

Keynote Address by William Tallman  
University of Northern Iowa Greek Awards Banquet  
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I wouldn't be surprised if some of you are sitting there wondering what the heck Aviation Business Administration is, so I'll explain. It's a four-year degree that prepares you to say, "Checking any bags today, sir?" Sort of the aviation equivalent of "want fries with that?" My buddy Jeff got his degree in Aerospace Studies, a program designed to qualify you to sweep floors at NASA.

He works as a firefighter, and I'm in Higher Education, and we're both loving life. The moral here is, don't let your degree dictate your destiny, do what you love. Don't take yourself so seriously that you forget to do what you love.

And once more into the fray. I stand here before you as a fellow Greek, to share words that will hearten, uplift and inspire you. To give you a shot in the arm of sorts. In the medical profession, I know of no shot that a doctor can give, that causes her to wince with pain when she administers it, but the shot that I give here tonight is different. As I wrote this introduction, I could feel my pulse quickening with the anticipation of delivering it here tonight. In survey after survey, the one thing consistently named as people's greatest fear is "public speaking," and I'm no exception to this rule. No matter how many times I do this, I always experience the same intense anxiety just prior to getting up to speak.

To illustrate it on a fear scale: death is down here by my feet, skydiving 'nekkid' inside a sack of rattlesnakes is up here by my head, and public speaking is just a teensy bit above that. But that's good -- for a couple of reasons. First, it's good for you to face up to your fears, whatever they are. And doing so is the biggest natural high there is - when people talk about a "substance free event," they aren't counting endorphins, so this buzz passes FIPG policy. But there's a bigger reason why this anxiety is good, and I didn't realize it till the other day when one of my good friends, Mary Peterson imparted this wisdom on me: "The time you're not nervous is the time you don't care." I liked that a lot, it's a great way to look at it.

It was always my humble opinion that this part of a banquet, the speaker, is typically the lamest. The irony of the fact that I now am the lame part of the program is not completely lost on me, and I'm going to cut to the chase here.

So moving right along, we're going to talk tonight about 3 things: WHAT's great about Greek, WHO makes it great, and HOW do we keep it great? I will be adhering to a piece of wisdom tonight that was imparted by a speech teacher: the three B standard of public speaking: BE sincere, BE brief, BE seated.

And I'll share a few pieces of wisdom with you tonight. I'm a big believer in shared wisdom for two reasons. First, you can borrow all the wisdom you want from people, and nobody ever asks for it back, second, you can give away as

much as you want, and it never diminishes; if anything, the more you share it the more it grows.

What makes Greek great?

Growth. Wisdom. These are the things that make Greek life what it is. These are the reasons why we play such a vital role in society. We are social organizations, not so much intended for the purpose of creating social interaction - humans actually do that pretty well on their own; No, as Greeks we're sworn to building a society, one citizen, one brother, one sister- at a time. We have been entrusted to do this by our Founders, promoting personal growth and imparting wisdom to our members.

As an 18 year old guy, coming to school from single-parent family with no male role models to speak of, I had a lot of growing up to do, and the fraternity played a critical role in that process. After one semester, I had a booming 1.15 GPA in a major that I didn't particularly like-and worse, I was doing nothing about it. It took one of the older members of the chapter, a guy named Dave Cloutier, sitting down with me and having a hard talk about what I was doing and where I was headed to give me the courage and inspiration I needed to do something about it. Somewhere in the course of the conversation that night, I stopped being a passenger, and started being the driver in my own life. Without that dialogue, I would have ended up another statistic, just another among the many who start school and don't finish.

So gaining maturity is an example of one type of wisdom that I received as a member. There are so many others that Greek experiences can, and often do, impart. Some are intentional, like the lessons we teach our new members, and others happen to different people for different reasons, but the thing that all of these types of wisdom have in common is, they grow out of the experiences we have as Greeks, and from the challenges that we take on.

We say that we are better, and we should be. We work harder at bettering ourselves than most. We will go from here and make the world a better place in every imaginable way. As better doers, better thinkers, better business and community leaders, better neighbors and better moms, dads, aunts and uncles.

We get into habits in college that will last the rest of our lives. One of the best habits we can foster is that of learning. Take care to ensure with your educational programming that the common knowledge of the classroom is spiced with tidbits of uncommon knowledge through the Greek perspective.

