
Chapter Retreats

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHAPTER RETREATS

Some may wonder why a Chapter needs to conduct a retreat, especially when things seem to be going well.

Even the best Chapter needs the opportunity to step back from its day to day operations and take a close look at itself - where it has been, where it wants to go, and how to get there.

Retreats are ideal for these purposes:

1. They help prevent outside distractions, so time is more efficiently spent, and the Brothers can seriously reflect on matters important to the Chapter.
2. Because the Brothers are away from comfortable surroundings, they focus more intently on what is occurring.
3. They provide an opportunity for your Chapter to evaluate how well you did in reaching previous goals, and set new goals.

4. They give the Chapter a vehicle to objectively identify its strengths and weaknesses.
5. They allow you to get things that need to be discussed out into the open in an environment where no one has any advantage.
6. They help a Chapter that has lost touch with its basic purpose and objectives to regain sight of them.
7. Retreats provide an excellent bonding opportunity.
8. They create an atmosphere for creative thinking and new ideas.
9. They give all Brothers a voice in the operation of the Chapter.
10. They strengthen Chapter unity, improve spirit, recognize leadership, and motivate Brothers to get involved.
11. Chapter retreats are an excellent promoter of Brotherhood and a great time!

THE IMPORTANCE OF A FACILITATOR

While the VNR-Membership Development and other Brothers can and should be actively involved in every aspect of the Retreat -- planning, booking a facility, etc., etc., there is a crucial need for the Chapter to involve an outside (non Chapter Brother) facilitator.

An outside facilitator provides the following benefits:

1. Experience with which to help the VNR-Membership Development develop a successful program, including topics, handouts, and exercises.
2. An unbiased attitude toward all Brothers and no previous knowledge of cliques or internal chapter politics. This encourages participation by all Brothers because they are speaking to the facilitator, with whom they should feel comfortable.

3. The initial attention and respect of all Brothers, which will help keep the meeting focused, and from being negative in nature rather than positive.
4. An objective viewpoint that will force the Chapter to examine itself by pointing out rationalizations and excuses.

These attributes are very important in keeping your retreat focused, productive, and fun for the Brothers.

GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER RETREATS

Design:

These guidelines will assist you in planning and coordinating your Chapter and officer retreats in a manner that will best accomplish the results you want. They will clarify the retreat's purpose and suggest organization and follow-up ideas.

Responsibilities:

The VNR-Membership Development and a Retreat Chairman appointed by the President are those responsible for preparing a successful Chapter retreat.

The VNR-Membership Development has the responsibility of insuring that the Chapter holds a retreat once each year, and that it accomplishes what it has intended to accomplish.

The Retreat Chairman organizes the logistics of the event.

RETREAT PREPARATION

Determining the Purpose:

The VNR-Membership Development, with the help of the Executive Committee, needs to describe in detail the Chapter's needs that should be satisfied by the retreat. Such an exercise is one of the most important steps in planning your retreat.

State clearly and positively the exact purpose of the retreat. What is the retreat's goal(s)? What do you wish to accomplish?

You may have more than one purpose, but don't spread yourself too thin. Start out to accomplish what you can realistically attain, while still presenting a challenge to the members of the Chapter.

Organization:

At the beginning of a semester you should:

1. Appoint your Retreat Chairman at the earliest possible date;
2. Select a date, time, and place as early as possible;
3. Promote enthusiasm for the retreat among the Brothers;
4. Post notices around the house or meeting place and vary their location. Announce the retreat several times. Be enthusiastic and positive;
5. Collect facts and data for use in your Chapter's evaluation prior to the retreat. The goals set at the last retreat should be measured against the progress made.

Time and Duration:

The timing of your retreat and its duration are important factors in its overall success.

The date(s) should be planned and announced as early as possible to allow maximum attendance. The date(s) should not conflict with football weekends, exams, etc.. The retreat should not be held right before or over a vacation period as the interruption causes the Chapter to lose focus on its goals.

Suggested times are:

1. Fall:
 - A. Freshman Orientation;
 - B. Immediately after Thanksgiving;
 - C. Prior to Fall Membership Recruitment.

2. Spring:
 - A. Prior to Spring Membership Recruitment;
 - B. Following Spring Break.

The length of the retreat depends on three factors:

1. The amount of material to be covered;
2. The amount of time available;
3. The willingness of the Brothers to spend the time.

The first two can be controlled, but the third depends entirely on your ability to organize the retreat and motivate the Brothers to participate enthusiastically.

