

From Hazing to Health

By Dan Wrona

The origins of hazing reach as far back in history as the Greek culture which fraternities celebrate. Since it first emerged, offenders and opponents have wrestled with its place in an organization. Hazing has evolved in form, scope and severity throughout the centuries, and we now face a time when it is especially threatening to fraternity life.

Today's issues extend beyond concern for legal liability and physical, emotional or social harm. Hazing erodes the fraternity's ability to be successful. Imagine a spectrum that ranges from a healthy, top performing chapter on the high end to a dysfunctional, underperforming chapter on the low end. Many characteristics of the dysfunctional chapter will match the hazing definition; hazing is simply a legally defined point somewhere between a healthy and unhealthy chapter. Examining the factors that determine a chapter's health provides answers about how to move away from hazing towards a stronger chapter.

Barriers Prevent Brotherhood

Initiated members often wedge a barrier between themselves and the pledge class. This typically appears as pledges having fewer privileges, sitting in the back of the meeting room, wearing prescribed clothing, having limited access to the house or walking everywhere together. The intent of this separation is to build pledge class unity, but it actually creates a barrier that prevents a sense of unity from forming among the entire brotherhood. Although it is a natural reaction to preserve the group identity, successful chapters take every step to avoid this by bridging the divide rather than exaggerating it.

Double Standards Create Apathy

Apathy is a frequent problem, and it is often instilled during new member education. It begins when members heap impossible expectations on pledges and then wait to confront them for missing class, forgetting their pin, skipping an event, forgetting the Greek alphabet or making an inappropriate comment. Meanwhile, the same initiated members are frequently delinquent in dues, commonly absent, in academic distress and rarely held accountable for their behavior. The main intent of this double standard is for new members to prove their worth and learn responsibility, but they really learn to work hard until initiation so they can slack off. Healthy chapters reverse this dynamic. They keep a close watch over members, insisting that they lead by example while allowing pledges the chance to practice and prepare for fulfilling the oath of membership.

Creating New Traditions

Just as in business, technology and life, we learn new insights that help us become more successful with time. Having learned these lessons, we can now put them to use to develop new traditions that will carry the fraternity through the 21st century.

Undergraduates take cues from those admirable alumni who came before them in the chapter, so do your part to lead Phi Mu Delta into the future. Encourage members to break down barriers and bring members and new members closer together. Give new members the chance to make mistakes. Hold members accountable to the principles of Brotherhood, Service and Democracy to send a clear message that we expect greatness. Pass the torch to future leaders as they build a healthier fraternity and create new traditions that will keep Phi Mu Delta relevant to incoming students for years to come.