

Veterans: How to Keep the Annual Meeting Relevant

Alex Snowden, Illinois State University

As a veteran Annual Meeting (AM) attendee, I consider the behavior other veterans have modeled and reflect on what we can do to make our experience at the AM worthwhile. I cannot count the times I have heard colleagues (and even myself) say they do not want to attend a session because they have heard it all before. The AM's purpose is to move our profession forward and build collaboration among the many different constituents who support the fraternal experience. I believe it is time for veterans to commit to making our AM experiences more meaningful and more than just a social experience. It time to give back in an informal capacity. Here are five behaviors I hope to model while in Nashville.

Become a mentor. According to fraternal lore, a professional in the field of fraternity/sorority advising has a life span of less than five years. It is speculated that we have a high burnout rate, no place to move up, and in many cases are lone soldiers on a campus. However, as veterans, we represent the survivors. Consider the tools that allowed you to overcome the burnout, to move up in the field, and to survive the at times frustrating lack of resources. Now, how cool would it be for a graduate student or first-time attendee to become one of “the greats” by learning from those veterans (you!) who continue to give back? As a veteran, find someone with “first timer” on their name tag, and sit down with them. Have a conversation and get to know them; learn about their institution/organization; and, help them work through one problem they face. You have a wealth of knowledge you can bestow on our future veterans, and you having one conversation could easily turn someone who views fraternity/sorority advising as a stepping stone into a professional who considers making fraternity/sorority advising their ultimate career goal. I challenge everyone to seek out someone new and make them feel welcome and thank them for joining the fight for value congruency.

Learn something. Hazing is bad! I get it, and hopefully, we all get it. It can sometimes be frustrating to sit in a presentation and hear what you already know. But in just five years, how much has research improved our understanding of hazing? What new strategies are being used today? What if a first time presenter found the magic formula to open the dialogue? Just like in other professions, we have to continually keep up with new methods, strategies, and trends in our field. Going to a session that you could possibly grow from (even if it a small bit of knowledge) can go a long way in bettering the work you do. Attend that “so-so” session, and force yourself to learn something. We preach lifelong learning so let's practice what we preach. Besides, what you take away from a session could be the inspiration for a break through developed by you.

Informally volunteer. I love hanging out with friends. This is the unofficial highlight of the Annual Meeting. You get a dedicated week to hang out with those who have stuck it out as long as you have in this profession without the day-to-day “distractions” of the office. It can be a relief to be around hundreds of people who get what you do. So why not pair the social aspects of the Annual Meeting with a bit of service? Hang out and give a hand to the Foundation. Ask if you and a couple colleagues can work the Silent Auction tables together. Fraternity/sorority chapter members volunteer so let's take the fun conversations, and give back to the Association which has given time to us.

Because you believe. This sticker is a badge of honor for Annual Meeting attendees. Some people will collect, distribute, and check the bulletin board to collect more. Honor those who have not yet received their badge of honor. Purchase a stack of ten.

When you have a great conversation with someone random and feel they get it, then give them a sticker. It shows you care, paid attention, and it gives them the affirmation they may be missing in their daily lives. You never know the impact you have on someone, so do not let the opportunity slip past you.

Enjoy the little things. You are a person people look up to...young professionals and first-time attendees have heard your name and know of something you have accomplished. This is the opportunity for you to enjoy that you have made it in this field and have turned this into a career instead of just a stepping stone. Enjoy your time, spread knowledge, and be the example. Remember, everyone is watching you, so make sure what they see is what a fraternity/sorority professional should be—an individual who emulates the values of the organization we advise.