**Isler Speech [EZ Speech No. 16254]**

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Remarks Micaela Isler as incoming national president of the Alpha Xi Delta Sorority.

[if you’re introduced, thank the introducer, then pause for a beat or two silently “scanning” the audience.]

[declaratively] Nothing good remains good unless it’s constantly being improved. [*beat*]

this is the philosophy of “continuous improvement,” and you could say that it’s not only the motto, but the guiding principle for everything we’d like to try to do at alpha xi over the next [no. months/years].

now, i think michele and her team did a terrific job in guiding our sorority through a somewhat difficult period over the last [no. months/years]. in particular, i’d point to [list two or three of your past president’s successes/accomplishments]. this was all great stuff, and we owe a huge debt of gratitute to you, michele, and [first names of the other members of the senior leadership team] for a job well done. [leading the audience in applause] thank you!

now, it goes without saying that no leadership team worth its salt ever gets done all the things it wants to get done during its term in office. ask any president of any organization. there are *always* areas — programs, policies, processes, procedures — that’re left to the next admnistration to tackle. so let me tell you where i’d like to see *our* continuous-improvement goals focused during our time in office.

i think we’ve certainly got to look at *both* sides of our business as a national hellenic organization — the recruitment side and the services side. i think we’ve got to look at more effective strategies our chapters can use in dealing with the inevitable — and sometimes quixotic — ups and downs of the recruitment market — a problem that’s only been exacerbated in recent times by the shrinkage of on-campus student populations nation-wide, because now folks can get their degrees — anything from a bachelor’s to a doctorate — entirely online, no campus required!

there remains, too, the very real and practical problem of chapter staff turnover. It’s hard to maintain continuity of service when the cast of characters changes every year. i think we need to explore ways of making our chapters better at performing as “learning organizations.” these are organizations that archive their experiences effectively and make it easy for others to build on them, and to learn all lessons possible from both the organization’s failures and its successes. in any case, i think it’d be worth some serious discussion time among the leadership team to identify ways that we might be able to help our chapters compensate effectively for the inevitable discontinu-ities inherent in our governance and operational structure.

On the other side, the services side, where we translate member fees into member benefits, i also think there’s room for improvement, or at least for some strength-ening. and bear in mind that everything we’re going to look in the services area will also enhance the recruitment effort, as well, because any time you can improve the product you bring to market, you’ve got a good chance to improve your market share.

okay. so lemme look first at recruitment. Like all sororities and fraternities, alph xi needs a constant influx of new members. As I noted, it’s becoming harder and harder to meet this challenge, not only because of campus-population shrinkage, but also because of such factors as rising student debt and perhaps a growing pulic skepticism about the whole “hellenic” thing in the first place. “Should i, or shouldn’t I?” is a question high school grads are finding increasingly difficult to answer with respect to joining a sorority or fraternity.

now, it’s been some time since alpha xi’s leadership announced the organization’s firm commitment to a “quality-not-quantity” recruitment policy. our sorority has long had the metrics to measure the quality and judge the character of prospective members. many of our chapters have done an excellent job in adhering to these standards; others not so well.

i totally understand that every chapter has a “nut” to crack each month, and that this nut’s got to get paid largely out of member dues. i understand that fewer members means less dues, and less dues makes the nut harder to crack. but that *cannot* be an excuse for lowering our acceptance standards. character counts. past behavior counts. our reputation counts. and remember: we’re not *required* to accept anybody.

so one of the things we’re going to be especially vigilant about in our upcoming chapter visits and regional meetings is compliance with our “quality-not-quantity” policy. but at the same time, we’re also going to be exploring ways in which national can directly and meaningfully help our chapters overcome the real and threatening challenges they face in terms of recruiting new members in this day and age.

so here’s one of things we’re thinking about: either on our own, or in partnership with, say, [name a potential brother-partner fraternity], produce a witty, maybe even “star-studded” video, called “*why go greek?*” that gives a brief history of fraternities and sororities in america . . . extols the virtues of the hellenic life, both on and after campus . . . is rife with alumni quotes and testimonials . . . and deals head-on and honestly with the myths and realities surrounding the “bad rap” hellenic societies are still laboring under in many parts of the country today.

copies of the video would be made available to every chapter and every alumna working in our recruitment drives across america. if we pulled this thing off right, i’d say there’d be at *least* a 50 percent chance it could viral; and with alpha xi delta’s sponsorship tag at the beginning and the end of the video, i don’t think there could *be* a better advertisement or more powerful recruitment tool.

