

In his book, "Up Your Organization", Robert Townsend wrote, "There is nothing fundamentally wrong with American business today except for the fact that we are operating under all the wrong assumptions!" I believe that we can say the same thing about fraternity and, in particular, about what we call "Alumni Relations".

Over the last eighteen years as executive director and even before that as a Regent, Vice-Regent and "BB"; I have heard a countless number of undergraduates bemoan the lack of alumni support at their chapters. I can only assume that it was the same before my involvement as well. The ones to whom I have talked or, more recently, whose postings on the internet I have read, have claimed that, when they became alumni, they would support their chapters. Well, the current undergraduates are still saying the same things. Are not those countless members, who swore that they would be different and are now alumni, supporting their chapters like they claimed needed doing? Could it be, as undergraduates, that our expectations are unrealistic? Are there other issues? Well, here are some thoughts.

**Assumption: No one tells the chapters what they can do to solve the problem.**

To adequately deal with this topic would take more space than is available here. In fact, Delta Chi has four **BRIEFs** on the topic: Alumni Board of Trustees, Alumni Chapter, Alumni Newsletter and Alumni Relations. We also have a Founders' Day Manual that details how to plan, organize and host an alumni event. I feel safe in saying that, on average, there are at least three copies of each **BRIEF** (with the exception of the Alumni Chapter **BRIEF**) at the various Delta Chi Chapters around the U.S. and Canada and less than two members who have read more than one of those **BRIEFs**/manuals. Copies of all of these **BRIEFs**, as well as the rest of our non-esoteric written programming, are available for downloading on our website ([www.deltachi.com](http://www.deltachi.com)).

**Assumption: It is the responsibility of the alumni to come back and be involved.**

First, alumni relations is just that, a relationship. In the eyes of far too many undergraduates, the success of their chapter's alumni relations program is defined by how much money their alumni send them. When asked to describe a "perfect" marriage, undergraduates do a fine job of talking about the partnership, of both parties meeting each other's needs, etc. However, when asked to describe a "perfect" alumni relations program, most talk only in terms of what the alumni can be doing for the chapter. For any relationship to survive, it must be beneficial to all involved parties. Alumni can provide the undergraduates such things as mentoring, sharing of expertise in areas necessary for the functioning of the chapter, and good old-fashioned role modeling. They are a living illustration of the fact that fraternity membership continues after graduation and that the values and principles taught in the chapter have a very real application in the everyday world. But undergraduates need to improve their hosting skills, must be willing to say "Thank you", and need to heed the mature advice they receive. The house must be well kept and clean, no drug usage, no stolen property in the house, etc. In other words, the chapter members need to show that they are worthy of the alumni's support.

**Assumption: We don't need alumni support.**

A survey by the American College Personnel Association of undergraduate leaders of living groups were asked to rank functions most important for their advisors. They responded in the following manner: 1. Provide advice when called upon, 2. Teach techniques of good leadership and fellowship, 3. Provide continuity with the history and tradition of the group, 4. Help members develop self-discipline and responsibility, 5. Prevent the group from breaking university [and fraternity] rules and 6. Supply the organization with information, expert knowledge, and insight gained through experience. It is a rare undergraduate group that cannot gain from alumni involvement. There is reason to believe that a chapter that doesn't want alumni involvement is a chapter that needs it the most.

**Assumption: There's nothing in it for the alumnus.**

Alumni can benefit themselves by working with other alumni in helping a group of young men who are at a critical stage in their development. Alumni learn about motivation, working with differing points of view in trying to achieve a desired end and understanding others. They enhance their individual network within the community, often times establishing business relationships with others they meet through their work with a chapter. They can develop or simply enhance close, personal friendships that carry over to their personal lives. The development of a model for a healthy relationship between and among undergraduates and alumni can assist in the personal growth of all involved, while at the same time increasing the abilities of our chapters to more fully achieve their role of providing nurturing environments for our members (of all ages!)