Shorter retreats are used primarily for routine goal setting and

evaluation. Extended, overnight retreats are, in general, used when a Chapter needs a thorough "housecleaning" or examination of the full range of their purpose and goals.

Shorter retreats need only a room or rooms to hold sessions and appropriate refreshments.

Overnight retreats call for sleeping facilities, meals, and recreational facilities.

Location:

The effectiveness of a retreat is often influenced by the location at which it is held. The best results are obtained when a retreat is held away from the Chapter house and from campus. However, this isn't an absolute necessity.

Of course, finances dictate that a Chapter probably won't go to a location that is too fancy or that has distractions of its own.

Some ideas for retreat sites include a lodge or farm in the country, campsites, local hotels or motels, or the house of an alumnus.

RETREAT ACTIVITIES

The following are some techniques and exercises that will help you accomplish the objectives of the retreat. All of them are designed to get the Brothers in attendance to think, react, and respond to a structured situation.

Role Playing:

Role-playing represents a useful technique for developing skills in dealing with people and illustrating problems. It provides an area in which examples of three types of roles - social, psychological, and physical - can be played out in a contrived and relatively non-threatening setting.

Through the process of role playing an individual will also gain insight into himself and his behavior as he participates in a situation according to his own needs and perceptions.

He begins to see and understand how he reacts in what may be unfamiliar settings and can gain actual experience in learning to see things and situations as others do. Observers also gain from this activity.

The VNR-Membership Development should select one or two of the following structured situations. Individuals can be selected to participate and identify with particular characters and act out the role spontaneously.

When the action stops, a discussion of the event should be centered around the problem that was presented and the behavior of each of the participants. You may then want to break the large group down into small groups of eight or ten men each.

Each group should move to separate parts of the room or to other rooms to consider solutions to the problem. The larger group should be reassembled and each group asked to report their findings.

1. **Situation #1: Membership Recruitment**

A. VNR-Membership Recruitment:

The four men in the room are the youngest Brothers of your Chapter. They are potentially strong recruiters since they know the underclassmen well. You want to answer all their questions to the best of your ability and give them enthusiasm for the recruitment process.

B. Brother #1:

You are thoughtful and reflective. What you need is material on the fundamental arguments for joining a fraternity other than for social opportunities.

C. Brother #2:

You are excited about fraternity life but fail to understand why living in the fraternity house is better than dorm living, and you know others will raise the same issue.

D. Brother #3:

You are willing to go out and recruit for the Fraternity, but you are not particularly persuasive and have never sold anything in your life. Ask the VNR-Membership Recruitment how to recruit.

E. Brother #4:

If this Fraternity is as good as everyone says it is, and if the Greek system can afford to be selective, why go out and beat the bushes for people? Is all this recruitment needed?

2. **Situation #2: The Chapter GPA**

A. Scholarship Chairman:

Your Chapter average has not been too bad, but the freshmen seem to be having trouble academically. Somehow, all the emphasis on social adeptness and fraternity spirit implies that the Chapter is not interested in educational competence. You are talking to the VNR-Membership Development and want to make detailed plans on how to successfully attack the problem.

B. VNR-Membership Development:

How many things can one guy teach at a time? Everybody gripes if the new Brothers aren't gung-ho for social events, aren't around the Chapter house enough, aren't learning about our history. Sure, academic performance is important, but that's the University's problem, not yours. If you can be persuaded that it is part of the Brotherhood Program, you'll cooperate; if not, then it's someone else's problem.

3. **Situation #3: Drinking**

A. Perpetually Drunk Brother:

You drink almost every day, usually ending up fairly drunk and obnoxious. The other night you showed up at a party very drunk. You did two things which alienated everyone there. First, you went over to a sorority house and started shouting obscenities. Then, about an hour later, you became ill in the front entryway of the Chapter house.

B. Chapter Noble Ruler:

You are in a bind. You know that the Chapter is very angry with the drunk brother. Certain key Brothers think this is the "last straw" with this brother, since he has already been warned several times to behave himself. Yet, you realize the guy has emotional problems that could really blow up if things aren't handled delicately. On the other hand, you have to protect your rights, the feelings of the brother and the Chapter also. You are undecided on how to handle this serious situation.

C. Senior Brother:

You are leading the Brothers who are demanding that the brother be thrown out of the Fraternity for his continued

drunkenness and obnoxious behavior. You contend that he has been warned several times and that each time he promises to behave, and then is soon back to his old tricks. You and many of the Brothers are fed up with this childish and inconsiderate behavior and are demanding that he be expelled from the Fraternity.

