

**THE CHAPTER RETREAT:**  
To progress, you must first retreat!

**What is a chapter retreat?**

Rather than "running away from something" as the word retreat suggests, the chapter retreat can better be defined as a strategic withdrawal. For a relatively brief period of time, your chapter can withdraw from the day-to-day activities of college, fraternity, and personal life in order to concentrate its efforts on developing and achieving goals and objectives.

The chapter retreat provides an opportunity for your chapter to study, in depth, a problem or series of problems for a sustained period of time which is simply not available through regular chapter meetings. It provides you with the opportunity to make an objective self-evaluation. The retreat can be used for long and short-term goal setting as well as problem solving. It can provide your chapter with the opportunity to grow as each member realizes his responsibilities within the framework of the chapter. It can provide the base upon which your chapter can build for the future.

The last paragraph seems to say that the chapter retreat is the automatic "miracle cure" for all the chapter's problems. Realistically, the chapter retreat will be only as successful in solving problems, goal setting, and the other values realized from the retreat as the decisions arrived at and the implementation of those decisions by the chapter acting together.

**Does your chapter need a retreat?**

Although many chapters regularly schedule retreats during the year, your chapter is a likely candidate for retreat if your answer to any of the following questions is yes.

- .....Is your chapter plagued by member apathy?
- .....Does your chapter have trouble setting goals and objectives?
- .....Does your chapter have trouble achieving goals and objectives once set?
- .....Does the spirit of friendship and brotherhood seem to be fading?
- .....Is a common chapter complaint "nobody knows what's going on?"
- .....Is it always the same few guys who do most of the work?
- .....Is your chapter split into factions?
- .....Are you doing the same thing, year after year?

Prior to the retreat, you should complete a chapter evaluation. A careful review of the answers from your chapter will reveal areas where improvement is needed, which can provide the necessary base upon which to build your chapter retreat.

### **How do you retreat?**

The first one is the hardest! With each retreat, it is important to establish a feeling of unity between members of the chapter, a feeling of working together for the betterment of the group. Experience has shown that one or more concerned members of the chapter can be instrumental in firing up the whole organization to having a retreat. The important thing to remember is that the chapter as a whole must support the retreat in order for it to accomplish what you want. If your chapter has never participated in a retreat it may be a good idea to invite a resource person who has had experience with other retreats to speak to the whole chapter about the value of retreats and to answer specific questions.

Retreats can be designed along different lines to emphasize various facets of the overall purpose of the fraternity. One in the fall could be designed for goal setting and one in the spring can focus on problem solving.

Through the retreat format, the individual member can be made aware of his responsibility to all the other members and to the chapter as a whole. He needs to see that the fraternity can be no better than the members from which it is made. He needs to see that scholarship, character, fellowship, and service do not happen by accident but through giving.

### **Who should attend the retreat?**

Your goal should be 100% participation--both brothers and pledges/associates. Your members are more apt to get involved when they identify with the goals of the organization, and this identification is more likely to occur when they participate in evaluating the present situation and formulating action plans for the future. Encourage your chapter advisor to attend, and give him plenty of advance notice. You may also want to consider inviting an outside facilitator.

### **How do you plan your retreat?**

The old adage "people support what they help create" proves true again. A committee should be appointed to plan the retreat. They should be responsible for the following areas:

1. **SET THE DATE:** be sure that the date does not conflict with sporting events, exams, etc. The best time is a weekend. Set the date well in advance so everyone can plan their schedule accordingly.
2. **SELECT A LOCATION:** the best place is anywhere away from the chapter house. By removing the distractions and the familiar scenery, the members will be able to concentrate on the retreat--camp sites, ski resorts, and a lodge or cabin are good possibilities. Be sure to make sure the site you select can accommodate all of your needs for meals, meeting rooms, and sleeping facilities.

It's also a good idea to arrange for a bus or other group transportation. This way everyone arrives on time and no one leaves early. It also prevents the chance of car accidents.

