apathy, leadership deficit, poor relations among and between councils and the many other struggles they face. These are also the struggles that deflate rather inflate a professional.

Advising a fraternity/sorority community is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes at least three years to begin seeing a difference and five years to begin actually changing a culture or continuing to improve a community. Never underestimate the efforts. Each action, if properly focused, will make a difference.

The following suggestions might provide insight in planning for the upcoming year:

1. Train Council officers immediately and empower them to act. Time on the front end will pay double in dividends on the back end. If you aren't a trainer, then find someone who is and engage them. Reach out to other fraternity/sorority advisors who have begun to make a difference on their campuses and ask them to share their programs and curriculum for training.
2. Develop a strong relationship with chapter advisors, presidents, and housing corporations in order to build trust. If it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a metropolitan city to raise a fraternity/sorority community. Spend time with the adults who, like you, are there to stay. Hold meetings inviting them to share concerns, thoughts and issues. It might be difficult to hear at first but responding to their needs is the first step in building respect and trust. Your common denominator is the students. What a great cause to rally around!
3. Communicate regularly with your constituents. In most cases, you are the one person who has all of the information. Share important information relevant to them. With every communication, thank them. No one is in the business as a volunteer or staff member because of the money. We are in the people business. That's why fraternities and sororities were founded in the first place. People are the product.
4. Run an efficient and effective office. Find staff members who share the same vision and work ethic as you do, and work together to serve the constituents. Use the CAS Standards for fraternity/sorority professionals to help guide your efforts in customer service. The storefront tells a lot about what is inside of a store.
5. Keep raising the standard and spend time talking about things that matter most to a fraternity/sorority community. Students and their advisors will begin trusting you and want to become part of the positivity of your efforts. This will assist you in bringing more hands and helpers to the table, thus providing you more time to continue to challenge the community to be better than it already is.

This will all take time on the front end. But, it will allow you to do things that encourage and motivate you to stay engaged. It will help you find new challenges and continue in this very important field and ultimately serve as logs to ignite that flame that once burned so brightly!