

## Where Did You Learn How To Do This Work?

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Where did you learn how to do this work? Following my experience at the Fraternity and Sorority Life Leadership Convening, this has been a question circling in my mind. It is quickly followed up by other questions, like: What is this work we are doing? What is the objective we are trying to accomplish?

We continue to work in silos; whether it be on our campus, within organizations, or between organizations and campuses. I am confident we all want to see sororities and fraternities succeed. However, I do not believe we all define success the same way, and this reflection does not even take into account the perspective of alumni or students. My reflection from the Convening is it is incredibly challenging and taxing work when we are not all working toward the same objective.

While we may work in silos, perhaps there are opportunities for us to create a unified approach to culture change. Inspired by Iowa State's head football coach, the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and IFC chapter presidents I advise have all been reading "Chop Wood, Carry Water: How to Fall in Love with the Process of Becoming Great" by Joshua Medcalf, this semester. This book provides a lot of life lessons easily applicable to sorority and fraternity.

### **Evaluate your work.**

When I left for college, my Mom said to me, "Don't forget your home training." She tried to instill in me lessons over the first 18 years of life that would contribute to my success. In sorority and fraternity, where do we get that training? Our own undergraduate experience? Not me. Some of the training I received is the exact behavior we are trying to eradicate as an industry. As new professionals, we often pick up bad habits as well. Medcalf (2015, p.27) challenges, "Under pressure you don't rise to the occasion, you sink to the level of your training." Are you just doing what someone else was doing, or are you thinking critically about the work you are doing? Are you blindly applying a technique or strategy from one campus to the next? As seasoned professionals, we become complacent. We lose our enthusiasm. We lose our excitement. We forget our home training and when we remember it, we are not critical.

It is important to find other ways to enhance our training. In my career, I have experienced nearly all structured professional development opportunities specific to fraternities and sororities. Most of the time, I had a great time, but I left with very little critical development. The two experiences I would recommend to colleagues based on my experience are: the Cross

Cultural Fraternal Advisor's Institute, especially for those professionals looking to develop a foundational knowledge for working with organizations who have a cultural component to the mission of their organization, and The Gathering, especially for colleagues who want to critically examine the work they are doing with sororities and fraternities. I acknowledge that funding for these types of events is a privilege, and we need to find ways to create access to these programs for more colleagues. In the meantime, professionals should think critically about what they need and find creative solutions for that development.

### **Be a critical thinker.**

You can evaluate your home training from the comfort of your own office. I could not be more proud of our colleagues that spent the time developing a set of competencies that will guide our development as professionals moving forward. This is much needed and long overdue. Every professional should be reviewing these competencies, creating professional development rooted in the competencies, and engaging in conversations with their supervisor around these competencies (Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 2018).

Our work can be exhausting, but creating a space to focus on what is most important in your work will create relief. "Your greatest challenge during your time here will be faithfully keeping your focus on the process, while surrendering the outcome" (Medcalf, 16). It can be easy to lose our focus. I, myself, have gotten caught up in the t-shirt color conversation, but we must be relentless in the pursuit of our mission. It is imperative we drive our attention to the things that matter most and focus on those. Likely the reason we may stray comes from the many perspectives of what our purpose should be. It's vital we return to the university mission when we may feel lost.

### **Define your mission.**

It feels like the industry is treading water without a direction. Thinking more about mission would offer a clear direction. It is time to change the approach. We need more evidence based practices, and we need more research. Without a driving force, how can we measure success? Often, as professionals, we generate goals for our chapters. Perhaps, we should take more time to understand the mission of students in these organizations and how that relates to organizational and institutional missions. It is imperative as professionals we take stock in the mission of our organizations and align those with institutional missions.

There are a lot of opinions about how sororities and fraternities operate. When professionals try to take ownership, they are criticized for not doing the work the right way (something we still have not yet defined). We should be celebrating our colleagues who take chances and think about problem solving from unique lenses. Creating change does not require the admiration of others. If I am staying true to the mission of my campus and organization, then I will be successful in this work. As Medcalf says, “Goals actually allow you to shirk responsibility. But a mission? Only the person in the mirror can stop you from living that out” (2015, p. 73).

### **Establish priorities.**

My role as a professional is not to do what students should be doing. It is not my responsibility to coordinate Panhellenic primary recruitment. It is not my responsibility to plan National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) Week. I lived an undergraduate fraternity experience. I did some things right and many more wrong, but those experiences taught me lessons that have stuck with me. My role does not exist to do what students should be doing and learning from on their own. Yes, there is a training and educational component of my job, but it is not about doing the work for students.

At the Convening, I was reminded our profession has continued to get so caught up in the minutia of the work that, when we gather, we complain about how busy we are, who is causing us problems, and who needs to engage in the work more. STOP IT! Focus on your priorities.

My institution defines goals in four key areas: increase access to education, enhance research, improve quality of life for lowans, and enhance university experience. The role of my work must influence each of these areas. A fraternity not interested in generating access to education is not one needed on my campus. A sorority not invested in improving the lives of lowans is not needed on my campus. As a university administrator, my purpose is to support the institution in reaching its goals. I must be research focused. I must enhance the university experience.

### **Advance sorority and fraternity.**

There needs to be a shift in our focus. When I ask myself the purpose of sororities and fraternities, my mind constantly runs in space. When I change the framework and think about sororities and fraternities as means to the end in fulfilling mission, I am provided more focus. Fraternities and sororities are tools to do a job. There is flexibility in that job, but the job is supporting the institutional mission. It is up to the organization at a local, regional, national, or international level to determine their own priorities and focus, but if sororities and fraternities

are going to remain a part of the collegiate experience, they must support the institutional mission.

As we take time this summer to prepare for a new school year, my team will be challenged to think more critically about how our work aligns with the institutional mission. We are doing great work that is in alignment already, but we need to improve the way we share that story. We need to assist our chapters in their ability to articulate how they bring value to the institution. When we are able to do so, we will advance sorority and fraternity.

Success in this industry will be determined by those that can tether organizational missions to university goals. “Because it is so much more comfortable to believe talent is reserved for the chosen few than it is to work your ever-loving butt off to become the best you are capable of being” (Medcalf, 2015, p. 102). At times in our field, we glorify certain people or certain programs. Instead, we need to look to ourselves and our own work. Are we doing the best we can for our campus, our community, our sorority, or our fraternity? We need to invest in ourselves and work environments before we try to save the industry as a whole. If I had one takeaway from the Convening, it would be this: senior administration is evaluating sororities and fraternities now more than ever. Sorority and fraternity professionals are uniquely positioned to make a difference, but we have to do the work that matters.

## References

Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. (2018). AFA Core Competencies Manual. Retrieved April 6, 2019 from <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.afa1976.org/resource/resmgr/publications/afa-corecompetencies-2018-fi.pdf>

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*Billy Boulden has worked with sororities and fraternities for more than 10 years. After joining Pi Kappa Phi at Christopher Newport University, Billy went to work for his fraternity. He completed a master's in organizational leadership from Gonzaga University while on fraternity staff. He worked with sorority and fraternity communities at Longwood University and Florida State University. He currently serves as the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Sorority and Fraternity Engagement at Iowa State University and an educator and keynote speaker for ForCollegeForLife where he focuses on working with students to make the most out of their sorority/fraternity experience.*