

Crisis Rush

Although the title of this article seems to address those experiencing difficulty in rush, do not underestimate the value of its contents as most of the following words apply to rush in all circumstances. Having clarified the usefulness of this information, imagine the chapter in despair. A desperate situation which is potentially threatening to the Fraternity's survival. A set of devastating circumstances which surfaced quicker than any brother would have thought feasible, even predicating a worst case scenario. Clearly, the situation at the chapter is grim. In fact, the state of recruitment is in... crisis. The problem. Not enough members due to unsuccessful or insufficient recruitment. This problem may or may not be accompanied by a multitude of secondary problems: Too many seniors graduating (curse them for leaving us), too much attrition in membership (brothers going inactive; who needs them anyway?), low associate member retention (more weak guys we don't need), financial debt and a strapped budget (It's a fraternity, not a business, right?), university or college probations and sanctions (Oops), the same probations from the International Fraternity (pass the salt), empty beds in the chapter house (everyone gets a single!), chapter without a house and a poor campus image to bottom off this depressing list of blunders (and rationalized excuses), foibles, and other discouragements.

"Where you come from is not nearly as important as where you are going"

Well, the good news is that the bad news is not the problem at all. However, the bad news is a symptom and result of the chapter's real malady. The sickness which plagues the chapter is a subtle phenomena that is commonly overlooked as members react to the onslaught of its symptoms. As the chapter is caught up in addressing symptoms, the illness continues to spread. But now rush is here. The immediate concern of the chapter's survival. Quickly, the chapter needs a cure, an end all, fail safe solution to all its problems so it can make it through this rush successfully. Is there such a cure? Is it too late for cures? What is the real problem? With some bit of digression we can address both the problem and its solution.

"We more frequently fail to face the right problem than fail to solve the problem we face"

What is rush? Perhaps this word has meaning to members of the Greek System, a mere two percent of our society. Rush may be an outdated term for what fraternities used to describe as a process of gaining new members, the annual advent of prospective members scrambling around campus in a desperate attempt to gain admittance to one of the few campus fraternities. Nowadays it seems as though these "rushees" have vanished. How did this happen? One word, "economics." In the beginning there were few fraternities and many prospective members. Chapters had their pick of future members. In fact, there was really little to do in the way of actually recruiting new brothers. Times have changed, but the process of joining has not. Specifically and economically, fraternities have responded to the demand by increasing supply, which has more or less resulted in equilibrium. Now there are enough fraternities for all those interested in joining, so rush has really become more a recruitment process. Right? Wrong, rush has become recruitment, but there is still plenty of room for fraternities to expand. With interest at sixty percent and membership at only twelve percent, fraternities continue to fall far short of meeting the demand. Attitude, not economics or rush regulations, is the primary reason that recruitment falters.

But we're really trying. Well, every NFL football team is really trying (and getting paid lots to try) to win, or even make it to, the Superbowl. Not every team gets there. It takes more than effort. Some teams have better athletes, better coaches, better fans, better stadiums, better uniforms, better experience, and better attitudes. The trick is finding out which of these factors matter, and which factors we can control. I don't think (and neither do you) that the other fraternities have better members. I know they don't have more General Fraternity support (coaching). They may have

better houses (stadiums), but nobody joins a fraternity for the house alone. Who cares if they wear nicer clothes? But they may have better fans and they probably have a better attitude, and these we can improve.

“Don’t confuse activity with productivity.”

Competition. In most cases the competition is not the other Greeks. With only twelve percent in the Greek System, the competition is most definitely beyond the Greeks. Look toward the residence halls, parental misconceptions, time commitments, academic concerns, girlfriends, etc.. This is what the competition is really about. Don’t exclude the chapter to just those men going through the formal rush process. Recruitment is a full year job. Meeting people and making friends, which is what recruitment is all about, should be happening every day. The only constraints on meeting people are those you make.

If rush is really recruiting, how can we possibly market and advertise something as intangible as the fraternity experience? Well advertising and selling intangibles is a marketing executive’s dream. Ask any advertiser what he would rather sell: a brightly decorated aluminum can containing twelve fluid ounces of carbonated water with some flavoring and a nifty opener that comes with a handy plastic carrying case with a purchase of six - or - the intangible experience associated with the immense pleasure one feels when tasting such a delectable soft drink? You’ve watched some TV. You get the point. In many ways, the intangibles of fraternity are its biggest and most effective selling points. We simply must learn how to market these. First, we need to understand what the intangibles are.

Like other areas of fraternity operation, recruitment can also be seen as business. If fraternities were corporations, recruitment would include several typical business departments: advertising, sales, marketing, and public relations to name a few. Most companies use a measure called the advertising sales ratio to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing expenditures on sales increases. Fraternities could benefit from this line of thought. If the recruitment budget is to the advertising budget as the new members are to the company’s sales, fraternities can also measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their dollars spent. This is just one way recruitment mimics the business operation that fraternities should enjoy.

Getting back to the discussion of those things the chapter lacks, we recall several deficiencies: house, money, image, and members. Rather than waste a lot of precious time arguing why these symptoms are irrelevant, just remember back to the time you accepted your bid. Was it because they had the best house? Was it because they had metal cylinders full of fermented grain? Was it because they were rich? Was it because they were popular? Was it because you met someone or several brothers at the chapter that you got along with in a way that made you feel like you wanted to be called their brother? Of all the reasons and excuses we rationalize to explain why recruitment has failed, we so often forget that the ONLY reason men join is because they made friends with someone at the chapter. Naturally, some of these other amenities may initially attract men to fraternities, but the reason they take a bid has nothing to do with amenities and everything to do with making friends. Never lose sight of this.

