

## Leaning on the Shield: A Page Out of NPHC's Book

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As probate season comes to a close, social media is roaring with photos and videos revealing the Spring 2017 neophytes. These moments conclude multi-week processes preparing new members for a lifetime commitment to their respective organizations and their principles. One facet of these processes, that is often overlooked, is the knowledge sharing of all organizations within the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and the, often, musical displays of appreciation for traditions at new member presentations. The precedent this sets, that isn't always maintained throughout college, is the basis of unity and the larger idea of interfraternalism.

Despite undergraduate insistence that a person pledges one individual organization and not the larger community, NPHC members learn a new mentality somewhere along the way. Somewhere amid preparing for the new member presentation, fervently discussing calendar dates, and arguing about who really “runs the yard,” a “we’re all in this together” mentality sets in that drives interactions with affiliated members throughout the rest of their personal and professional lives. For those who land in higher education, these practices drive their approach to general networking, being a good campus partner, and supporting students.

In Malcolm Gladwell’s book *The Tipping Point* (Gladwell, 2000), he talks about three archetypes of people: mavens, salespeople, and connectors. Each type takes a different approach to creating change whether through information, ideas, or persuasion. Members of NPHC organizations embody the true essence of *connectors* in effortlessly utilizing their affiliation to network. Connectors make change happen through people. From navigating the job search to getting acclimated in a new space, NPHC members are known to figuratively *lean on the shield* for the benefit of themselves and others. It is quite rare a member does not have a prophyte, neophyte, spec, secret, line sister, club, etc. that can be of use for projects, reference, or fun during a transition. This immodest gesture, and reciprocal loyalty and care, creates a cross-organizational network of individuals willing to pay it forward to ensure the success of others with shared experiences. NPHC members know they can go anywhere in the U.S., and even abroad, and be taken care of.

At the very core of relationship building is the sense of connectedness through shared experiences. For NPHC members this comes naturally; however this approach can be adopted by any professional and practiced with a wide range of students and colleagues. Try it on:

### Spit Your Spiel

Modern technology has provided great access to the lives of others prior to ever stepping foot in the office. Use social media browsing to your advantage, and introduce yourself to individuals and departments considered key stakeholders in your work. Coming into a new space, the likelihood of meeting someone who has similar life experiences to you is high. This means the likelihood there are pre-existing connections or commonalities is even higher. Lean

into the power of storytelling, and make new friends by introducing what has shaped who you are.

### **Promote Unity**

We're more alike than we are different. Establish relevant partnerships with departments who share similar values. While many organizations or units tend to work in silos, the thing that remains constant is the desire to develop students. Form new collaborations with not-so-obvious partners as well. This can produce new programs and initiatives to expand the reach of your overall division. Just like in fraternity and sorority life, institutional departments all sink or swim together.

### **Show Respect**

Don't minimize interaction with colleagues to mandatory meetings and annual retreats. A large part of being effective in supporting students is embracing the shared advising model that stretches beyond the confines of one physical office. Who else is making a direct impact in the lives of students? How? What events do they host annually? Can you support their efforts by just showing up? When we champion neighboring entities, we enhance our ability to really reach and connect with students. Learn, and share widely, what makes another department special.

At the most recent AFA Annual Meeting, Dr. Lori Hart accepted the Jack L. Anson Award with an eloquent speech challenging us all to be introspective as we set expectations for students. Fraternity/sorority professionals should be modeling the way as it relates to lifelong learning, lifelong giving, and the continued culture of lifelong brotherhood/sisterhood. The practice of interfraternalism should continue well beyond Greek Week, mixers, or the last new member presentation of senior year. Interfraternalism in action is as simple as not missing the figurative "roll call" – because it doesn't go unnoticed when you aren't truly present in your work. Introduce yourself, share resources to achieve common goals, and respect the work of others through acknowledgement and support. There is an ongoing cry for fraternal unity. Interfraternalism is a mentality all fraternity/sorority members and professionals must do their part in upholding.

## References

Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.