I like to say, "A Greek should be able to administer first aid in an emergency, give a pep talk, avoid an argument, mediate one that's already in progress, order the perfect bottle of wine to complement the meal, say 'it's getting late, let's make this round a coke instead', run the PTA meeting, coach the little league team to a championship, get a dead car started, take away the keys when they need to be, answer the professor's question, speak clearly, know what's right-and do it, negotiate the salary they deserve, and make someone they love feel terrific without laying a finger on them. Because if we don't, who will?"

We are about education, but education in ways that the classroom simply cannot duplicate. All UNI graduates will leave with a diploma. I challenge you to ensure that all UNI Greeks leave with an education. We are the future.

Who makes Greek great?

People. We all have prominent alumni in our organizations, whether they are entertainers like Deana Carter, Cloris Leachman and Kevin Costner, Civil Servants like Elliott Ness, Ronald Reagan and Bob Dole, Authors like Dr. Seuss and Kurt Vonnegut, Speakers like Steven Covey and Eileen Stevens, or part of the first husband/wife team in space, like Astronaut Jan Davis. We point to these people proudly, as shining examples of what our members can do, and we are right to be proud of them and their accomplishments.

But to rest on the laurels of their achievements and bask in their glory is to forget the fact that we were exceptional organizations even before they joined. They bring esteem and honor to our names, but who did it before them? And the big question: Who will do it in the future?

We're celebrating some of those people here tonight; recognizing those who strive to make the most of their Greek experience, and to improve it for their brothers and sisters. I'm really proud to be a part of that.

And you should be proud too, because this is your Greek community. We are all equally responsible for its preservation and advancement, from the newest new member, to the oldest senior, from the junior committee member to the council president; we will all succeed, fail or rot in stagnation together.

Together. One of the great things about a community is the fact that high expectations are contagious. The German philosopher Goethe said, "If you treat a man (or woman) as he is, he will remain as he is. But if you treat a man as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be." If you do nothing else, have high expectations of yourself and of others in your chapter, and in the Greek community. Take the time to get to know whom your interfraternal brothers and sisters are, and let them know if they let you down. And especially when they make you proud. Something you should realize is, when you graduate, it'll be great to run into your brothers and sisters from your chapter and other chapters, but even meeting other Greeks, you will have a connection. Some of my closest friends come from Fraternities and Sororities I'd never heard of until after I graduated.

High Expectations. One time I was in a small group situation, doing an icebreaker where we all said our name, and what we did in our chapters, "I'm Jim, President, I'm Sandy, Treasurer, and this one person said their name and then, I'm nothing."

I'm Nothing? Another time I got to listen to a person explain that they didn't want to run for an office because they didn't want "the responsibility."

Maybe you've heard similar comments in your chapter or council. You may have even made them yourself.

Well think again, because here's the news: if you're Greek, by definition, you are NOT nothing, and you ARE responsible. That started the moment you got down on one knee, raised your hand, lit the candle, whatever – and swore before your brothers or sisters, your Founders and your God to not only live up to the ideals of your organization, but to advance them; the moment you were initiated. We've all already made that commitment. The only questions now are, will we honor our commitment? How will we honor it?

Subtlety is not a very strong trait in the fabric of American society. We're all about the big time; the bigger the better. We love heroes and big wins and shocking scandals and drama; and the little things, often the more important things, go unnoticed for lack of flash and appeal.

I think of formal vs. informal rush, and the fact that most chapters I talk to would rather take a 15 man pledge class in two weeks and have five drop out, than to take an average of one guy a week for the whole semester, and keep them all. It's the big win/hero syndrome. We want to hit the home run.

I saw an ad that read, "If you wait to be a hero, you'll never get anything done." True heroes are out there today, going unnoticed, and taking care of business. Going to class everyday and getting the most they can out of it, performing random acts of kindness, saying thank you, smiling, and just making this world a better place to be. Try finding a headline about that.

But there are rays of hope! Are there any TKEs in the audience tonight? Please stand if you are. Thank you, you're the type of heroes I'm talking about. I got sent a clipping from the Des Moines Register this week that made me proud to be Greek. You guys can sit. Headline: "Reaction to their brother's crisis doesn't fit frat-boy image." It's the story of a member of the Greek community here at UNI, Austin Kelly, a TKE Brother who was stricken with Guillain-Barre Syndrome, a rare illness where the body's immune system attacks its nervous system.

