

(Hopefully) Sage Advice from a First-time President

By Martin Totland – Alpha Chi Rho – Pace University

To head up an organization of twelve men without any prior experience can be a daunting task, and it inevitably brings with it some challenges. Although overwhelming at first, I ultimately found it a rewarding experience to be President of the Pace University Colony of Alpha Chi Rho. Here are some of the methods of acclimatizing that helped me.

Having returned to school in New York after a nine month absence, I found myself in the unexpected position of being elected President of the Colony. At the beginning of the semester, the former President had to abdicate, so to speak, due to various time constraints and academia-related issues. I had been absent from New York and the Fraternity for a long time due to the Christmas holiday, a semester spent studying abroad and a summer break. I willingly accepted the nomination for President despite having been away for so long. I wanted to make up for my absence in a way, and I had a feeling I could help the Fraternity.

As an international student from Norway, I initially had almost no idea what Greek life was about. For a while it was strange concept to wrap my mind around. And then, after having gotten comfortable and used to the idea, I took off for nine months and returned to end up as my Colony's President. I had previously held the position of Sergeant-at-Arms, so I had at least an iota of experience with the responsibility of holding a position. President, however, was something entirely different.

As President, I noticed that the other men in the group seemingly instinctively would look to me for answers. There seemed to be some gravitas that came along with the title of President. Despite that we all knew I had never been President of anything before, I was now the go-to-guy for any and all questions regarding the Fraternity, or so it seemed. What turned out to be a challenge for me was to understand that it was now on me to know or to find out if I didn't know the answer to their inquiries.

After recognizing and accepting the idea that I now had to put in more of an effort than I previously did the position became easier to handle. While I ought to have been more cognizant of the expectations, it seems that this is something every Chapter/Colony President – nay, every leader – can benefit from, make yourself aware from the onset of what is expected of you and get to know it. It will not only make your job easier, but it will make it easier for the other officers too.

Another way to make the job easier is to start thinking in terms of the group's benefit rather than your own. This concept might be unfamiliar to some as most of us are used to running our own lives and making decisions based on your own circumstances. While useful in that context, it won't do much for your Fraternity. While some experienced people might scoff at such seemingly novel advice, it really isn't as obvious someone inexperienced. It is really helpful to ask oneself what befits and *benefits* the group when dealing with Fraternity matters.

Additionally, I would like to point out the importance and usefulness of attending National events, such as Conclave and National Convention. Besides being an entertaining congregation, scores of Brothers have a lot of accumulated experience and advice. All you have to do is ask.

Case in point: the last time I attended Conclave I attended a workshop for Chapter Presidents. During the sessions we shared advice on how to effectively run a Chapter. A Brother, whose name unfortunately escapes me, explained how looking at your E-board as a 'team' was very helpful. This team, he said, was someone you should trust, they should trust you, and you should work tightly together to accomplish the goals you set. Make sure they have your back, and make sure it is worth having, so to speak.

It is important to acquire the correct state of mind to be a leader and to work cohesively with your Brothers. It is also incredibly important that you all help one another get used to the fact that you must think of the group first in regards to Fraternity-related matters. Progress will slow down as soon as there is serious dissent. I've seen that happen in and outside of Greek life. Justified dissent should always be taken seriously when making decisions. It can come from a personal disagreement or observation. That is why it is important that everyone is on board.

I read a quote, attributed to no one in general, that said "Fraternities are the fuel that allows common people to produce uncommon results." To run with the analogy, an engine will only run smoothly if all the pistons are firing correctly. Make sure yours does.