4. **Situation #4: House Duties**

A. VNR Management & Operations:

You are a forceful person with strong concepts about the obligation of every Brother to pitch in and help the cause. Besides, the alumni board are now down on you for the state of the second floor halls and bathrooms. The problem is a pair of would-be rebels up there. They just won't do their house duties at the assigned times, if at all, on the grounds that they have more important things to do. You have just met them in the hall and are going to talk with them. You approached the executive committee last night and they asked you to handle the situation in hopes that no official action would need to be taken. If you fail, they will take over and use force.

B. Two Non-Cleaners:

The place is getting ridiculously regimented. Both of you are pacifists, and this ROTC type house manager issues orders like a master sergeant, expecting everyone to jump. Well, you won't. It's one thing to pitch in and do your part of the job; that's reasonable. It's another thing to have this loudmouth pushing everyone around at will. You really have no choice but to resist him, on principle. If this Chapter is really for men, it's time that it started acting accordingly. You are disturbed and angry over this constant harping on something so unimportant.

5. **Situation #5: Factions Within the Chapter:**

A. Chapter Noble Ruler:

Meetings have been grueling lately, and bull sessions have been worse. The Chapter is badly divided between factions representing different interests. The jocks, the party boys, the would-be scholars, the musicians, and the professional fraternity men are constantly belittling each other. You find a mixed group and try to discuss the situation and what can be done to clear up this mess.

B. Five Other Brothers:

Assign these roles among yourselves. It should be easy enough to assume a wishy-washy position in which you defend your preferences and accuse the others of not appreciating the contribution your friends make to the Chapter. Each of you is defensive and easily agitated. One of you is a jock, one a party boy, one a serious student, another a "good 'ol boy", and one is a rah-rah fraternity man.

Brainstorming:

Brainstorming is basically a concentrated effort toward problem solving. The process is very simple and leads to excellent results when carried out properly. The steps are:

1. The main group is split into a number of smaller groups of seven to ten.
2. Each subgroup selects a spokesman/recorder. He records all ideas of the group.
3. State the problem.
4. Ask the groups for solutions.
5. DON'T criticize any solution. This encourages creativity and will give you a broader range from which to select a solution.
6. Write ALL ideas down. One idea may trigger another, maybe even "the" solution.
7. Once done, the spokesman spends five to ten minutes with each other group, explaining his group's ideas, listening to the ideas of others, and bringing them back to his group.
8. The whole group reassembles, and each spokesman gives a brief report on the ideas given.
9. The whole group then selects one or more solutions to the problem.

Small Group Discussion:

Break the group into smaller groups. Give each group a set of questions from one of the categories listed below.

Discuss answers in the whole group.

1. Membership recruitment:
 - A. How effective has our recruitment program been in the past? What is the basis for this conclusion?
 - B. How many men have we initiated in the last two recruitment periods? How does this compare with other fraternities on campus? What percentage of the men we recruit do we initiate? What percentage of our bids are accepted? What percentage of the male agricultural students do we recruit? Can we improve? How?
 - C. What criteria do we use to select a new Brother? How would we define a "quality" rushee? How many of our Brothers fit this description? Should we develop (or review) the criteria we use to judge the men we rush?
 - D. If our program is highly successful, why is this so? How can we make it even more effective?
 - E. If our recruitment program is ineffective, why? How can we make it more effective?
2. Brotherhood Education:
 - A. What is the purpose of our Brotherhood Program?
 - B. Are we accomplishing this purpose?
 - C. What emphasis should be placed on scholarship in our program? How can we do this?

- D. What is hazing? What are the disadvantages of hazing?
 - E. What improvements can we make in our program?
 - F. How can we ensure that positive effects of the program are long lasting?
3. Scholarship:
- A. Is our scholarship "good" or "bad"? What criteria are we using to judge it? Are those criteria the correct ones?
 - B. If we judged our scholarship good, why? How do we continue this?
 - C. If we judged our scholarship bad, why? How can this be corrected? What is the best plan of action?
4. Finances:
- A. Is our Chapter in "good" financial condition? What is the basis for this conclusion?
 - B. Is collection of Accounts Receivable a problem? If so, what are the causes and how can they be corrected?
 - C. What improvements can be made to our financial condition?
 - D. What should our financial commitments to each other include?
5. Alumni Relations:
- A. Do we have a good alumni program? Why?

