

Tales from the Dark Side... I was a Fraternity/Sorority Advisor

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I recently celebrated my third anniversary of leaving a college campus where I served as the fraternity/sorority advisor, and such, leaving the only career I had known for my entire professional life. I was scared. I was excited. I was nervous. Did I know what I was getting into by leaving the comforts of higher education and heading into the great beyond of fundraising? No way. But I certainly have learned a lot in my three year transition to a recovering fraternity/sorority advisor.

I was comfortable advising fraternities and sororities, and I can provide an argument that I was somewhat decent at it. But I started to realize I may be one of the professionals who has a shelf-life in higher education, and I wanted to utilize my expertise and experiences in other areas. A phrase I remember from attending the Interfraternity Institute (IFI) in 2007 was, “when it’s time to go, you will know.” At that time, I could not believe one could ever feel that way about working with fraternities and sororities. But beginning around fall 2013, I completely understood and knew it was time.

If you choose to be involved with AFA and the profession, colleagues and professional connections eventually become friends and mentors. And these people become very important to not only your professional life, but to your personal life as well. I have yet to interact with another profession where friendships and connections become so close – close enough where you visit one another outside of conference season or take regular vacations – all because you met through the crazy world of fraternities and sororities. And because of those connections, when you begin to think about transitioning, there is a feeling of “I don’t want to let these people down.” We are such passionate people and so committed to what we do. I find it amazing that we wrestle with not letting other people down when thinking about changing careers.

But these are the people who will help you with the transition. They will offer feedback and advice (sometimes unsolicited!) about what you should think about or do next. It was through conversations with friends and mentors that helped me realize fundraising or alumni relations was a logical career path. Once I told them, and the cat was out of the bag, they were excellent resources in beginning to search for the next adventure.

I transitioned out of higher education and into fundraising in March of 2014. 2014 was a big year for individuals who spent many years working with fraternities and sororities on campuses and at headquarters in transitioning to other areas. Fundraising, alumni affairs, student conduct offices, motherhood and other areas gained phenomenal professionals. Unfortunately, fraternity and sorority advising lost years of experience in a profession already known for its high turnover.

I believe professionals who “left” still have a commitment to the fraternal movement. The fraternal movement needs advocates who have sat in the hot seat and understand what our campus-based professionals and inter/national headquarters colleagues are trying to do. We need to be on chapter advisory boards, volunteer for our organization, or stay connected somehow. It does not have to be right away – taking a break is fine. But getting re-engaged on “the other side” can be very fulfilling.

After three years not on a college campus, I can tell you there is nothing like working on a campus and specifically with fraternities and sororities. I have not found that energy in the fundraising jobs I have held since leaving higher education. The “feeling” you have working with college students and on a campus cannot be replicated – even when you are asking people for money for causes you feel passionately about. For me, I have remained committed to facilitating and consulting within higher education, so I get a dose of that energy as a visitor. I get to work with college students for a few hours, challenge them, and then I get to go home. I also get to be an outside expert for organizations and campuses because I understand higher education, but now work outside of the field.

If you are thinking about transitioning out of your current position, I want to give you the permission that it is OK to begin asking those questions, seeking out the resources, or exploring other areas. I know it can feel like cheating on a profession and cause we care so much about. There are plenty of ways to stay involved without being front line – and having a fulfilling life and career while still advocating for fraternities and sororities in a different manner.