3. **FIRE-UP THE MEMBERS:** unless the need for the retreat is absolutely critical, it is better to suggest attendance rather than require it. Have the retreat committee promote the event and build enthusiasm so no one will want to miss it.
4. **SURVEY:** by reviewing the results of a chapter evaluation (see attached example), the committee should come up with a number of important topics to include in the retreat agenda.
5. **EVALUATE:** depending on the format of the retreat (which will be discussed later) the committee should develop some method by which the chapter can evaluate its effectiveness at the close of the retreat. This evaluation will be very important in planning the next retreat. Using an Action Program Control Sheet to list objectives, completion dates, and the people responsible for the program is a good way to monitor the retreat objectives.
6. **SET GOALS:** once the self-evaluation has been completed by the chapter the committee should work together to set out in writing exactly what the retreat is expected to accomplish. These goals may be general (develop a greater spirit of brotherhood) or very specific (design this term's membership education program).

### **What format should your retreat take?**

There is no magic answer to this question. Depending upon the composition of your chapter you may wish to structure your retreat in a number of different ways.

A suggested format for a chapter retreat might be:

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. This will set the tone for the entire retreat
- B. Should stress the need for the retreat
- C. Should stress the goals and objectives of the retreat
- D. Should stress the possible benefits of the retreat
- E. Should remind those participating that they should be serious, open-minded, honest, and cooperative
- F. Pass out and review the retreat agenda
- G. Should not be longer than 15 minutes

#### **II. Total involvement ice-breaker**

- A. All participants pair off with another that they don't know well--someone from a different pledge class
- B. For three minutes all "A's" tell "B's" what they expect from the retreat.
- C. For three minutes all "B's" tell "A's" what they expect from the retreat.
- D. Going quickly around the group, each member tells one thing that they heard from their partner while a leader writes it down on artist paper

- E. Leader can then give short (2-4 minute) summary of the group's expectations--challenging the group to make them come true

### **III. Small group discussion**

- A. Five to seven people
- B. Topics selected by the retreat committee (or Executive Committee), based upon the chapter self-evaluation results.
- C. Method
  - 1. Each small group should select a recorder who will note important conclusions for reporting to the chapter.
  - 2. Each group should discuss the same topic but with different emphasis provided by thought starters. Thought starters are written questions which start the small group going on the topic.

For example, thought starters which could be distributed to a small group on the topic of pledge/associate member education are:

- a. What is the purpose of pledge/associate member education? Are we accomplishing this purpose? Are there other ways by which these objectives could be accomplished more effectively?
- b. What emphasis should be placed on scholarship in the pledge/associate member education program?
- c. Is our Big Brother system working? Why or why not?
- d. What is "hazing"? Is any form of hazing being used? What are the disadvantages of hazing?
- e. What improvements can be made in our pledge/associate member education program? What do we overemphasize? What do we underemphasize?

Each of the above thought starters will get each small group going on a different tangent toward an overall solution.

- 3. After 30 minutes of discussion, reassemble the chapter and give a three to five minute report on the results of the group's discussion. These main points should be written on a piece of artist's paper and hung on the wall. There should be no comments from the chapter at this time although individual small group members may want to "fill in" some for the recorder.
- 4. Repeat the above procedure for each topic.
- D. Structuring of small groups--it is better if people who do not usually associate with each other comprise each small group. If possible, structure the groups in this fashion. Groups should be restructured after each topic.

### **IV. Goal Setting**

- A. The next discussion of the retreat should be goal setting group discussions. For example, if you discussed four main topics, divide the chapter into four equal-sized groups. Give each group the artist papers from each small group's discussion of the

topic and now charge the new group to evaluate the suggestions made and suggest 3-4 specific goals. You should probably allow 30-45 minutes for these discussions.

