

## **Advising the Advisor**

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There are many things that contribute to the success of an advisor but one thing is critical: support. Being a sorority advisor can feel like a separate sorority in and of itself. So many times other sorority women who do not work with undergraduates directly can have a hard time understanding all that goes into it. Therefore, advisors must form a sisterhood and bond where they are comfortable leaning on one another and working together.

I recently finished a two-year term in the role of Vice President for Undergraduate Affairs of the local graduate chapter for my organization. In my role, among other things, I was responsible for the training, development, and support of the undergraduate chapter advisors at four area colleges. All four of my advisors had differing personalities, skill levels, and needs. It was necessary to work individually with them in order to provide them both the challenge and support they needed in order to excel in their advising roles. We engaged in dialogue about the role of an advisor and how they can be supported by me and the organization to which we belong. There were several tactics I used to support them:

### **Personal and Professional Development**

The goal of fraternity/sorority advisors is to assist in the development of students involved in the organization. My role was to help advisors develop the skills to make this happen. This required an ongoing commitment to their personal and professional development. I began by hosting advisor training before the fall term began. This is pretty typically and knowing many times advisors get tired of trainings just as undergraduates do, I was intentional in ensuring we focused on their areas of needed growth. This helped to make them aware that this was important to me and therefore helped them to take it more seriously. I was also lucky to have a regional officer who happened to be in my local chapter whose role on the regional level is to work with undergraduates and their advisors. I was able to utilize her in the training. This was helpful because it provided a higher level of credibility. I continued my commitment to their development by following up on trainings throughout the year with related articles and information as I came across it including information on conferences and other professional development opportunities of which they might want to take advantage.

### **Open Communication**

I also implemented monthly individual meetings with each of the advisors. This provided an opportunity for them to update me in a formal way on the on-goings of the chapters they advised and to talk through any advising issues they were having. This was also a time when we could forecast issues and strategically plan responses to them. Although this formal time was important, building strong relationships with them allowed me to be able to have ongoing conversations on a weekly—and sometimes daily—basis. This allowed them to be more comfortable with me and to be able to talk about things outside of the sorority that may impact performance.

This group of advisors and I comprised the Undergraduate Concerns Committee. We met on a monthly basis so they were able to partake in fellowship among one another and share updates so everyone was in the loop. There was a segment of each meeting that I called S.O.S. (Sigma's Offering Support). This segment allowed them to share their advising struggles with one another. This proved useful because often times they were able to help one another in a way that I could not.

## **Morale Boost**

Recognition is a large part of advisor support. As we all know, advising is a thankless job that oftentimes goes overlooked. People either are not aware of or do not care about the hours and hours of time, large amount of money, and stress that goes into fulfilling such a role. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the significance of an advisor to the members of a chapter. When I was elected to my position, I promised myself I would never make the advisors feel as though no one cared or valued the work they did. Even if it was only me, they would know somebody cared and valued them.

Recognition can take many forms. I found the small things mattered the most. I consistently recognized special events in their lives (birthdays, sorority induction anniversaries, etc.), but I also made it a point to recognize their professional accomplishments, things they may have been proud of in regards to their children, and so forth. I mailed cards and gifts, sent simple e-mails, and/or posted public social media recognitions. One recognition tactic I found to be particularly successful was mentioning a job well done in my monthly report at chapter business meetings. Individuals tend to like praise, no matter their age or level of experience. Praise can cause people to work harder; it can give that extra pep in a step. A small dose of praise could re-focus an advisor on why they do what they do.

In regard to advisor support, it is important to remember to make it individualized, try new ideas, and make sure advisors know you value their efforts. None of this is rocket science. Most people are already doing these things, it is just a matter of the level of energy and work that you put into supporting them that causes them to give you back high efforts and great performance.