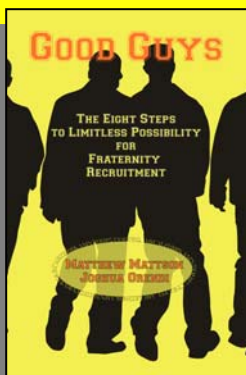




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## "PHIRE UP" YOUR NEW MEMBER EDUCATION PROGRAM

By  
Matthew G. Mattson, M.S.  
Joshua A. Orendi

Quick... What did you learn in your fraternity/sorority new member education program that actually helped you *be* a more successful fraternity/sorority member?

For many Greeks, the answer to that question is hard to find. Many chapters put a lot of emphasis, time, and energy into educating their newest members, only to end up with new members who only know trivial information about the history of their organization. Shouldn't a new member education program be in place to prepare young brothers and sisters to be successful members, and have the ability to effectively and efficiently operate the organization?

Thinking back, we learned things like when our national fraternity was founded (and *fascinating* details about our founders), the history of the Greek movement (like the Miami Triad), and how to say the Greek alphabet really, really fast. Our brothers tried to teach us some other things as well through "pledge bonding" activities, but many of those only created a closeness among the new members, and a slight disdain for our elder brothers because we were apparently not considered worthy of helping to run the organization yet.

Many Inter/National organizations have created very effective values-centered new member education programs that they have tried to institute nationally. These are a great step forward, but often undergraduate fraternity/sorority members accept these top-down curricula apprehensively because the undergraduate members really value the autonomy of being able to create their own.

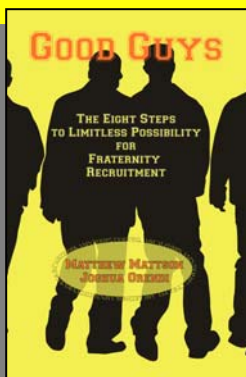
With all this in mind, this article offers a recommended curriculum outline that is meant to drive *results*, allow for organizational and chapter creative autonomy, and prepare young fraternity/sorority members to immediately be productive leaders in their organizations. This new member education curriculum outline is based on *The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility*, which was originally introduced to the Greek community as a recruitment model in the book, **Good Guys: The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility for Fraternity Recruitment**. This article demonstrates the adaptability of those *Eight Steps*. They are about more than just recruitment. They are about running an effective organization and achieving the full potential of that organization over the long-term. This curriculum could be an eight week new member education program, but more



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importantly, each new member education program should at least borrow elements from each of the *Eight Steps*.

Obviously, the format of an article does not allow for in-depth analysis of every step, but further insight can be found by reading **Good Guys**, which is available from [www.PhiredUp.com](http://www.PhiredUp.com).

Before proceeding with *The Eight Steps*, it is important to remind readers that they probably didn't learn everything they ever needed to know to be successful as a fraternity/sorority member in their new member education program. In fact, we would argue that even if you have the best new member education curriculum, you still become the perfect brother or sister in that short orientation period before you are initiated. Therefore, consider not only how this eight step system can inform your new member education program, but also consider building a *membership* education program – a continual learning system that goes throughout membership as an undergraduate, and maybe even into the time when members become alumni.

Without further ado, *The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility for Membership Education*.

### **Step 1: Know the Basics**

**People and Purpose.** These are the two basic ingredients of any membership organization, and especially of fraternities and sororities. A Greek chapter needs two things to exist, and it needs to work on two things keep existing: recruiting a high quantity of high quality *people*, and helping those people develop through the organization's unique *purpose*.

This step is a great place to start when creating a new member program. Be sure to start with the very basics (because most chapters never talk about the fact that they're made up of these two simple elements). Once members understand that these two basic pieces are the things from which ALL organization opportunities and challenges stem, they will understand the importance of focusing time, energy and resources toward these two basic ingredients.

This step introduces the two core curriculum pieces that should make up any results-oriented new member education program, 1) Teaching members how to recruit other members so that the organization can be full and healthy, and 2) Teaching members the values of the organization, and why it is important that they work to live these values everyday.