**Assumption: One alumnus can fix everything.**

There are simply too many operational areas for one man to be expected to help with and still have time for a job and family! To enhance the potential for more alumni to become involved with our chapters, we need to avoid the appearance of alumni having to fill a "black hole" for the rest of their lives. We need to cut the pie into bite-sized pieces with defined parameters, ask for a one year commitment with an honorable "out" (and an opportunity to "re-up" if they wish!), and talk about their being a part of a team of involved alumni. Too many alumni avoid involvement out of fear of being the only one involved, spending countless hours running from one crisis to the next, and not being able to leave on their own terms if need be.

**Assumption: The role of an alumnus involved at the chapter level is understood by everyone.**

When you talk to undergraduates about their involved alumni, you often hear, "They aren't doing their job". When you talk to those alumni, you usually hear, "I don't know what they think I should be doing." Try the following. Have the chapter draft on one piece of paper a list of what they believe an alumnus in a particular position should and should not do. Then, on a different piece of paper, have them draft a list of what the chapter should and should not do in its relationship with the alumnus in that position. Concurrently, have the alumnus draft his opinions of the same items. Have a meeting where the lists are exchanged and mutually agreed upon lists of both sets of responsibilities are developed. One copy goes back to the chapter for review and adoption while another copy goes home with the alumnus for his, and his

family's consideration. Once there is agreement, copies should be signed and exchanged. Additional copies might be sent to other involved alumni, the Greek Advisor and Delta Chi Headquarters. Finally, each school year, the "relationship statement" should be reviewed, updated and reaffirmed. As the chapter expands and develops, the agreement will have to evolve with it. It should also be updated if the alumnus has any changes in his life (marriage, children, new job, etc.). This idea can work for an existing "BB", Faculty Advisor, or even an entire A.B.T. No more "I don't know what they expect from me/us" or "Why didn't he/they...?"

Alumni are volunteers, and we must understand the myriad demands on their time. Which is why we need to make it as easy as possible for them to be involved (letting them know of major events two months in advance; well organized chapter meetings worth attending and lasting less than one hour, sending copies of chapter meeting minutes when they miss a meeting, telephone lists, chapter visitation reports, monthly financial statements; providing with all supplies; etc.). Involve alumni in operations to the extent that both the alumni and undergraduates find mutually acceptable. Match each alumnus' skills with a specific chapter need (accountant-working with the "D", handyman-house maintenance, lawyer-contracts, etc.) because people enjoy doing what they are good at doing.

I would be remiss if I didn't caution some alumni to polish up on their coaching skills. There is nothing like doing something for free to make someone feel that they must be obeyed. No one likes to be told what to do and how to do it day in and day out. A well intentioned alumnus can quickly lose his effectiveness if he doesn't take the time to get to know the undergraduates as individuals and listen to what they have to say. In the process, the alumnus may learn something as well and a better decision than either may have reached separately is often the result. It is also important to realize that, many times, the way a decision is reached matters far more than the decision itself.

We need to realize that, when an alumnus gives of his time and resources, there are usually others that are "giving" as well. Every hour he is with us is at least an hour away from his family or significant other. That "gift" should not be ignored or it will cease to be given. Most everyone can accept a certain level of "community service" by an alumnus as long as that alumnus is clearly enjoying the service rendered and is being recognized for it (often neither of these are the case as alumni plod along in an unhealthy situation simply out of loyalty to a past memory or in hopes that soon things may change). Where personal relationships with the families of alumni can be fostered there can be direct benefits. Flowers to his wife, a baby-sitting service, a gift certificate to their favorite restaurant, etc. can also be important.

### **So, what about alumni in general?**

The vast majority of alumni will not be in a position to be directly involved with a chapter. This is usually due to their geographical location but sometimes simply due to other demands on their time and resources. Family, career and community work can all play into whether an alumnus, at a particular stage in his life, will interact with his chapter and, if so, to what degree. We must also realize that, given the wide

disparity in age between most of our alumni and the current undergraduates, expecting them to stop by for spontaneous conversation is a bit optimistic.

