

The following is an article on recruitment that appeared in the fall 2003 issue of Theta Chi Fraternity's magazine:

From the Executive Director

Brother to Brother

By Dave Westol (Beta Zeta/Michigan State '73)

Soon after the completion of Disney World in Orlando, Florida, a visitor remarked that it was too bad that Walt Disney, the creative genius and CEO of his company, did not live to see the opening of the huge park. Mike Vance, Creative Director for Walt Disney Studios, replied, "He did see it—that's why it is here."

At Chapter Leadership Conference X, held at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in July of this year, an undergraduate member of our Fraternity made much the same observation about our Founders, Frederick Norton Freeman and Arthur Chase. Looking around the auditorium filled with undergraduate and alumnus members for a general session, he said, "I wonder what Freeman and Chase would say if they could see us now."

Our answer: "They did see us here."

Our Founders saw far beyond the snow-covered parade grounds of Norwich University and the granite hills of Vermont on that chilly April evening so long ago. They saw a national organization, the expansion of our brotherhood, the development of our Fraternity, and the leadership education that is so critical to our advancement. They saw a Fraternity with chapters across North America.

And, they saw the need for bringing more men into our brotherhood. Two more men were initiated into our Fraternity within one day of our founding. Theta Chi increased by 100% within 24 hours. It is a lesson that we must reiterate each and every year.

It is recruitment these days, and not "rush." Regardless of the term we use to describe the process, the result is either "Good" or "We could have done better/not so good."

During the past twelve years, men's national fraternities have undergone what a financial advisor might call a "Market adjustment"—the term often used to characterize a downturn in the price of stocks after a rally or an anomaly in pricing. The adjustment for Theta Chi has been a gradual decline in initiations each year. The reasons for the decline are not difficult to identify. The condition of chapter houses, image, perception, hazing, the emphasis upon alcohol...have all played a role. Our adoption of alcohol-free housing is one response to that decline.

At the same time, we have an anomaly within that downturn. Expansion or the recolonization of inactive chapters for Theta Chi and other men's national fraternities has been accelerating. More groups of young men have stepped forward to say, "We want to be a chapter of a national fraternity." Our recolonization pipeline is nearly full for the next two years at campuses at which we once had active chapters.

And, when asked why they would choose to undergo the labor pains of starting or recolonizing a chapter, the young men say, “We don’t want to be hazed, and we want to be a credit to our Fraternity.”

What can we, as undergraduate and alumnus brothers, extrapolate from these seemingly inconsistent findings?

Theta Chi Fraternity and other men’s national fraternities continue to offer something that many young men want to experience. But, if there was ever a time that we—alumnus and undergraduates—need to work, and work together for recruitment, the 2003-04 academic year is that time.

Alumnus members have the advantage of seeing the techniques and procedures from recruitment being used in life. If you are looking for an opportunity to give back to Theta Chi, your participation in recruitment education and recruitment are needed.

Recruitment is...no excuses.

Take every excuse you may hear about a poor recruitment effort – everyone of them. Write them down. Crumple the paper or wad it into a ball. Burn the paper. Now, we’re ready to get going.

Excuses for a poor recruitment or rush effort have one common aspect. Every excuse has been used for years and recycled.

“*No one did well this semester on our campus.*” Yes, someone did. There is/are always one, two or three fraternities that did very well. When that fact surfaces, the excuse *du jour* is “*Well, they took anybody they could. We got quality.*” Nope. It doesn’t work that way. Quantity and quality are usually indistinguishable because good men, and the chapter that does well in recruitment also does well in quality and caliber of men.

“*The IFC didn’t publicize recruitment.*” IFC is not an acronym for, “I’ll Fill Chapters.” **We** are Theta Chi Fraternity. The chapter and charter are **ours**. It is our responsibility to recruit New Members – the lifeblood of the chapter, as so often is stated.

“*We didn’t advertise/put up posters/signs/_____.*” Recruitment is not a passive endeavor. Signs, ads in the campus paper, posters, and email announcements do not bring forth significant results. Getting out, meeting people, introducing them to fraternity life and then to Theta Chi is the key. And, that’s not easy, especially for members who are much more comfortable sitting in their rooms with their PlayStations and waiting, in vain these days, for scores of underclassmen to storm the chapter house, demanding to know how to join.

“*We just don’t do well in _____ semester*”, or “*You don’t understand our campus. The student paper/faculty/administration/residence halls hate us.*” Aside from the agonizing generalities, how do other groups begin on the campus if every person’s hand is against the Greeks? The semester or quarter has nothing to do with recruitment. *You* control how you do. We control how we do.