Overcoming the pitiful symptoms a chapter faces leads us to the problem. The symptoms are the result of imbalance. They are unbalanced because anytime the negatives outweigh the positives, the end result is a decrease in chapter motivation, self-esteem, pride, confidence, and the enthusiasm that is absolutely essential for successful recruitment. No matter how bad things are, we must never forget that the only necessary part of a fraternity is a close association of college or university men. In this, there are always positives. All too often we know the problems, but lose sight of the positives. Not to ignore problems, but recruitment is certainly not the time to be imbalanced by focusing too closely on discouragements. No one wants to join a losing team or a sinking ship. Recruitment needs self-esteem (S), confidence (C), enthusiasm (E), motivation (M), and pride (P).

If the chapter doesn't have these, get or make them. Again, the problem is a fraternity experience and resulting group norm that has become too engrossed in the negatives. However bad the symptoms are, there must always be more positives or the chapter will never make it. Positives and negatives are not so much absolutes, but rather states of mind.

"A wise man is master of his mind, a fool will be its slave."

Developing SCEMP takes diligent effort, sometimes it must be forced. Identify the positives and turn negatives into positives. Start using those rationalizing skills for something more useful than excuses. Ask the chapter: "Why should people want to join this fraternity?" This question must be answered many times until a lengthy list is created. From this list develop a deep understanding of the positives. Define the intangibles, apply them to different situations, and use them in persuasive points. To understand a topic thoroughly we need more than just a mental grasp of it. We need to express it with verbal communication and written explanations. Take the reasons for joining the chapter and do just this. Ask why reason number one is better in a fraternity than a residence hall or commuting. Then ask why reason number one is better in Delta Chi. "But, it's not" is never an acceptable answer. Force a rationalization if necessary. The value of an exercise like this is not so much in its product (the list of reasons), but rather in the active learning process of doing it, SCEMP happens.

Keep in mind, there is no magic. No magic handshake; no magic event, theme, slogan, or poster. Only attitude and perception: SCEMP. A recruitment retreat is the perfect forum for taking some time to identify the positives, the selling points that motivate the members and revive the fraternity.

Once the chapter has the right attitude the men need to use it. Remember, making friends effectively is what recruitment is all about. Attitude helps, but practice makes it perfect. Understanding our inherent clumsiness in inter-human personal contacts will provide a helpful awareness to remember when meeting new faces. Through our socialization process, we are actually discouraged from making friends. Consider some early lessons from our parents. "Don't touch that, it's hot... hot." And hot it was, so hot we actually listened to that early piece of parental advice. They told us another thing. "Don't talk to strangers." We never even tested this one, bought it at face value and never forgot it. Today, it's an unfortunate hindrance on our ability to meet people effectively. Be aware and overcome it. Be aware of how the new person feels as you sense the group dynamics of a casual conversation. Eliminate those invisible, but extraordinarily thick, barriers we tend to create around our circle of friends in the fraternity. Think about how you've felt when placed in a situation where everyone was already friends with everybody else... except you.

Initial personal contacts are challenging, but this is the lifeblood of your fraternity. Rather than wait for "rushees" to maybe come knocking on your door, take a bold step and recruit some prospective members.

As many students have preconceived misconceptions about fraternities, we need to take care and be sensitive to those as we meet people in the recruitment process. Talking about the prospective member's perceptions and relating those to the real fraternity experience can be helpful in alleviating non-truths. Thinking back to the reasons we have for joining are also good topics to discuss as the fraternity experience relates to them a great deal.

When making friends, there are several things to remember. The chapter wants to make the prospective member feel comfortable. Make him feel like he is a part of the group. In fact, everyone should have a good time during the recruitment process. Learning his name, the sweetest sound to his ears, and letting him talk are very important in making him feel comfortable. Avoid making bold impressions and competitive gestures. These do nothing to make him feel comfortable. Getting the prospective member to talk is not always so easy. Keep asking questions

and don't give up. As soon as he opens up on a topic, get him to someone he can relate with better. By all means, don't run out of questions and don't fill in the dead space with long monologues about what your fraternity has to offer. In fact, the vital information and chapter statistics should be written on a cover sheet to be passed out when guests ask specific questions. This way, we can save the facts for written accuracy/consistency while having more time to concentrate on making friends.

Allowing the guests to do most of the talking has two advantages. One, it makes them feel welcomed and important that the chapter is interested in them, their thoughts, opinions, hobbies, and ideas. Two, it allows the chapter to make the crucial recruitment decisions. If the brothers do all the talking, the guest just listen (hopefully) and decide whether or not they like what was said. If they do all the talking, they have a good time, and the brothers get to decide who will get a membership invitation. But keep in mind, it is much harder to be an active and interested listener than a speaker. The brothers must be genuinely interested in what their guests have to say. Ideally, recruitment conversations should be mostly a mutual decision making process, with equal conversing from both member and guest.

All of this making friends stuff takes practice. No one is naturally good at it. Diligent practice, role-playing, and a rush workshop can facilitate the learning process necessary to effectively make new friends.

Finally, if there is time, write the recruitment program down, and by all means take time to evaluate its effectiveness and efficiency. Recruitment is the most important aspect of a fraternity's success and many times the key to its survival. Recruitment is not one man's job, it deserves everyone's constant attention.

“Destiny is not a matter of chance; it's a matter of choice.”