

Lead by Example

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It is easy to get so wrapped up in the day-to-day activities of our jobs that we forget one of the most important duties of a seasoned campus-based professional—the charge to prepare those who follow us to carry on the profession that we all hold close to our hearts.

There are many ways to ensure new professionals acquire the skills that will help them become successful in the field. The concept of preparing young professionals should not be limited to staff members. Undergraduate students become consultants for their organizations and enter the field. Graduate assistants discover their passion for advising within the fraternity/sorority world and seek employment in the field even though their course of study may have been in something other than student development or higher education. However, the primary charge is to prepare the future of the fraternal movement by engaging the young professionals on our campuses.

My primary methodology for perpetuating the profession is “modeling the way” (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). It is important that those who young professionals contact on a daily basis understand some of the basic tenets of the art. Therefore, the senior professional must lead by example. Consider all of the things you admired about the fraternity/sorority professional that had the largest impact on you. This should guide your own performance as the seasoned professional. For me, some of those tenets are integrity, a student-focused mentality, autonomy and continued education.

There should be no question about the integrity of the successful fraternity/sorority advisor. We advise members of values-based organizations. The credibility of the advisor is highly dependent upon the values that are apparent to the student leaders on our own campuses as well as those we impact on other campuses. Our students will talk, tweet, or text about their campus-based professional when interacting with peers all over the country so our influence is genuinely boundless. Therefore, it is incumbent upon a seasoned professional to model this behavior to a young professional.

Additionally, while the young professional is often concerned about the title of their position or what award or recognition they may receive next, it is important that those who are experienced remind and guide those eager young souls that our best service to the students we direct is achieved when they act in what they believe to be the best interest of the students on their campuses.

It is my belief that entry level professionals do not grow when held back or are not given the latitude to grow. As stated above, we owe it to those who report to us to help them experience all they can so they gain the experience to be productive seasoned professionals. For example, the individual who holds the coordinator position on my campus has been given the opportunity to gain experience that I would maintain some directors do not experience on other campuses. My philosophy on that young professional's growth has given them the opportunity to negotiate housing contracts both on and off campus for nearly 1,000 students involved in Panhellenic recruitment. Likewise, they have written a bid for feeding a larger number for recruitment in the coming year. They have overseen a University recruitment event with nearly 2,500 in attendance. They have piloted the course to extension on our campus for the first time in over thirty years. Additionally, they have closely advised philanthropic events with thousands of attendees and tens of thousands of dollars raised for nationally known causes. Yes, as the senior professional, I observe and guide the coordinator, but the hire was made with the goal in mind of allowing the person in the role to grow through performance and experience not observation and research.

In addition to the autonomy, it is important to give a young professional the opportunity to attend professional development opportunities like the Annual Meeting, the Interfraternity Institute and much more. During times of tight budgets and economic uncertainty, many institutions are quick to cut professional development funds, which is to the detriment of today's young professional and to the fraternal movement as a whole. Therefore, it is paramount to find and reserve funds for the purpose of furthering the education of the young professional you supervise. You may consider setting boundaries for number of travel opportunities per year, utilizing regional conferences to save money, and assisting the young professional in applying for all available scholarship in order to accomplish this goal.

Please remember the duty we all have to those who come after us to prepare them to be successful fraternity/sorority professionals. We must seek to guide and to educate the future of the craft. After all, according to a recent Facebook post, there are only about 275 members of AFA who have been in the profession for more than seven years (AFA, 2012). In order to continue to succeed, more of today's young professionals need to be developed and retained so they can model the way for our future young professionals. Regardless of your techniques, whether you model integrity or encourage travel to the Annual Meeting, be sure to share your wisdom to continue the growth the fraternal movement has experienced.

References

Kouzes, J. M. & Posner, B. Z. (2008). *The student leadership challenge : five practices for exemplary leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.