- B. Each group selects a recorder who will report back to the chapter the deliberations of the individual group. After his presentation the chapter is free to discuss the recommendations of the group.
- C. After discussion, the chapter should vote to accept, modify, or reject the recommended goals.

#### **V. Action planning**

- A. Reassemble into the same groups used for goals formulation.
- B. Develop a step-by-step action plan for achieving each goal, to include deadlines, names of members responsible for the implementation of each step, and costs associated with each goal. Allow 15-20 minutes for each goal.
- C. The recorder should turn in his group's action plans to the Retreat Chairman.

#### **VI. Closing your retreat**

- A. Group leader--should review the previously set goals of the retreat to see if the purpose was accomplished.
- B. Chapter--the best way to close the retreat is with a "Good of the Order" session. This allows each member to share with the chapter his personal feelings about the retreat.
- C. Evaluation--have each retreat participant fill out an evaluation form. (See attached sample evaluation form.) These evaluations will help improve future retreats.

#### **How long is a good retreat?**

The only possible answer to this question is "as long as is needed to get the job done." Most chapters plan a retreat to last a day or a day and a half.

The retreat can begin on Friday evening with a social activity, with the actual retreat process beginning on Saturday morning. Other chapters begin on Saturday morning and close with a social function on Saturday night. The social function should be restricted to those who are participating in the retreat. No alcohol should be permitted except at the scheduled social activities.

Your plan for retreat should allow a fair amount of free time. You may wish to schedule breaks in the morning and afternoon to allow the members to talk among themselves. The benefits of a retreat are not only the solution arrived at in discussion, but the appreciation of each other which the members will develop.

You may wish, if time and facilities allow, to schedule some type of activity that all members of the chapter can be involved in. Some chapters organize their retreat around a canoe trip. Others plan softball or volleyball games as part of their plan. In planning your agenda, remember that part of the purpose of the retreat is for the members to enjoy it and get to know one another better.

#### **Who should run our retreat?**

For your first one or two retreats, you will probably find better success if you have a leader who has experienced this type of group process before. Likely candidates are your chapter adviser or regional fraternity officer, your campus Advisor to Fraternities or another faculty/staff member

from your institution. With enough lead time, your fraternity headquarters may be able to provide a staff member to help you plan and conduct your retreat.

Once your chapter has experienced a couple of retreats, the logical choices for retreat leaders are the president or vice president.

The most important thing for any retreat leaders to remember is that they are only to facilitate (make easy, help) discussion, NOT to lead it. He is the pivot man who sets the tone in the introduction, briefly describes the topics to be discussed, watches the time, calls the chapter back together, calls each group to report, and closes the retreat with an evaluation of how far the chapter has gone toward meeting the goals of the retreat. His opinion is not given until the very end except as a member of a small group. He assists, NOT runs.

### **How do we follow up on our retreat?**

Get all of the results of the retreat, particularly goals and actions plans, down in writing. Distribute a copy at the next chapter meeting and keep a copy posted on your chapter bulletin board. Send a copy to your chapter advisor, regional fraternity officer, fraternity headquarters, and the Advisor to Fraternities on your campus.

You will quite probably be amazed at the amount of suggestions, plans, recommendations, and actions that will come out of your chapter retreat. In that wealth of information lies the quick road to confusion and, in the final analysis, inaction unless the Executive Committee of your chapter is ready to immediately implement those things which the chapter voted to accept at the retreat.

Your first chapter meeting after retreat should include a report on how, when, and to what extent the conclusions of the retreat have been implemented. You should be prepared to tell the chapter when all the conclusions of the retreat will be chapter policy. The chapter needs the immediate reinforcement of action to feel that their efforts in the retreat are worthwhile.

If you are slow in implementing the retreat's conclusion, or fail to implement them, what you are, in essence, telling the chapter is that all of their efforts were futile and worthless. Then, try to get the chapter interested in another retreat!

