

All Hands on Deck - Strategic Planning & Execution

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We often challenge our undergraduate members to align their actions and values with campus policies and procedures. We also expect they do the same for their inter/national organizations. Many times, there are accreditation programs for both the campus and the organization, along with a myriad of other requirements, that must be fulfilled.

With the recent landscape for fraternities and sororities, many campuses are looking at creating a strategic plan and/or updating their current plan to demonstrate relevance of the fraternal experience. In many cases, this may include assessing programs and trainings to make sure the growth and development we aim for is actually happening. A strategic plan is a living document used to communicate and articulate the organization's goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals, and all of the other elements and resources developed during the planning process to the organization. As campuses review and consider what their ideal fraternity and sorority community looks like, inter/national organizations are having the same conversations.

Are campuses and inter/national organizations having these conversations together? Are they communicating to see how each strategic plan can be beneficial to the other and/or guide each other as they create their strategic direction for the future? How can these two parties find synergy during the strategic planning process?

As members and supporters of the Association, both groups are part of the leading voice aligning higher education with fraternity/sorority experiences. We come together every year at the Annual Meeting, at various drive-ins, and other professional development opportunities. Outside of these gatherings, we need to do more. As the professionals working towards a common goal, we must include each other in the critical conversations that involve our students/members. We need to send the first email, make the first phone call, and engage with each other outside of a risk management or crisis issue. Otherwise, our strategic plans and execution of them will never reach full potential.

Never Assume

We often share with our students and members that membership in a fraternity or sorority isn't only for four years, but for a lifetime. While this statement is valid, we forget to share their current collegiate experience is limited and what they say today...will be gone tomorrow. The reality is turnover in our profession is about as high, if not higher, than it is in our chapter leadership. We know this – it isn't a secret – yet we often fail to reengage the new consultant or campus professional with our strategic goals. We often assume all the information they need to know about our campus and/or organization was transitioned to them. False. According to the Center of Applied Research (2005), "Being clear about an organization's strategic goals provides focus and helps managers understand how to direct their resources and make decisions on a daily basis" (p. 1). A key aspect to successfully planning and executing a strategic plan is ensuring your stakeholders know your "why." In order to provide the support needed when

developing and implementing a strategic plan, all parties must be educated on the aspiring goals of everyone involved.

Check in Early, Check in Often

Fraternity and sorority life is an ever-changing, evolving puzzle with many pieces. As professionals, whether on a campus or at a headquarters, we work diligently to make all the pieces to the current puzzle fit as seamlessly as possible. However, more often than not, we try to use the same pieces in a puzzle that is constantly changing and find it simply doesn't work. Former CEO of eBay, Meg Whitman, in S. Sanghera (as cited in the Center of Applied Research, 2005) stated, "...companies used to have strategy meetings once a year. Now we have them every two weeks" (p. 1). Is it realistic to have strategic plan check-ins every two weeks with our campus or headquarters partners? Probably not. Is it realistic to check in early and check in often? Absolutely. The frequency of check in is dependent on the need and environment surrounding the situation. When a strategic plan is conceptualized, it is done so during a particular time in that organization or institution's history. The climate we work within will never be the same as it was when a strategic plan was developed. For this reason, we must take the initiative to gather stakeholders vital to the success of the strategic plan and remain transparent. Check in early, check in often.

The New Normal

Some people love change and some people hate change. We as professionals thrive on improving our organizations, campus communities, and members while challenging ourselves and others to be better than average. When developing a strategic plan and executing it, you will need the same passion. Stretching goals drive strategic out-of-the-box thinking, and while different organizations use different parameters, all of the best practice companies set targets requiring a shift from business as usual (Center for Applied Research, 2005, p. 2). If there is a shift in "business as usual," there will also need to be a shift in the resources provided. Strategic plan success takes a village: a village of people and resources. If there are changes to the original plan, the village needs to know. For example, if an institutional strategic plan requires a headquarters representative to attend an annual leadership experience, they need to know this as early as possible. Something to always remember, as mentioned before, is to over-communicate these expectations since we have high turnover and unfortunately, things may slip through the cracks during transition. We have to hold each other accountable if success is desired.

If an email is sent, and you never receive a reply, do you just give up? No, you follow up and continue to follow up until the desired outcome is achieved. We can't assume just because we have transmitted information it has been received and digested. As educators, we share the same vision, the same goal. We know our paths to that goal, or execution of a strategic plan may differ, but communication and transparency is key to achieving our shared vision. We are in this together. Remember, the key to planning is to have a plan.

References

Center for Applied Research (2005). A summary of best practice approaches in strategic planning processes. *TruGroup Strategic Planning Briefing Notes, 25*. Retrieved from <http://trugroup.com/whitepapers/tru-strategic-planning-best-practice.pdf>