The purpose of most fraternities/sororities can be found in their ritual, in their creed, or in their mission statement. It is the values, mission and vision of the organization. While we understand that there are secret words, phrases, handshakes and symbols that most organizations won't reveal to their non-initiated new members, if a chapter isn't communicating the most core values to its new members, and setting very clear expectations for a lifetime of



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membership, then that chapter shouldn't expect success or a high quality membership. Find ways to help members truly understand the promises that will be asked of them, and the commitments that the organization is willing to make to them in return.

Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 1

- \* Introductions/Welcome/Icebreakers
- \* Teach members the two basic ingredients of membership organizations: people and purpose.
- \* Teach members the one thing that differentiates fraternities/sororities from other membership organizations: ritual/values.
- \* Teach members the importance of recruitment, and that continual recruitment is an expectation of every member.
- \* Teach members the basic expectations the organization has of them.

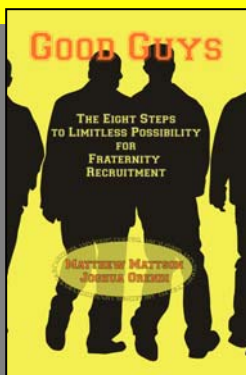


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**Step 2: A.C.E. Your Values**

In Step 1 we were reminded that a group's purpose (its values, mission and vision) is one of the two basic building blocks of any organization. Step 2 encourages curriculum content that focuses entirely on that purpose – after all, what could be more important to teach your members than how best to exemplify what it *means to be a member*.

A.C.E. Your Values suggests that there are three important lessons within Step 2. In order to truly "live your ritual," a person must **Achieve**, **Communicate**, and **Expect** the unique values of their organization. Here is an [edited] excerpt from **Good Guys** to further explain:



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*To achieve one's values, one must first know them. So, once you have pulled out that dusty ritual book, blown it off, and taken a peak inside, consider what changes in your organization and personal life you would need to make in order to know that you are **ACHIEVING** what your founders hoped for.*

*Your words, your outward appearances, and your actions are clearly **COMMUNICATING** what it is that you believe. Every minute of every day your members are sending messages to the world about what a fraternity man or sorority woman that wears your letters is. This is great, if the message is on target with your stated purpose. What is your chapter communicating?*

*You must also **EXPECT** the values that you espouse as an organization of your members, and especially of yourselves. This means holding each other accountable to the pledges that you make as brothers/sisters. Expect the values of the organization of yourself and your fellow members.*

Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 2

- \* Offer members an in-depth look at what your organizations values truly are (talk about the values, not about your secret rituals).



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- \* Teach members what a brother/sister who *Achieves* (or lives) the values of your organization looks like – what actions, beliefs, or behaviors are common among your best members from the past and present.
- \* Teach your members how to *Communicate* the values of your organization to people outside the membership.
- \* Teach your members the importance of *Expecting* values-driven behavior, the importance of accountability, and how your rules, policies and procedures are all based on the values of your organization.
- \* Teach members the importance of respecting organizational values and maintaining individual beliefs.

### Step 3: Get Motivated

Motivation is among the top three challenges faced by most fraternities and sororities. Many Greek leaders struggle motivating their chapter members to be involved in organizational work and activities. Often, this is because of the lack of any real reason *why* they should care about the organization.

The most important thing to understand about motivating others in a group is that most people will work as hard as their dream is important to them. In other words, they are motivated by *their* desires, not yours. Great leaders understand the individual needs and dreams of their team and bring everyone together with a unifying purpose – often in the form of an end goal.

Step 3 teaches the importance of including dream building time in your membership education curriculum. To motivate others, allow them to dream about what they want to create, and then show them that in order to get what they want to create, it just takes positive, simple, every-day good habits.