As a minimum, each alumnus should maintain a good address with the Headquarters and his chapter. At any one time, Delta Chi has over 8,000 "Lost" alumni and spends a sizable amount of money trying to track down or keep track of our alumni. Often, we will receive a letter from an alumnus stating that he has not been receiving the *Quarterly* when we show him as "Lost" at an address that is two years or more out of date. Sending in items for the chapter's newsletter or the *Quarterly* (marriage, birth of children, promotion, etc.) is also helpful. Obviously, a donation to the Delta Chi Educational Foundation and another to your local chapter in care of its ABT would be appreciated as well. When possible, just stopping by the chapter to say "Hi" is a big hit with most undergraduates although I have been told of many "horror" stories here. It is the obligation of the chapter members to keep their house presentable. When an alumnus or anyone else for that matter stops by, each and every member needs to walk over and introduce himself. Someone should offer to show the alumnus around the house. Someone should ask if the alumnus needs anything. The "E" should send him a thank you note for spending some time with the chapter. Time and again, I have received letters from alumni recounting where such common courtesies have been neglected, or worse, and stating that they will never again visit their chapter.

If you are involved with an undergraduate chapter, you can help yourselves by having everyone in the chapter and the currently involved alumni read those **BRIEFS**, and then hold a chapter retreat on how to be the best partner you can be in this relationship. Your alumni will respond. Maybe not at first since they may have been neglected or even mistreated up to now or have had too many false starts at a healthy relationship. This makes them reluctant to believe that this one will be any different. Don't take a short timer's attitude about all this. A strong alumni relations program is a way of life and can't be established (only begun) while you are in office or even while you are an undergraduate! Don't try to "fix it" for yourself as an undergraduate but for your chapter's future undergraduates. You will personally benefit as an alumnus for a long time to come if you do it right.

**Assumption: "National" doesn't do anything to help.**

What does Delta Chi as an international fraternity do to help regarding alumni involvement? More than most realize. In 1993, we adopted the Alumni Ceremony aimed at "initiating" our graduating members into alumni status. To date, 759 alumni have participated in the ceremony. The ceremony sends a clear message that a member's involvement in Delta Chi does not end at graduation. The *Quarterly*, probably the number one way alumni stay in touch with Delta Chi, costs more than \$50,000 each year to send mainly to alumni. Every Delta Chi with a good mailing address is sent the fall issue. The remaining three issues go to all undergraduate members, alumni out of school less than five years, alumni who have donated to the Foundation within the last five years, alumni who have asked within the last five years to receive the magazine and any "Lost" member we have located with the last year. We provide mailing lists or labels free of charge for Delta Chi purposes. We host alumni receptions at no charge to our members. Since 1980, we have waived

over \$150,000 in revenue from alumni initiations to assist our chapters with limited alumni involvement in increasing their alumni base. We have written those alumni materials mentioned earlier. Every time we do an Alumni Directory, we send a free copy to each chapter. Upon request, we send free mailing labels, alumni printouts and even copies of databases to assist our chapters and alumni groups in contacting the alumni. We have put on alumni training workshops. Through our chapter visitation program, we have discussed alumni relations and programming with countless alumni and undergraduates. Every new "BB" receives a congratulations letter with a handout on how to work with his chapter and an outline of the responsibilities of every officer. We offer several awards for alumni and alumni programming to indicate the value we place on them. Please realize that the concept of a job placement service (usually the first alumni programming idea everyone thinks of) jeopardizes our single gender status and that is why we have not tried to coordinate such a program.

We would like to do more but we are dealing with limited resources. In every fraternity, undergraduates make up the overwhelming source of revenue. Even in fraternities noted for alumni services this is true. To put it on a chapter level, you will be hard put to get any chapter's alumni, on a year-in-year-out basis, to give to the chapter an amount of money that could touch what the chapter could generate from simply filling its house and collecting its dues. The difficult impact to measure, of course, is the degree to which additional money spent on alumni would increase alumni involvement and, therefore, the strength of programming at the chapters. There is a thought however that, like rush, it isn't the money you spend but the one-on-one effort that counts. Alumni simply don't base their involvement or donations on how much money you spend on them.

There's another point. To start spending money on alumni programming, we either have to stop spending the same amount on the undergraduates and/or raise the fees we charge to the undergraduates. There is no free lunch. Every time we do something for the alumni, the undergraduates get to pick up the tab. What we have been trying to do is to service the undergraduates as much as possible. Expansion and dues increases have been generating the revenues to do this. We have felt that the alumni, if faced with the choice of our increasing services to them at the expense of the undergraduates, would tell us to service their chapters first. That, for the most part, is what we have been doing.

