How to Create Change? Get Over Yourself and Do the Work.
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Creating lasting cultural change is a frequent and ongoing topic of discussion in the fraternal industry. Whether working at a headquarters or on a campus, there seems to be a general consensus that the way in which the collegiate fraternal experience is currently being implemented is not in alignment with the ideals fraternal organizations aspire to, nor to the student learning outcomes expressed by universities. Therefore, a lot of time is spent talking about change. Understanding the change process is critical to being able to create change. But, understanding alone is not enough. Two factors are frequently neglected: there is an organic element to change, and patience and perseverance are key to success.

The result of the cultural change professionals seem to desire is students demonstrating through their actions an intrinsic, genuine belief in organizational mission and values. This kind of demonstration may require students to modify their attitudes, habits, and ultimately behavior. This cannot be forced; it is an organic process that can only be influenced. Using findings from psychologists which show the human brain is ruled by two different systems – the rational mind and the emotional mind, which compete for control – Dan and Chip Heath (2010) have identified patterns in successful changes that can be applied to influence people through a change process. These include techniques like "scripting the critical moves," where actions that are required for change are pared down to only a few simple instructions, or "growing your people," where change agents work to cultivate a sense of identity and instill a growth mindset. The presented techniques can be incredibly helpful in identifying methods that work to help people embrace new behaviors. While some of these items can be done immediately, with progress shown along the way, the major shift can take some time. Once the shift arrives, it is vital for professionals to ask…will our work ever really be finished?

About four years ago, the buzzword in the fraternal industry was "relevance," and Alpha Gamma Delta took to heart the question of how relevant the experience was for its members. A re-branding effort happened to coincide with a massive educational initiative to complete the Fraternity's four-year collegiate member development program. They focused on the Purpose, which is Alpha Gamma Delta's public expression of its values. Both initiatives were tested and piloted, and it was clear they included language and concepts around which the membership could rally. We knew these were two core elements in being able to shift the member experience, so the changes were implemented as soon as they were ready. The interesting part about implementing changes that people buy into, though, is the areas where change has not yet reached become illuminated in stark contrast.

At the same time these conversations around brand and member development were taking place, a similar conversation about risk management was also happening, complete with task forces, research, and pilot programs. In an effort not to overload the organization's constituents with too much change at once, the risk management changes were slated to rollout a full two years after the brand and member development program had been launched. For the two-year period between launches, constituents saw the incongruence between brand messaging, the discussions happening in member development programs, and the outdated approach to risk management. It was uncomfortable. It was frustrating. It created urgency in a way that allowed for the change in approach to risk management to be welcomed rather than resisted. Because the brand continued to evolve and the membership had experienced two full years of member development programming, launching a risk management approach that focused less on policies and procedures and more on health and dignity felt like a natural evolution. Seeing how constituents responded to the brand and the

member development programming was critical in shaping the risk management rollout, which would likely have failed had it been done any earlier.

It has only been within the last few months that we have been able to really see our members' and chapters' behavior changing. Rather than trying to hide their imperfections, they are asking for help. Rather than waiting for instruction, they are proposing and implementing strategies to bring their chapters into better alignment with organizational principles. Rather than angrily calling with complaints, they are calling with concerns, a desire to seek clarity and a commitment to be part of a solution. There were glimpses of this type of positive behavior along the way, but it seems to have been approaching a tipping point within the last few months. And, yet again, the successes we are experiencing continue to highlight the other areas where there is a great deal more work to do. More urgency is being created. The cycle continues.

Cultural change is not for the faint of heart. It requires listening to those with opposing viewpoints. It requires having the same conversations over and over and over again, with both the same and different people. It requires sitting in frustration and discomfort for long periods of time. It requires watching scenarios unfold which you know could be prevented or fixed if only you could get the initiative out sooner. It requires making choices between your own wellbeing and the greater cause, and learning when you can and cannot sacrifice yourself. It requires letting go of ego. It requires grace, patience, and perseverance.

In her 2013 TED Talk, Angela Duckworth explains her theory of "grit" as a predictor of success. "Grit is sticking with your future – day in, day out, not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years – and working really hard to make that future a reality… Grit is living life like it is a marathon, not a sprint." This same statement can be applied to change. While Kotter (1996) and the Heath brothers provide insightful strategies for influencing the kind of change that shifts behavior, attitude, and habits, they leave out an important part of the change agent(s): patience and perseverance and how they intersect with the concept of urgency.

If Duckworth's research tells us anything, it is that talent is overrated. "There are many talented individuals who simply do not follow through on their commitments. In fact, in our data, grit is usually unrelated or even inversely related to measures of talent" (Ted Talks Education, 2013). Change requires a commitment longer than the two year timeframe most young professionals commit to their first jobs. It also requires a greater commitment to urgency than some seasoned professionals display after years of seeing the same issues continue.

Research in learning and development asserts roughly 70% of lessons learned by successful leaders are from work and life experiences, 20% are from feedback and working through examples provided by others and 10% are from structured learning, like courses, workshops and reading (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2006). Challenge and resistance are inherent in change processes. If cultural change in the fraternal industry is going to happen, it will require getting over the idea that change models script exactly how a change effort will evolve. It will require getting over the idea we are so talented that people should automatically listen to us. It will require us to stop blaming the environment or the people. It will require us to just dig in, exhibit some grit, and do the work.

References

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