

Recruitment Counselors and their Transition through the Experience

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Are you getting nervous about sorority recruitment? Don't fret! You'll encounter many amazing women throughout recruitment week but most important, you'll meet your recruitment counselor, who will be by your side during the entire process.

(National Panhellenic Conference [NPC], 2013, para. 1)

One opportunity for leadership in a sorority community is serving as a recruitment counselor. In its most fundamental sense, transition is indicative of movement, and the individual who elects to be a recruitment counselor is indeed *moving into, through, and then on from* this experience (Burns, 2010; Schlossberg, 1981). The recruitment counselor *moves into* the role by being selected, trained, and disassociating from her sorority; *moves through* the role as she actualizes the requirements of the position during the sorority recruitment process; and *moves on from* the role when Bid Day arrives and she reveals her affiliation, returning to her sorority. By viewing the recruitment counselor role as a transitional position, fraternity and sorority advisors are better able to prepare participants for what Schlossberg (1981) identifies as "an event or non-event resulting in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5).

Moving Into the Role

The recruitment counselor moves into the role, be it by application and selection, or by virtue of her position within the Panhellenic community. Entering into the role of recruitment counselor requires the sorority woman to do what Bridges (2009) defines as transition – letting go of something, such as a way of seeing oneself. It requires the sorority woman to reframe how she views herself within the context of sorority life. She is no longer the member of a specific sorority, but rather a member of the sorority community.

Training recruitment counselors as they enter the role is imperative. The NPC Recruitment Counselor Guide (2014) provides excellent examples of how to prepare recruitment counselors for the many experiences potential new members (PNMs) might face during sorority recruitment. Training, however, needs to encompass how *all* stakeholders may interpret and react to the processes at work during recruitment, including the recruitment counselors. Fraternity/sorority advisors ought to consider "how much [sorority recruitment counseling] alters one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 5).

As she steps into this new role, the recruitment counselor finds the requirements of her own sorority are no longer appropriate (Bridges, 2004; Ebaugh, 1988). Instead of leaving the sorority permanently (disaffiliate), the recruitment counselor is asked to distance herself from her sorority for a limited amount of time (disassociate). However, the requirements of disassociation mimic those of disaffiliation, and often the two terms are used interchangeably. Disassociation intentionally requires recruitment counselors to limit interaction with affiliated sorority members for the time immediately before and throughout the duration of sorority

recruitment, and to refrain from sharing their sorority affiliation with PNMs. Although the disassociation requirement is now optional as a requirement if affirmed by the campus' Panhellenic (NPC, 2017), it remains a common practice in many sorority communities.

Moving Through the Role

As a recruitment counselor continues through the role and disassociation begins, she acknowledges an ending, albeit temporarily. Bridges (2004) refers to an ending as the start of transition – an individual lets go of something or some way of doing things. Once an individual comes to terms with the specific experience that is ending, thus prompting transition, she moves on to the neutral zone, or a “moratorium from the conventional activity of [one’s] everyday existence” (Bridges, 2004, p. 135). The neutral zone provides space and opportunity for self-renewal, as this “emptiness” between the stages of endings and beginnings is a chance to develop perspective on the stages themselves (Bridges, 2004). The neutral zone is the time when the “old way of doing things is gone, but the new way doesn’t feel comfortable yet” (Bridges, 2009, p. 8). Decisions and choices are made during this time, but the direction or experience is not clear or settled (Burns, 2010).

It is important to discuss how the recruitment counselors are engaged in the sorority recruitment process as a sort of neutral third party, and what that means to be "neutral" or "objective." It's not solely about what to say, or how to say it appropriately, but rather a conversation with the counselors about feelings they may encounter as they navigate sitting separate from their organization.

Moving on From the Role

Finally, the recruitment counselor moves on from this role to begin again as a full-fledged active member of her sorority, only now with new members and new outlooks since she was last involved. Returning to the sorority at the conclusion of recruitment is exciting, although it may include difficulty with the adjustment. It is an ending as a recruitment counselor, but also a beginning (again) as a sorority woman. While the recruitment counselor is returning to the same sorority they had left only months earlier, for some, they return different, with new knowledge and a new perspective, one where change is based on the deconstruction of outlooks as a result of the “out-group member” period of time (Bridges, 2004; Hogg, 2006).

Considerations for Practice

An experienced, undergraduate sorority woman should fill this role, because she is not only responsible for providing fair, impartial advice to women interested in joining the sorority community (NPC, 2014), but she also needs to possess the maturity to successfully navigate some contentious situations. In selecting individuals to be recruitment counselors, consider how some may cognitively process the situation they have entered, for they are likely to differ in their reactions and interpretations of particular types of events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Those in transition make two types of appraisals of their situations simultaneously – primarily, based the perception of the transition itself (i.e., is it positive, negative, or irrelevant); and secondarily, wherein they assess the resources available for coping with the transition. As

transition occurs, reactions and perspectives are constantly changing and evolving, therefore the coping strategies and their utilization do so as well. Because a transition is a transaction between the individual and her environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), how a recruitment counselor appraises her movement from one role to another may influence how she feels and copes with the event or non-event (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Consider preparing recruitment counselors for navigating not only the emotions of the PNMs, but their own as well. Sorority women meet all the PNMs who attend their specific events, and when a PNM does not attend the next day, the sorority women often don't notice or know why the PNM is not there. Each sorority woman is responsible for getting to know those who *are* present at the event, not those who don't attend. However, the recruitment counselor's responsibility is to that small group of PNMs, and they are responsible for talking through a decision-making process that is in no way transparent. The practices in play during recruitment can sometimes make the sorority recruitment process difficult for both PNMs and the counselors to negotiate, and it can evoke emotions and feelings each may not have been prepared to address.

Lastly, there are ample opportunities that could be developed and expanded as topics for recruitment counselor training sessions, including an expansion of counseling skills to include navigating emotions and feelings of all stakeholders, including themselves, as well as ethical leadership development as it relates to being disassociated.

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