

## Trust What Process

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For at least a decade, professionals in the field have been telling students to “trust the process” or “TTP” for short. Whether they use it on day two of a five-day leadership institute, or as a way to describe membership recruitment, they use it with the intent to calm the questions going through the student’s head. However, throughout this same decade, professionals have called for more critical thinking and urged students to challenge the process.

The seven-year-old that would not stop asking why – “Why is the sky blue?” “Why do I go to school?” “Why do people eat broccoli?” – is now a college student and their curiosity for the world has turned into a motivation to make a difference for others. College students belonging in Generation Z are advocating for their beliefs more, which may mean that more students will challenge the process than the generations before.

Seasoned and new professionals alike can get frustrated by a student asking “why” all the time. When the chapter president asks why they have to go to a convention, or the social chair wonders why a keg isn’t allowed at the event, when it is much more economical, advisors can get pretty defensive and shut down the questions with an answer such as “because it is policy.” But this answer isn’t satisfying Gen Zers, which when you think about it, should be a good sign. After all, we want students to challenge risky traditions and not accept an older member’s answer such as “because we have always done it this way.” Explaining the “why” behind these policies and other practices can not only lead to better understanding but can also lead to more buy-in from the very generation that likes to advocate for their beliefs. If advisors can help this generation of students understand the methods of risk reduction engrained in policy or the importance of student leadership development for themselves and their chapter, then they may be able to create a generation of critical thinkers who speak up and advocate for a healthier experience because they believe it will make a difference.

The staff in the office of fraternity/sorority life that I work with get “why” questions from students daily. After a few years of changes in campus policies regarding social events and standards outlining national policies, our students had many questions about the purpose. The Gen Zers’ “why” questions have been coming from a desire to learn; they don’t want to let others down and they have thoughtful questions about balancing obligations and finances. We have already seen the impact that explaining the process can have on Gen Zers on our campus. They are attending more national programs and prioritizing convention into their summer

internship schedule. More organizations are registering events and focusing on safe practices because they understand the big picture difference those practices make in their peers lives.

Rather than saying “trust the process” when a student is feeling doubt by a program or policy change, dive deeper into the learning process that Gen Z students are craving. When one uses a leadership model to write curriculum for a retreat or institute, try explaining the model in the first session as a way to create a road map for them. The “ah-ha” moments will still come as they connect the dots. The model shouldn’t be a secret kept from participants. Use the introduction of the model as a way to build care for the program and show participants how participating in the program will make a difference for them.

This is what professionals have asked new member educators to do for their new members. Show new members the expectations, things you want them to learn, and the schedule at the beginning of the program. This can reduce stress, misunderstanding, or lack of purpose for their new members. Wouldn’t one want to eliminate these during their leadership program as well? How can we tell someone to “trust the process” if they don’t know anything about the process?

The next time a student asks why or is challenged by a process or policy, lean into the question and engage with them as a learning opportunity. Not one that is “advisor knows all,” but rather one of mutual understanding. Who knows – maybe we will learn something from this generation that can help fraternities and sororities make it into the next 100 years. After all, Generation Z is motivated by making a difference, and that difference can be improving how one’s organizations have always done things.

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