Recruitment is...a direct reflection of the chapter philosophy.

I was once asked to work with a Theta Chi chapter in the Midwest that had maintained a membership in the low to mid-twenties for at least a decade. Year after year, the chapter lived on a ragged financial edge, with members who spared no effort in finding excuses for why the chapter could not recruit. We had recruitment visits, special meetings, recruitment training sessions, and retreats. Nothing seemed to work.

In reality, the challenge was to replace the “c” in could with the “w,” as in would not recruit.

I sat down one evening with eighteen members, seventeen of whom were thoroughly indoctrinated into the philosophy of the chapter. The recruitment chairman, who in my opinion was born with two adrenaline glands, sat at the far end of the line of chairs in the living room, tapping one or both feet on the floor and shifting restlessly in his seat.

I asked a simple question of the members. “What is the best or optimum size for this chapter in terms of membership?”

One by one, the members recited the politically correct answer for the chapter. “Twenty”...“Maybe twenty-five”...“I think twenty-two to twenty-three.” One member broke ranks and said, “Thirty,” only to receive gamma ray glares from older members who were accustomed to dealing with smart-aleck suits from the Headquarters and their annoying questions but didn’t want anyone from the chapter breaking ranks.

Meanwhile, the recruitment chairman could barely contain himself. When his turn arrived, he stated, in a strong and positive voice, “Sixty!” And (I thought to myself) how glad am I that I recertified in CPR, because I am going to have to administer the procedure simultaneously to seventeen undergraduates who were gasping for breath.

The chapter did not face insurmountable challenges in recruitment. The chapter was located on a medium-size campus with a number of other Greek letter organizations and enjoyed solid support from the administration.

The challenge was simple. The chapter members did not want to grow the chapter. They liked things the way they were. They liked “small.” They liked low expectations. They liked being the proverbial last guy chosen for a team. An increase in membership would mean changes, challenges, expectations, and improvements. Nope! Give us that good old status quo.

When the membership began to grow, when the vision and energy of the recruitment chairman began to turn into reality, the chapter began to succeed...in IFC, intramurals, regional and national awards, and recognition. The members – those who wanted improvement – chose their New Members carefully, and the results were gratifying. Membership reached the mid-seventies. The correlation between size and quality is not automatic. But, when a chapter grows, and grows with good men, it is readily apparent to everyone, and especially to alumni.

Recruitment is...hard work.

There is no magic bean, button, or wand. There is no shortcut. Recruitment is work. Recruitment is stepping out of your comfort zone and making friends. It is becoming a good listener. It is being on time. It is following up on promises. It is being honest. It is being a friend.

A chapter will never succeed at recruitment by waiting for men to visit. Our chapters that succeed in recruitment do so because they understand what it takes to succeed – time, effort, energy, enthusiasm, commitment, attention to detail, and...

Recruitment is...a collective will.

I’m often asked how to motivate undergraduates to recruit. Sometimes I am asked to “Motivate” a given chapter. My response is the same for both requests. I can’t

motivate our undergraduates to recruit. Motivation is internal. It starts with the individual and ends with the collective will of the chapter.

Every year, or so it seems, one of our Leadership and Education Consultants becomes the “Recruitment Guru.” Last fall, it was Sean Bailey, from our Alpha Psi Chapter at the University of Maryland. In 2001, it was Brian Murphy, from our Theta Delta Chapter at Santa Clara. Tom Tinnin, Epsilon Phi/Central Missouri qualified as a Recruitment Guru when he was a Field Representative and again during his time as a Regional Counselor.

The qualification process is simple. Have a successful recruitment effort with a struggling chapter or a recolonization or expansion effort, and suddenly you are “Da Recruitment Man.”

Brian Murphy recruited eleven men at Lehigh in the fall of 2001 to begin the rebuilding process for that chapter, and within weeks I had alumni corporation presidents contacting me. “Send us that guy!” they said. “He’s the one we want to visit our chapter.”

Brothers, we would like to send our Consultants to every chapter, every semester. In reality, we can’t. However, even if we could, Brian, Sean, and Tom would tell you that there was no magic in their approach. They recruited men like themselves, and then provided coaching and encouragement.

There are some things you can do to bring the will and focus of your chapter to bear upon recruitment.

First, hold a Recruitment Retreat or meeting. Three hours is plenty. Get out of the chapter house. Hold the meeting on campus in a classroom. Bring at least two large flip charts, markers, and tape.

Set the tone. A good opener is to bring the large composites from the past five years. If membership is declining, it will be readily apparent. How many pet dogs and iguanas will be used, along with expanding the size of individual photos, to fill up the once-crowded composite and make it seem “full”?

