COVID-19 arrived amid a laundry list of industry wide challenges that so many of our campuses and organizations were already facing. We are honored to be on the front lines, helping and leading our industry, shoulder to shoulder next to so many dedicated and skilled professionals into this new challenging season.

At Phired Up Productions, our mission is to transform the way people join fraternities and sororities. In many ways, COVID-19 has pushed us to fulfill that mission sooner than ever. As we have sought the best response to this pandemic, we have tried to lean on a few key principles: 1) Humanity first. 2) Generosity must drive our choices. 3) Permission to innovate.

Before I share more about those three principles, let’s take a moment to be honest about the impact of COVID-19 on something we know a lot about: joining.

I have been working in our industry for almost two decades, and I have never felt more concerned about our future than I do now. I am worried recruitment is going to be cancelled. I am fundamentally concerned that the relevance of our industry will be called into question. I don’t know what parents are going to advise surrounding this current health scare, but I can only imagine it will have a lot to do with social distancing, avoiding large events, and disengaging or simply coming home. I am most worried that well-meaning institutions and organizations are going to throw a ton of rules, regulations, and barriers at chapters that will further blunt their ability to recruit (and operate).

That last one is a big one for me. I feel like we are talking about the same stuff in a different season all the time. I am spinning my wheels to initiate real, positive, life-altering change in organizations and communities, only to be bound by real and perceived regulations. It is time to set our people free.

One of my favorite things in our Phired Up culture is what we call (per)mission. It means that as long as what we are doing for our clients is in alignment with our mission and values, we have (per)mission to do it. In our company, we have no fear. We win together, lose together, and lift one another up to tackle big problems without worrying what others will say or think. It’s a culture we have worked hard to create in the last two years, and it is centered around mutual respect and love.
We believe these same cultural agreements and key principles will help guide others during this challenging moment.

**Humanity first.** We are not an industry of properties and paperwork. We are not an industry of cold, hard business. We are built out of pure relationships — out of brotherly and sisterly love. All of our choices, our communications, and our interactions must put our members first. Care for them. Reach out to them. It’s 2020. You don’t need a Zoom webinar to know how to care for our members digitally. We’ve all been doing it for years. Now is the moment when we must work extra hard in our efforts to love. We must send more texts, create more digital conversations, and have more video calls than feels comfortable. The humans of our organizations deserve it.

**Generosity must drive our choices.** It’s easy to fall into a scarcity mentality when toilet paper, masks, and disinfectant wipes are actually scarce. But neither fear nor hoarding are fraternal values. We are organizations bound by oaths to serve. We all must make choices (as fraternity/sorority members and supporters) to give first. Let’s push our co-workers, volunteers, and chapters to give. Let’s push ourselves to re-frame our everyday schedules to ensure we’re contributing, adding value, and helping in real ways. This season of our existence will have more moments filled with fear and feelings of scarcity. Let us give in every moment and in every way out of the abundance of brotherhood, sisterhood, and siblinghood that we’ve all felt.

**Permission to innovate.** Now is not the time to get stuck on old assumptions of how things should be done, especially when it comes to how people join our organizations. You have (per)mission to innovate. You have our unfettered authorization to come up with very new and very modern ways to do business (especially when it comes to the way our chapters attract, select, and secure new members). As long as your decisions help us collectively achieve the mission of fraternity/sorority life, then you have (per)mission to take action!

What would it look like if our host organizations and campuses gave out one rule for recruitment and that rule (in the wake of COVID-19 or otherwise) sounded like this:

*We trust you. In this time, we invite you to use your values to innovatively recruit and retain your members. Please refer to (insert umbrella organization mission statement here) for further instruction. We are here to help you do that (insert direct contact information), so please reach out if you want to talk through this more. Again, we trust you.*
We can do the work we have always done remotely. At Phired Up, our team is working around the clock to ensure we have a responsive plan to how we are going to help you market to, recruit, retain, and on-board new members in this season and beyond. In the last month, we have run digital keynotes, 100% remote based market research, and shared documents digital trainings, team meetings, coaching sessions, strategy sessions, and really cool client meetings all online. We have been guest panelists for countless chapters, national organizations, and campus communities, and we have had many laughs and tears with so many of our industry ‘phamily” via FaceTime. In some ways, I feel like we are more connected, and it feels amazing to see so many of your faces through the screen (though nothing beats an in-person hug).

Our staff is spending time with each other via video, we are going outside, and we are being strongly encouraged to use this time to innovate quickly and love fully. We are doing this with partners and children in tow. Working remotely is something we have all done as a staff for a long time. I have a child with a heart transplant, and we have had family shelter-in-place orders often in the last eight years. I feel like the whole world is working from home with a heart transplant right now and it is not easy. Nothing about seeing the world stop is easy and, if anything, the reflection time, while welcome, can be a little scary. I have sat often in the last month alone with just my thoughts (yikes).

I am worried but I have never been more hopeful. Our company and our industry have an opportunity to thrive here. We have the prescription for how to do this right, and it has been right in front of us all along. We must say to our members, “you can do this, you will do this” and let them show us what they are made of. As it turns out, we don’t really have much of a choice because the alternative here is not pretty. The plan we need is here:

1) Intentional marketing and strong messages about the experience of fraternity/sorority.
2) Good technology to manage and track relationships.
3) Intentional methods of consistently connecting with and engaging current and future members.
4) The courage to step out of our comfort zones and give (per)mission.
5) Love and grace — more than anyone deserves and always with the assumption that we are all doing our very best.

We are here to help you — no strings at all, so please reach out to us. This will pass and while it does, we are here to help you champion this experience. At Phired Up we know, fraternity and sorority has the power to change and save lives. We will continue to stand with you. Take care of each other.
Dr. Colleen Coffey Melchiorre has been an advocate for fraternity and sorority life for almost 20 years. A proud member of Alpha Sigma Tau, Colleen lives outside of Nashville with her husband, three little children, and a poodle named Otis. Colleen wrote the first book on sorority recruitment (link) and remains a loyal Phired Up employee of many years. Her presence is appreciated nationwide as a strategic partner (and resident mother) to multiple organizations, chapters, and communities. Colleen loves yoga, barre, being outside, and washing her hands (no seriously, even before this whole thing started). Contact her at colleen@phiredup.com.