- B. What, besides money, can be gained from strong alumni support?
 - C. Why do graduates lose interest in Fraternity after leaving school? Can we improve this situation?
 - D. What improvements can we make in our current program?
6. Campus and Community Relations:
- A. How are we regarded by non-fraternity students and the school administration? If negatively, what are the causes?
 - B. How would improved relations affect the Chapter? What can be done to accomplish this?
 - C. How are we regarded by other greeks? How can we improve our reputation?
 - D. What recommendations can be made toward a "total" public relations program?
7. Brotherhood Involvement:
- A. How well organized are we as a Chapter? Do we get things done when and as they should? If not, why?
 - B. Is Brother motivation a problem? If so, how do we get them more involved and enthusiastic?
 - C. To what extent are Brothers involved outside the Chapter, in the community, and on campus? How would increased involvement affect the Chapter?
 - D. What recommendations can we make concerning improved Brother involvement and morale?

Idealized Design:

This is a great activity for getting around self-imposed constraints and allowing the Chapter to realize its full potential.

Too often our conception of what is possible limits the goals we set. Our ability to achieve is thereby limited by what we believe to be possible. Too often we are moved by what we wish to get rid of instead of by that which we wish to achieve.

We walk into the future looking at the past, concentrating on our problems instead of our goals. This is not the formula for success.

The Brotherhood should be asked to describe what they would like their Chapter to be, given only one constraint - if it were brought into existence, it could survive.

Let them wrestle with the usual issues of size, housing, alumni, education, etc.. Once the "ideal" Chapter is designed, ask what your Chapter must do **this year** to start toward that goal.

You'll be surprised at the positive attitude this creates. The key to this exercise, as in so many situations, is following up on the plans laid out.

It is important to remember that the Chairman's job is to see that the retreat follows the agenda in an orderly manner. He should avoid the common tendency to lead the retreat to a result **he** feels is important. If he does, the retreat loses its worth as a concerted effort of the whole group. Significant progress in a limited number of areas of the Chapter's choosing is far more important than limited or no progress elsewhere.

FOLLOW-UP

The entire retreat process is worthless for the Chapter without following up on the goals and timetables set. The following steps will help you to properly follow up:

1. Publish for each of the Brothers the goals that are adopted, along with specific assignments and target dates for attainment. Have them also posted in a place for all Brothers to see. Inform your Advisers, Regional Vice President, greek adviser, and the ATP Headquarters, of your Chapter's objectives.
2. Coordinate the various aspects of your plan for reaching goals. keep the Brothers motivated and working on short and long-range goals. Praise or prod when necessary.
3. Review the goals at each Executive Council meeting and at one Chapter meeting a month.
4. Reevaluate regularly. Ask yourself and the Executive Council how you are doing, what you should be doing now, and what needs to be done.

CONCLUSION

A retreat can be a major step on the path to Chapter success.

For the best results, all the Brothers should participate in the evaluation and goal setting process. By doing so, they will more closely identify with and support the goals and specific tasks the Chapter sets for itself.

Sample Chapter Retreat Agenda #1

Saturday

10 AM	Depart campus
11 AM	Arrive and set up
Noon - 1 PM	Lunch
1 PM - 2 PM	Bonding Activity
2 PM - 3 PM	Our Chapter and Its Problems
3 PM - 4 PM	Officer's Review of Chapter Status
4 PM - 4:30 PM	Break
4:30 PM - 6 PM	Chapter Excellence - What a Great Chapter Does
6 PM - 7 PM	Goals for Our Chapter - Our Steps Toward Excellence
7 PM - 8 PM	Dinner
8 PM	Free Time

Sunday

9 AM - 9:30 AM	Breakfast
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM	Brotherhood Involvement
10:30 AM - Noon	Role Playing
Noon - 1 PM	Lunch
1 PM - 2 PM	Review of Retreat
2 PM	Pack
3 PM	Depart

SAMPLE CHAPTER RETREAT AGENDA #2

Friday

5:30 PM	Depart
6:30 PM	Arrival
7 PM - 8 PM	Dinner
8 PM - 11:30 PM	Retreat Activities
11:30 PM - 1 AM	Chapter Skits
1 AM	Lights Out

Saturday

8 AM - 9 AM	Breakfast
9 AM - 10:45 AM	Membership Recruitment Workshop
10:45 AM - 11 AM	Break
11 AM - Noon	Membership Recruitment Planning session
Noon - 1 PM	Lunch
1 PM - 4 PM	Organization Workshop
4 PM - 4:30 PM	Evaluation and Summation of Retreat
4:30 PM - 6 PM	Establish Goals and Deadlines for Achievement
6:30 PM	Departure
9 PM	Late night dinner together