Remember, though, to stay flexible as a chapter in the implementation of your new ideas. Many of the things suggested which sound good in theory during the retreat will simply not work out in practice in your chapter. When this happens, the chapter will know and should be able to adapt their original plan into a workable one. Remember, also, that very often many changes will be suggested and that the sheer amount of changes at one time may be too much for the chapter. When this happens, let the chapter decide which changes are priority items and should be immediately adopted and which items can be "laid on the table" until some set future date. Don't make the mistake of "overkill" by trying to do too much too fast. Your individual chapter situation will govern in this area.

### **Any final tips on chapter retreats?**

Just one. Have fun. Remember that a chapter retreat is like any other fraternity activity. It has a serious nature because of the work to be done and things to be accomplished. But it should also be an enjoyable experience for those who participate in it.

**Acknowledgements:**

Special thanks go to the Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity and the following people and organizations for the information presented in this item:

Michael B. Carty, Province II Chief, Alpha Tau Omega  
Douglas N. Case, Advisor to Fraternities, San Diego State University  
Bert Sams, Province VIII Chief, Alpha Tau Omega  
Kappa Sigma Fraternity  
Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity  
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity  
Sigma Nu Fraternity  
Tau Kappa Epsilon Fraternity  
University of Illinois Interfraternity Council

## A P P E N D I X

### SAMPLE RETREAT SCHEDULE

#### FRIDAY

5:00 p.m.	Retreat Committee arrives
7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Brothers and Pledges/Associates arrive & get settled
8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Executive Committee meeting to talk about what they hope to accomplish and appoint discussion groups
10:00 p.m. - 10:15 p.m.	Informal meeting to discuss retreat & goals
10:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.	Icebreaker

#### SATURDAY

8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.	Small group discussions: Scholarship
9:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Sharing of small group discussion summaries
10:00 a.m. - 10:10 a.m.	Break
10:10 a.m. - 10:40 a.m.	Small group discussions: Rush
10:40 a.m. - 11:10 a.m.	Sharing of small group discussion summaries
11:10 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.	Break
11:20 a.m. - 11:50 a.m.	Small group discussions: Alumni Relations
11:50 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.	Sharing of small group discussion summaries
12:20 p.m. - 1:40 p.m.	Lunch
1:40 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.	Goals formulation (3 groups, 1 for each topic) A. Scholarship B. Rush C. Alumni Relations
2:20 p.m. - 3:20 p.m.	Goals selection (entire group)
3:20 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Break
3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Action planning (3 groups)
4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.	Recreation (volleyball games, etc.)
6:00 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.	Dinner
7:15 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Free time
8:00 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.	"Good of the Order" session (around campfire)

#### SUNDAY

9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.	Breakfast
10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Evaluation of retreat
10:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Clean-up
11:00 a.m.	Depart

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SAMPLE CHAPTER EVALUATION</b> <b>(to be completed by every member)</b></p>
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Areas to be considered include, but are not limited to: rush, pledge/associate education, scholarship, alumni relations, community service, campus involvement, social programming, chapter management, financial management, public relations, house management, ritual, and individual member involvement and motivation.

**What are the chapter's five strongest areas?**

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

**What are the five weakest areas?**

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. |    |

**Summarize the chapter's present status and situation:**

**Place in priority order areas that need the most attention:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**List any new ideas or programs you think should be implemented:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

**Additional comments:**

## SAMPLE CHAPTER RETREAT EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Were the housing accommodations adequate?  Yes  No

Comments:

2. Were the food accommodations adequate?  Yes  No

Comments:

3. Were the meeting facilities adequate?  Yes  No

Comments:

4. Do you think the Chapter retreat was successful? Why or why not?

5. Were the group discussion topics adequate?  Yes  No

Comments/suggestions:

6. Were the number and content of the organized sessions adequate?  Yes

No

Comments:

7. What did you like best about the retreat?

8. What did you like least about the retreat?

9. What changes or improvements could be made for future retreats?

10. Do you think a retreat should be held next year?