The story talks about Austin's illness, and his ongoing recovery, but also about the unexpected outpouring of support by his TKE brothers. A direct quote from Mrs. Kelly - "These guys are not afraid to say, 'I love you, and I will pray for you.'" That's Fraternalism. That's what being Greek is about. I guess my point here is, even if this story had never made it to press, if I'd never seen it, or if I'd not decided to mention it here, you would still be heroes, and your actions, heroic.

When we talk about the contributions that Greeks make its invariably in terms of "how much money our alumni donate to this school." It blows my mind. Interestingly enough, there is an ongoing research initiative into the impact of Greek life on students, and the preliminary results suggest that Greeks do not give significantly more money than non-Greeks. There is something else they've found though. The research suggests that Greeks give more of what is known as "social capital". In other words, we're more likely to volunteer in the community,

and sit on committees and serve on boards of directors. We give more freely of our time for the betterment of our community. And in reality, anyone can give money, but time is the most precious gift that can be given. To illustrate, if I give you \$1000, I can go to work, or to Vegas, and make that money back again. It can be replaced. But with time, once it's been committed, it's never coming back, no matter what you do, or how hard you work.

We've given one other a very precious gift, in that the time we share tonight can never be retrieved, and is gone forever. I feel like the time investment I've made with you tonight is the best investment I can make. I hope you walk away tonight feeling the same.

How do we keep it great?

In the book, "Built to Last" the authors discuss the concept of time-telling versus clock-building. If you had a talent of being able to look up in the sky, and tell the time down to the second, that would be pretty special. You'd be a time-teller. But if you could build a clock that would do the same thing, long after you were dead and gone, that would be even more amazing. You'd be a clock-builder. As Greek leaders, we're all currently time-tellers. We know how to get things done, and we do them. One day soon, though, you're going to leave this institution, and then what?

At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the framers of the Constitution got together to plan out our government. Generally accepted wisdom of the time dictated that we needed a strong national leader. In all other countries of the world, a strong king meant a strong country, and so it would have been predictable for our framers to spend their time deciding who would be the best man for President.

Instead, they focused their attention on creating a mechanism to ensure that we would have the best candidates for President elected consistently, from that point forward, long after they were dead and gone. The result was what is now known as the electoral system. They were clock-builders.

Whether your chapter wins awards tonight, or not - I challenge you to think tonight about who is going to win the awards next year. And the year after that. And after that... Think beyond how you're going to succeed next year, and think about how you're going to make success a tradition. Build the clock.

Show of hands, how many seniors in the audience tonight? Thanks for being here. I'm talking to you specifically now, but to all of you who will eventually be seniors. Retention of senior leadership is one of the biggest challenges facing Greeks today. Your knowledge and skills add immeasurably to the quality of our community. So stay involved.

Walt Disney spent the last day of his life in his bed, surrounded by people with notebooks, sharing his ideas and visions of how to create and develop DisneyWorld. He didn't check out early, he had things that needed to be done, and so do you. Think about what they are, and do them.

Don't let your experience end here. You have too much talent and skill to let it languish. Stay involved with your chapter. With another chapter near where you live. Heaven forbid, you volunteer with a chapter of another organization if they don't have yours nearby. Not just for the formals and reunions, come to roll up your sleeves and get dirty. Spend time at an alumni meeting. Ask about the chapter's grades. Get on their case if they're not up to par. And now, while you're still in school, LISTEN to the people who get on YOUR case. They do it because they care about Greek life, and they care about you. Megan and Tom, they're here because they care about you.

If you're like me, and you get a great benefit from being Greek, pay your dues and give back, so that others can have the same experience, or better. You owe it to yourself, and to the Greek community, and we need you. This business is not about policies and procedures and manuals. It's about people, and growth, and wisdom. We're the ones who make it great. If Greek is going to stay great, it will be us who give of our time to make it so.

I'm going to end now with a quote by William Arthur Ward, and a thought from a modern-day philosopher.

"I will do more than belong, I will participate. I will do more than care, I will help. I will do more than give, I will serve."

And my final thought:

Always tell the truth  
Say your prayers  
Hold Doors  
Pull out Chairs  
Easy on the Swears  
You're living proof that dreams come true  
I love you and I'm here for you.