

## Teaching Women about the Awesome Influential Power

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“Sorority women can solve all the problems in our community because they certainly don’t contribute to the bad behaviors; only the men do.”

As a fraternity man in college, it always appeared to me women could help fix the problems caused by fraternity men by standing up to make changes in fraternity/sorority communities. As a participant in fraternity/sorority roundtables dedicated to talking about community challenges, it seemed that many of these challenges were driven by the men’s behavior and the women felt no responsibility for these obstacles. Nonetheless, I found it frustrating that the women, who were not responsible for these discussed behaviors, were the most vocal and action-oriented in these settings. In documenting the group’s thoughts on the flip charts during these roundtables, I started to notice the drive of these women to make change. Yet I couldn’t help wondering, if the women were not the problem, why were they doing so much of the work to address the problem?

In order for our women to understand the power they have to make change, we have to help them recognize they DO contribute to those negative community issues. As a man in a woman’s world, I know women play a role in perpetuating those challenges we face in the fraternal movement. As someone who spends his time talking to women about the role they play in spring-boarding these behaviors, I also seek to empower them to understand the muscle they have to make positive change. Then we hit the wall! The immediate rebuttal is “The fraternity men have the power on our campus, so we don’t have anything to use to make change.” WRONG!

Moments before we hit this wall, I would have asked the group to describe sorority women. I hear words like independent, strong, fierce, intelligent, capable. Never once have I heard the word powerless. The portrayal of strength and independence juxtaposed with powerlessness is the constant narrative. “Because fraternities control the community” is the perpetual battle cry. In an effort to unpack this argument, I always ask “What skills, resources, or tools would they wish they had to make change in their community?” The answer is always influence.

As a headquarters professional and speaker, I find college-aged women across the country who undervalue the power of their influence in making change within their community. They don’t need influence – they have it! Yet they don’t know how to use it. By helping college women understand their influential power in their community, reduction efforts become possible. How

do we teach women about influence to see reduction efforts transpire? Implement influential skills.

1. **Consistency** – slow, steady, and *the same* wins the race. While this is the easiest concept to “get,” it’s the hardest to implement. Consistency is hard. When our women say “No more” to the fraternity who degrades women with poor party themes and language, their influence is made known. However, we have to help take that a step further and make sure it is not only for one week, for only one fraternity, or for only one cause. It has to be consistently applied to all areas over a period of time. This task can be arduous, but reaching this consistency level is the only way their influence will be realized.
2. **Treat Yourself like a Scarcity:** Remember that eternal teenager principle, “I want something more when someone says I can’t have it”? When our women’s groups treat themselves as a scarcity, they will require the men to work harder to toe the line of behavior most acceptable to the standards they wish to see for harm reduction. Nowhere is it written that fraternities are the only groups sorority women can socialize with. When we fill our calendar with other groups, including other sororities, we treat our calendar and our members like a scarcity, therefore making it clear if a group wants to collaborate – they had better follow the policies and procedures we are being asked to implement.
3. **Social Proofing:** This psychological phenomenon explains how people and groups assume the actions of others in an attempt to reflect “correct,” or what is perceived as “correct,” behavior for any given situation. Meaning, if the College Panhellenic Council can establish the expectations for safe social events and every sorority follows suit, we will social proof the men’s groups into community change. Men’s groups will see how the women expect events to run and then they will follow suit to correct behavior, or else they would not have much of a social calendar.
4. **Reciprocity:** We see a lack of reciprocity regarding philanthropic efforts. The rise of competition-based philanthropic efforts are creating fundraising goals well beyond many of our organization’s dreams. Nevertheless, when we use competition to count down to the cent of monies raised, women fail to demand that same engagement of the men’s organizations, even when these same women have raised several thousands of dollars during the men’s events. I understand sororities are often larger, and therefore, it feels impossible for a men’s organization to raise what their female counterparts

raised; however, effort goes a long way. Thus, I challenge fraternity men when I speak to think beyond the dollar amount and put in the work equivalent. In turn, women must recognize when their male counterparts are not reciprocating their money raising efforts.

Women in our communities can be the change agents when they understand their influential power to make change. Stop telling them to be the change agents because they are women — start inspiring them to be the change agents because they are influential leaders. Understanding influence means greater reduction efforts and healthier communities.