

Ritual: Ceremony or Living?

Developed by
Mari Ann Callais, Ph.D.
CAMPUSPEAK, Inc.

What Does Ritual Mean To Fraternities and Sororities?

1. Is it just a ceremony?
2. Do our rituals have an impact on our members' behavior?
3. Is it just something that is just part of the experience?

How Do You Teach Ritual? You have to talk about it – you must make it a part of the chapter experience.

How Can Initiation Be More Effective and/or Meaningful For the Chapter? Practice the ritual!

How Can We Help Chapters use Ritual as part of their Disciplinary Process? Use your promises to hold one another accountable – not just rules and policies.

Chapter Education

1. Have them talk about the meaning
2. Encourage members to read the ritual ceremonies
(Many of them do not even realize that they can read their ritual books)
3. Have them take equipment out and talk about it, talk about the ceremony in everyday language.
4. Have an alumni/alumnae member come in and explain the connection between ritual and lifetime commitment

New Member Education

1. Discuss the meaning of ritual
Collegians are always concerned about ritual being secret – they do not prepare the new members for the ceremonies and explain that most of the ceremonies connect to one another and have meaning
2. Have the new members talk about what they feel ritual means and why their organization has ritual

Suggestions on How To Teach

1. Encourage them to have a ritual review
2. Encourage them to have a ritual run through
3. Ideas concerning preparation:
 - A. Have chapter members review their own vows before the ceremony
 - B. Have the new members write letters to themselves prior to the ceremony
Give them back on their senior year Founders' Day
 - C. Use RBCs/RSCs as an educational tool (Developed by Sigma Chi Fraternity)
 - D. Have them talk to new members about ritual prior to initiation - could even begin those discussions at the beginning of the new member program
4. Encourage them to watch the Sharing Our Ritual Video - National Interfraternity Conference
5. Have the chapter as a whole conduct a post initiation discussion
6. Use the "Cool Symbols, So What Do They Mean to Me?" Activity (Developed by Mari Ann Callais, Ph.D.)
7. Use the Pin and Flag Activity

Ships Are Safe In Harbors But...

From Delta Chi Fraternity's Magazine

These are difficult times indeed for chapter officers. At no other time in the history of American College fraternities and sororities have our undergraduate leaders faced a more bewildering array of challenges and choices. Risk management, hazing, behavior, alcohol and drug use and abuse, suicide, charges of anti-intellectualism, of sexist and racist attitudes. This is truly a time for strong officers-young men and women who can make a decision, and stand by it. And, to make a decision in the best interest of the organization, as a national fraternity or sorority.

Sometimes this means making a decision, which is unpopular. Sometimes this means making a decision, which runs counter to the feelings of a majority of members. Sometimes this means making a decision which only a few support, or which a loud, vocal minority will decry as "dictatorial".

A fraternity chapter president has a large, framed poster in his room. The poster was a copy of a painting of a ship, anchored in natural harbor. The harbor scene was tranquil – sun beaming down from a cloudless sky, sailors sprawled about the deck of the ship, which was a large, three mast schooner, other sailors wandering through the village built into the walls of the cliffs which formed the harbor.

Outside of the harbor, however the scene was quite different. A stormy sea was depicted, with low gray and black clouds hovering over huge wind-whipped green waves. Rainsqualls and bolts of lightning completed the scene. The caption under the scene on the poster was simple. It read,

“Ships are safe in harbors but that is not what ships were made for.”

Our officers often have two choices which match the scenes depicted in that poster. The first to take the popular scene, the politically sensitive position, to always follow the majority opinion regardless of the consequences and then to shrug and say “Hey, the brothers/sisters voted – what could I do?”

The second choice, sometimes far more difficult, is to do the right thing. That may mean unfurling the sails, battening down the hatches, sailing out into the storm. It isn't easy. It isn't fun. But it is the right thing to do.

Doing the right thing doesn't always mean acting in a way that runs counter to the majority. It doesn't mean confrontation or arguments. Sometimes, it can be done in a quiet, calm manner. The important thing is to do it.

Our undergraduate officers look out on more storms from their harbors than ever before. It is good to know that more and more of our officers have sailed out from their harbors and through those storms, because it is what they were elected to do. And we are a better Greek Community for their courage and leadership.

ATTITUDE

"THE LONGER I LIVE, THE MORE I REALIZE THE IMPACT OF ATTITUDE ON MY LIFE. ATTITUDE, TO ME, IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN FACTS. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PAST, THAN EDUCATION, THAN MONEY, THAN CIRCUMSTANCES, THAN FAILURES, THAN SUCCESSES, THAN WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK, OR SAY, OR DO. IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN APPEARANCE, GIFTEDNESS, OR SKILL. IT WILL **MAKE OR BREAK A COMPANY...A CHURCH...A HOME. THE REMARKABLE THING IS WE HAVE A CHOICE EVERY DAY REGARDING THE ATTITUDE WE WILL EMBRACE FOR THAT DAY. WE CANNOT CHANGE OUR PAST...WE CANNOT CHANGE THE FACT THAT PEOPLE WILL ACT IN A CERTAIN WAY. WE CANNOT CHANGE THE INEVITABLE. THE ONLY THING WE CAN DO IS PLAY ON THE ONE STRING WE HAVE, AND THAT IS OUR ATTITUDE...I AM CONVINCED THAT LIFE IS 10 PERCENT WHAT HAPPENS TO ME, AND 90 PERCENT HOW I REACT TO IT. AND LET IT BEGIN WITH ME."**

CHARLES SWINDOL