If our undergraduates get what they ask for - involved alumni, then they may be surprised by what is expected of them in return. Compliance with their advice. No one wants to put forth time and effort only to be ignored. Compliance with the law (no under-aged drinking, no drugs, no sexual misconduct and no hazing). No alumnus should have to waste his time or risk his reputation because someone else is unwilling to comply with the basic principles of Delta Chi. Responsibility is a two-way street. If he has done an outstanding job, nominate him for an award from Delta Chi or make up one, or more, chapter awards yourselves! **COMMUNICATE!** Thank them for the hours of counsel and the wisdom of experience. Do not assume that they know you appreciate them...prove it.

## SIDE BARS:

### Sample Hierarchy of Interests/Needs:

- Family (wife, children, relatives)
- Job or profession (and related peers)
- Religion
- Local community activities
- Personal leisure
- And then comes Delta Chi—maybe

Once Delta Chi has become a part of the priorities, you need to find out what the basic interests of the alumni are:

- A desire to continue friendships developed in school.
- An interest in the status of the chapter.
- An interest in the institution, higher education and Greek life in general.
- A desire to see and visit fraternity friends on special occasions.
- A willingness to actively serve the fraternity within certain conditions.

If possible, involve these interests in the appeal. In addition, most alumni want to feel *needed, useful and appreciated*. A skillful use of these concepts will massage his ego especially if the hierarchy of interests, limited time, and conflicting obligations, are consistent with the time he has to spare.

## ALUMNI TURN ONS

- A clean chapter house and gentlemanly character of the undergraduates.
- Adequate notice of events (4-6 weeks for regular events and 8-10 for special events).
- Events starting on time.
- Acknowledgments (thank you notes, phone calls, mention in the newsletter, etc.) of contributed time and money.
- Old scrapbooks, newsletters and recent awards.
- Being invited and involved with the Ritual.
- Contact by other alumni who they may or may not know. Either way the alumni are more on the same level with each other no matter what the age.
- Improving the image of the chapter/Fraternity.

- Opportunity to help young people develop.
- Pride in being a Delta Chi.
- BEING ASKED! Benjamin Franklin said, “If you want to make a friend, let someone do you a favor.”
- Staying in touch with old Delta Chi friends.
- Making new Delta Chi friends.
- Activities and progress of the Fraternity.
- Enthusiasm of other involved alumni.
- Regular communication through a quality chapter newsletter.
- Personal and professional networking opportunities.
- Reminiscing about Delta Chi experiences.

#### **ALUMNI TURN-OFFS**

- Loud music.
- Dirty and poorly maintained chapter houses.
- Last-minute invitations.
- Sitting or standing around an alumni event with nobody talking to them.
- Requests for money, especially if this is the only contact the alumnus has had with the chapter in a long time.
- Not being thanked for attending or contributing time and/or money.
- Banquets.
- Going somewhere without his wife (perhaps even his children). Note: even if the wife attends, she may do so reluctantly because she will not understand what the Fraternity means and she will not know anyone else. The chapter must take the time and effort to make her feel welcome.
- Meeting strangers at social events.
- Local jokes.
- Foul language/off color humor, especially in front of wives, children and other guests.

#### **IMPULSES & MISCONCEPTIONS**

- Never assume that the alumnus has an abiding interest in Delta Chi.

- Some students want it (whatever “it” is) NOW. Be patient. It takes time to generate and keep alumni interest.
- Do not attempt too complex a program for alumni involvement.
- Do not assume the alumni will drop everything to come running back to the chapter. Timing is everything; never plan an alumni event during the winter holidays.
- Do not be disappointed if only a handful of alumni attend an event—even if you have invited several hundred or there is a low response rate to a solicitation letter (of any type). Average participation is about 4-7%.
- Some students expect the alumni to come to the chapter on their own. While open invitations to stop by anytime are nice it usually takes a special event and a specific invitation to get someone to take the time out of their schedule and/or away from their family.