

## So Your Students Have Been to a Conference/Convention/Institute/Insert Word Here...Now What?

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**Scenario One:** You just spent a week/three days/eight hours learning and growing during your leadership experience. You are excited. You are itching to get started making BIG changes, having a positive impact on others, and sharing the amazing fruits of knowledge that you have just gained. But...now what?

You get back to your campus/chapter/council bursting at the seams with ideas and information that will revolutionize the current state of your fraternity/sorority community. The first meeting rolls around and you spend two hours unveiling your new plan—a plan that includes a lot of changes. While you are envisioning the incredible outcome these changes will have, shortly after everyone else realizes you are proposing change, they shut down. Change is scary. They are overwhelmed by all of the information being thrown at them. They think you drank the conference/convention/institute Kool-Aid...

**Scenario Two:** You leave your conference/convention/institute and head home for the remaining six weeks of summer before the fall semester starts. When you first arrive home you are tingling with the urge to plan, organize, and check items off your to-do list. You realize the majority of your changes are on hold until fall semester and over the course of those six weeks little-by-little you start to forget what you had planned, why you had planned it, and how you were going to accomplish it. Now what seems important is a far cry from the plan you made for yourself at the conference/convention/institute that you attended a million years ago...

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Do either of these scenarios sound familiar to you? Unfortunately, as fraternity/sorority professionals we witness this phenomenon all too often. How do we ensure students' momentum continues once they return to everyday life? How do we assist in making sure that the students maximize their experiences after it is complete?

A good place to start is by reaffirming their experience; giving them the opportunity to revisit it. Making sure to help them understand that over the course of their experience they have learned things that have resulted in personal growth, growth that their fellow members have not yet experienced. Remind them that the experience they had was not about the icebreakers or the team builders but about the impact those activities had. "A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimension" (Holmes, n.d.).

Next, spend some time reviewing their plan. This will serve not only as a time to familiarize yourself with their goals, but also a refresher for those who may have forgotten some of what they set out to accomplish.

After you review their plan, ask them to set a list of outcomes. This is not your average to-do list. The common to-do list is made up of activities that need to be completed. Instead use outcomes, not activities, as goals. "Activities are not outcomes. When people confuse activities with goals, they get lost. They soon cease all pursuit of clear and compelling outcomes and results. They travel in circles. Instead of producing outcomes that matter, activities-based goals only produce more activities that in turn

produce still more activities, and so on (Smith, 1999).” Do not let your students fall into this trap. Instead, focus their energy on the outcomes and in turn, the results. While creating a list of outcomes it may become apparent that for each outcome they will then be able to build a to-do list of activities.

Next, have your student establish partners. This step will involve having many individual conversations—tough conversations. Encourage conversations in which your students will not only share their goals but will also have a chance to listen. While it is often difficult to extend ourselves to others, to relay our hopes and plans while putting our guard down, these are the conversations that will form the foundation for success in making their plan become reality (Wheatley, 2002). Find these partners in brothers/sisters, fraternity/sorority community members, chapter/council leaders, advisors, administrators, alumni, etc. In addition to establishing partners, you may also wish to have the student find a mentor (which does not necessarily have to be you). Ask the student to find someone who they trust and respect, someone who will hold them accountable while challenging them. These partners will be the individuals that assist in completing their to-do list and provide support throughout their process.

One of the most valuable resources your students have is their fellow participants and facilitators. Encourage them to stay connected. When they are struggling, need advice, or want to celebrate a small win have them connect using their leadership experience’s Facebook, Twitter, or listserv. When they are in need of an additional reminder of the positive change they are capable of, have them revisit their notes/workbook.

In summary, spend time reaffirming your student’s experience, review their plan, have them set outcomes, encourage them to establish partners, and remind them to stay connected. The task of staying on track after leaving a conference/convention/institute is a difficult one but hopefully these tips can help your students be successful in making the most of their experience.

## References

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- Smith, D. K., (1999). *Make success measurable! A mindbook-workbook for setting goals and taking action*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
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