

Beyond the Red Door

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In my first job as a fraternity and sorority advisor in the fall of 2007, I hosted what was to be the first of many leadership conferences on a college campus. Not knowing anyone else, I reached out to the one speaker I knew who addressed this type of community, David Stollman. I remember his distinct message to “buy in or get out” right from the start of my own undergraduate sorority experience. That message stuck with me throughout the years, so I thought it might work with my students.

After bringing the house down, Dave and I got to talking. I shared my desire to get more involved in the field as a volunteer, but I was met with a lack of response when I reached out to my own organization. After I finished my story, he paused, and then proposed the idea of volunteering for a fraternity. He then explained it should not be just any fraternity, but the one to which he gave an oath to years ago. He claimed Sigma Phi Epsilon loves their female volunteers, and would appreciate the opportunity to have me as part of their team. I agreed, and he got the ball rolling. This conversation, unbeknownst to me, became the conduit to my life-long dedication to serving fraternities and their men. A few weeks later, I was placed on the Alumni and Volunteer Council (AVC) of the New York Phi chapter at Columbia University. This is where I got my first taste of volunteering with a fraternity.

I titled this piece “Beyond the Red Door” as a nod to the symbolic meaning of the Sigma Phi Epsilon red door. Those who know their SigEp trivia know a red door on a chapter house means the chapter subscribes to the Red Door Policy. This policy states, “Wherever a Brother finds the Red Doors of SigEp, he will be welcomed into the chapter to share in the Brotherhood and tradition of the Fraternity.” Since SigEp showed me through the red door, I have not looked back.

I have since continued to walk through other doors, albeit none of them red, by volunteering with more fraternities and ultimately landing jobs on campuses that have two to three times as many fraternities compared to sororities. Fraternities such as Delta Upsilon, Beta Theta Phi, Delta Tau Delta, Sigma Pi, Phi Mu Delta, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc., Alpha Sigma Phi, and Tau Delta Phi have all welcomed me into their organizations as a leader and a volunteer, even if I didn’t have a chapter of theirs on my campus. I have had the honor of serving as a leadership conference facilitator, presenter, curriculum writer, and a sounding board for new program ideas. They value me as much as I value them; each with their own extraordinary missions to develop young men into global citizens ready for success. It is within the fraternal world I know I have a place where I can offer a different perspective or support for a new idea.

Fraternity, when done right, can change the world. This statement, which I repeat to others often, is what drives me to continue to work with these men’s organizations. The escalation of “bro-culture” (Chrisler, Bacher, Bangali, Campagna, & Mckeigue, 2012; Kimmel, 2009) which is described as a combination of academic apathy (Whipple & Sullivan, 1998), problems with

cognitive development (Pascarella et al., 1996), mistreatment towards women and minorities (Biddix, Matney, Norman, & Martin, 2014), and tolerance of intoxication and hazardous alcohol use behaviors (Biddix et al., 2014), seem to be running rampant in these communities, and we need to develop constructs to help these men defy these stereotypes. That is where volunteers like me come in. In a world where we have women's centers, women's empowerment, and more, someone needs to be doing the same thing for our men. We need to create environments that foster healthy development of our young men through care, compassion, accountability, education, and development. This is why I dedicate my life to supporting fraternities. I believe in these young men and will continue to make them a priority in my career.

References

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