Use the Theory of Capacity. Go back five years in terms of recruitment and New Member classes. Calculate: How many men joined each term or semester? How many were initiated? And, how many remained involved and engaged in the chapter and/or lived in the chapter house for two years? If your average is four out of ten, you’re doing average. Many chapters will not meet that standard. List the names, year by year, on a big sheet of paper. And watch the faces of the current members. The composites the names...it begins to sink in. This is our chapter. If we don’t recruit, it won’t be around.

And that is motivation, from inside the lines.

Now, let’s talk Recruitment.

Success in recruitment is validation. It is confirmation. We have a good chapter. The fact that other men want to join validates our commitment – our passion for Theta Chi and our chapter.

Now, what factors influenced your decision to join Theta Chi? Ask the question. Get the answers. Write them down. There will be plenty of repetition, and that’s okay. The same things that brought us to our respective brotherhoods ten, twenty, or thirty years ago apply today.

Friendship...humor...energy...the leadership you can see in members. Social and intramurals have their place, but remember the quote from Ty Willingham, the Head Football Coach of Notre Dame, to his assistant coaches on the recruiting trail. "Recruit character first, and talent second."

Then, ask this question. "There is always one guy – one brother – who influenced your decision to join our chapter more than anyone else. Who is that brother?"

There will be repetition, simply because the best recruiters are also the consistently loyal members who take up the cause. Then, you ask those members who were named as the reason why others joined – "What's your secret? What magic did you use?"

Of course, the answer is, "There was no magic. I called back. I didn't give up on someone. I made a point to greet him at each event. I remembered his name. I answered his questions. I listened. I made sure he had a ride to our events. I made sure he knew our expectations, and that I knew his."

There's your magic. There are your techniques and the Right Ways to Recruit. And, all we did was listen to ourselves for three hours in a room of brothers. No Powerpoint, no \$2,000 ads in the campus paper, no wasting hours putting up posters.

Recruitment is...Honesty.

I am not surprised that we have some members who conceal the initiation date for that semester. Saddened, but not surprised.

I am not surprised that some chapters do not provide a comprehensive and detailed outline of the New Member program, with dates, times, and expectations for New Members and for members. Saddened, but not surprised.

But, the questions will always remain. Why not tell men who are interested in joining our Fraternity and our New Member program in detail, and the date of initiation? Why not explain the definition of hazing to them, and then look them right in the eyes – in the eyes – and say, "Those practices are not a part of our Fraternity, nor our chapter." Why not talk about expectations for all members, because you will only spend a few weeks as a New Member, but a lifetime as a member? Explain that we have only one standard in Theta Chi Fraternity, for all members and New Members.

Why not, indeed...unless, you can't answer those questions. And if you cannot, then you and I know what must be done to bring about the changes so you can look a prospective brother in the eyes and say, "You will not be hazed, in any way. We don't believe in hazing. There is no such thing as 'constructive hazing.' There is no such thing as 'hazing with a little h.'" We respect you. We respect each other. We respect our chapter and our Fraternity. Hazing has no place in Theta Chi."

Whenever I speak about hazing, I ask the audience, "How many of you like liars?" The usual response is that no one likes liars. I then say, "If you haze, you are lying during recruitment." And, sadly, hazing attracts the guys who will compromise our chapters in other ways, and drives away the men that we want as brothers. We end up admitting the men who are taught to believe that you earn your badge once – after you survive being hazed. We drive away the men who believe you earn your badge every day, whether it be as a New Member, an undergraduate, or as an alumnus. Some of those men see the concept of fraternity so clearly that they form colonies of other men's national fraternities.

The keystone in the arch of recruitment is *honesty*. Honesty attracts men with vision and energy. Honesty is part of the 'character' that Coach Willingham described. Honesty is inherent in The Creed of Theta chi and our Ritual. It is trust. It is the Helping Hand.

If we work at recruitment, and accept no excuses, if we commit ourselves to doing the very best that we are capable of, and if we recruit the best men, with honesty and integrity...then we will succeed.

And if a chapter has but two men remaining with vision, integrity, and energy? I can think of at least one other chapter that succeeded and persisted for more than one hundred years that began with just two young men, and one dream.

Recruitment is...a reflection of our dedication, pride, commitment, and energy. We will control the course and direction of our chapter in 2006 and 2007 through our recruitment this semester. We are whom we recruit.

If you are reading this column as an alumnus member, and you would like to give something back to your chapter...recruitment is a good place to begin!

Thanks –

Dave