

Advancing Sorority, but Not Your Own

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In the summer of 2016, I was given the incredible opportunity to become a staff member of Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority—more affectionally known as “Tri Sigma.” A campus professional at the time, I had observed it to be a common practice for national headquarters to hire outside of their own membership. Regardless, I couldn’t shake the nervous feeling of “*What if they see me as a fraud?*” I felt rife with imposter syndrome.

My first few weeks on staff, I walked on self-imposed eggs shells, nervous to overturn anything that might be deemed sacred or secret to the organization—keeping my knowledge of my own organization to myself, and really, existing in two different worlds—professional sorority world and *personal* sorority world.

A month or so into my new role, I embarked on my first on-site chapter visit. I would be staying with a collegiate chapter for a week, supporting them through formal recruitment. Anxiety rushed over me—“*Surely, these women will see me as a phony, reject my help, and this visit will be a failure.*” During the drive to my suite, I smiled nervously and stared at my hands, hoping to continually skirt the subject of my affiliation.

Around lunch time, the topic finally came up. While eating with a group of collegiate members, I was asked, “*So where did you join Tri Sigma?*”

“*Well ...*” I responded. “*I am actually not a non-member of Tri Sigma, I am a Kappa Kappa Gamma.*” Their eyes locked on mine for a moment, the gears turning, processing what I had just related. Sensing the noticeable struggle for what to say next I added, “*The thing is, we have different letters, and I don’t know your ritual, or any of your secrets. But I do believe in the critical role that sorority plays in empowering women. That’s my aim, to empower women through sorority – and doing that for my own organization as a volunteer is wonderful, but professionally? It is even better.*” The women smiled, relaxed and said “*That’s really cool*” and that was it. I took a deep breath, and we went on to have a fantastic visit.

This became my tipping point where it all shifted. My heart grew exponentially that day, because I recognized more than one organization could have a place in my heart, and to be critical to my identity as a sorority woman, which I had never fathomed before. I had always perceived interfraternalism as something I *did*, not something that was an intrinsic part of *who I am*.

From that one interaction, my love for Tri Sigma, and my commitment to being an interfraternal partner has continued to grow. With every program I attend, and every member I interact with, I am stunned by the kindness, grace, and sisterhood I am shown on a regular basis. Seeing the women in this organization show love for a woman that is not “one of theirs” has convinced me the underlying premise of sisterhood is greater than any one organization, and extends to

women everywhere. True sisterhood is when interfraternalism becomes women's empowerment.

In a world where women are continually pitted against one another—in the news, as prime time television subjects, in classrooms, and yes, in sororities—I find an incredible amount of fulfillment knowing I spend every day working to change that narrative through the advancement of women's organizations. Likewise, each day, these organizations change the narrative of my own fraternal story. Although Tri Sigma is not "mine" in terms of membership, it has become a part of me and has contributed to the foundation for what I consider to be my personal mission in life: serving and uplifting other women.

In a world constantly telling women what they *can't* do, I have the gift of saying to collegiate women, "*actually, you can do anything you want*", and have been given the profound gift of other women telling me, "*you can also do anything you want, Nancy.*"

Too often, I think the premise of sisterhood or sorority is lost in the name of branding, image, reputation, and growth. We focus so much on the differentials, what makes us *better* than each other that we often forget the overwhelming premise of sorority, which is to empower young women and give them a place to belong. Had I not joined Kappa Kappa Gamma, the trajectory of my life would have been radically different – it is so humbling to stand back and reflect on this. I see myself growing and learning in ways I could have never fathomed because women who share the common bond of the sorority experience are dedicated to my empowerment.

If you ever have the opportunity to work with an organization outside of your comfort zone – do it. If you ever have the chance to simply be mentored by someone from another organization – do it. Why? Because interfraternalism is more than an email signature, co-hosting events, or sponsoring national initiatives – it's the instances where men and women take the time to see the value in another person, so much so it transcends the letters they self identify with, allowing them to push and challenge each other to believe in a better definition of relevancy for not only the fraternal movement, but for themselves.

Recently, I transitioned into a new role with Zeta Beta Tau Fraternity, and while my audience is now different, the experiences that my time on staff with Tri Sigma provided me remain. Tri Sigma taught me, in so many ways, that interfraternalism is not about advancing just the organization you are a member of, but pouring yourself into others, and finding just as much if not more fulfillment in that work.