*“why go greek?”* would be aimed at improving boosting recruitment directly. And so, too, I believe, would a stricter enforcement of our “quality-not-quantity” recruitment standards because, in the end, quality people want to live with quality people, it’s as simple as that.

but now let me move to the “services” side of our agenda, and here again I’d reiterate that everything we’re thinking about in terms of improving member services and enhancing member benefits will, through [pantomine “air quotes”] “gilt” by association, hugely benefit recruitment. the more features and benefits you’re able to offer your customers, the more likely they’ll be to choose *your* brand.

Now, i think one of the things national is best positioned to do for our chapters is to provide unique and effective training programs, in the form of live, stand-up seminars and workshops, which they could offer free to their members, a couple-three times a year.

i know . . . i know: it seems ridiculous to even *consider* such costly interventions in the age of the internet, but i’m personally not a big believer in online training. online education, yes. online training, no. Think of the difference this way: if you had a kid in school, would you rather she’d be given a class in sex education or a class in sex training? [if there’s a laugh, don’t “step” on it.] Effective training is *live* training, it’s *hands-on* training, it’s highly *interactive* training, and its effectiveness is based on the power of group dynamics, which is impossible to capture on the “interwebs.”

so . . . what kinds of “trainings” are we considering? i think there are two areas, in particular, in which alpha xi could enhance its member-services profile. One concerns the growing crisis in student indebtedness across the country; and the second focuses on the persistance on too many campuses today of sexual assualts and sexual harassment against women.

as for the issue of student debt, i’d like to explore the creation of a 2- to 3-hour. live, instructor-led workshop entitled, *“how to handle your debt before it handles you!”* we’d work with experts in the field to put together an interactive workshop which would provide participants not only with lots of practical tips and suggestions about all the strategies and resources available to them to help them map out a workable repayment plan. we’d provide an online directory of these resources, organized by state, and the workshop would guide participants in using these resources effectively. It would probably also provide some cautionary tales to motivate participants to take their student debts seriously and commit themselves to paying it off.

finally, i think we could also develop a powerful and effective awareness and motivational workshop called *“standing up / fighting back,”* dealing with the issue of rape, sexual assult, and sexual harassment on campus. the principle goals of this workshop would be, first, to help participants identify potentially troublesome behavior or negative character traits in men they might be thinking of hooking up with; and second to give them the knowledge and the courage to report any assaults to the proper authorities. this is a highly sensitized and stygmatized issue, but this is *exactly* why i think this kind of awareness training is so vital; and it’s also why it requires the privacy and intimacy of a very small workshop setting, with no more than perhaps 12 or 15 participants.

now, i’m very well aware that developing instructor-led, live training and then disseminating it throughout a nationwide organization of some 130 chapters will be a very expensive thing to do. so will producing a 12-minute video on the “greek” life. But when you consider the specific topics we’ve identified — hellenic life, student debt, and sexual harassment — i’m thinking that there’s got to be any number of corporate and foundation sponsors — including, for example, the national hellenic association and any number of “women-oriented corporations — who’d be very interested in associating their name with these projects, all of which would offer a continuing nationwide exposure for the underwriters.

so the question is: whaddaya think? any of these ideas sound good to you? any of ‘em sound horrible to you? the thing is, we want and need your input as we finalize our agenda for action this year. toward this end, we’ve added a new “*agenda for action*” link to our “contact” page, and i hope anyone here, and all alpha xi members, chapter officers, staff, and alumna nationwide will use this link specifically to comment on these ideas, and/or to suggest others of your own. emails submitted through this portal will land directly in my inbox; and I assure you i’ll read every one. i can’t guarantee i’ll *act* on every one. but you can bet I’ll read ‘em all.

with that invitation, i’ll close my remarks with my sincerest thanks for your attention. thank you.

[wait for applause]

now i’d like to turn our meeting over to [etc.].

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