In some new member education programs, we've seen chapters use an activity that involves having new members draw their dream fraternity/sorority house. This can be a powerful exercise. We encourage you to take that further and have them imagine the ideal organization that they'd like to create. Doing this helps them understand the potential for the organization, but more importantly, it gives them a reason to work hard as a member – to achieve *their* dream, not just the dream of members that have come before them.

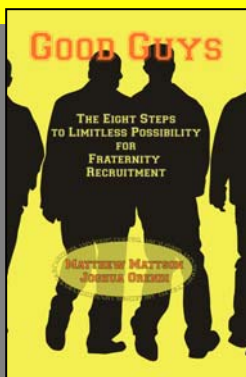
Another important point Step 3 professes is that while it might be natural to want to motivate all members of the chapter to get involved, often the reality is that about 80% of the results in any chapter are driven by only 20% of the members. This is unfortunate, but is often a reality that must be lived with. Spending your time trying to motivate brothers/sisters who are dragging the chapter down, is often a waste of time. Instead, focus on the strength of the chapter by using those who are motivated to do the work, and constantly work to recruit the kind of people who are motivated by the possibility of achieving *their* dream.

### Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 3

- \* Teach members that the organization is theirs, and they can create it in anyway they can dream of.



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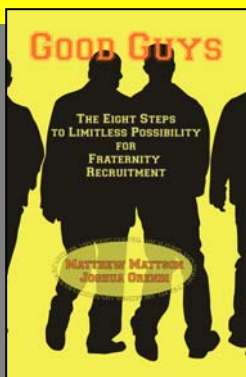
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- \* Teach members that in order to be motivated as a chapter, the chapter must have a dream that it is trying to achieve. Just *being* an organization is not enough.
- \* Teach members about the "power of one." Each of them has the power to completely revolutionize their chapter, if they're willing to do the work.
- \* Teach members the importance of getting involved in leadership responsibilities right away.

**Special Note:** Steps 4, 5, and 6 may at first seem to focus solely on recruitment, which may confuse some people. However, pay close attention to the ways in which many elements that you might expect to find in a traditional new member education program are interweaved within these steps. Also, remember, recruiting *people* into your organization is one of the two things that actually accounts for the results of your organization, and if you can teach your chapter how to recruit a high quantity of high quality members, many of your other organizational issues will take care of themselves. Recruitment is *that* important.

#### **Step 4: Know Your Audience**

When it comes to recruitment, Step 4 teaches the importance of understanding the size of your organization's potential audience, understanding prospective members' needs, and understanding tactics for meeting prospective members and getting their names into your chapter's database. These are very important topics to teach new members, and can fit very well into a membership education curriculum.

Know Your Audience can mean even more, however, when used as a step in the new member education process.

1. Who does your chapter serve?
2. Who is your chapter's audience?
3. Who do you need to partner with effectively in order to be a successful chapter?

These questions provide a framework for the recommended curriculum for Step 4. Along with understanding the prospective member audience so that your newest members can immediately begin one of their core requirements of membership – recruitment – it is also important to teach the necessary relationships that a chapter has with its community and other entities within its community.

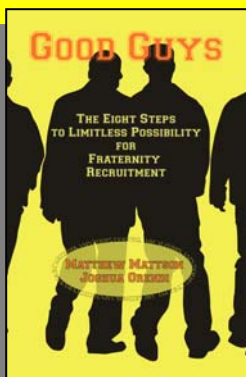
Consider those three questions. It is important to teach your members the many different constituencies that are served by any fraternity/sorority chapter, the audience from which your chapter recruits its members, and how to successfully partner with other entities. Your chapter's responses to these questions might include: members, potential members, specific niche markets of members (agricultural students, business students, service-minded students, etc.), alumni,



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university, Inter/National organization, governing councils, Greek Life Office, community, specific charitable organization(s), etc. Helping your newest members understand how your organization fits within its culture and community is very important.

#### Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 4

- \* Teach members about the size of the chapter's prospective pool of members, and methods for getting their names onto the chapter's database.
- \* Teach members about the governance of the chapter with regard to the university, Inter/National organization and campus governing councils.
- \* Teach members how to partner with other organizations or community entities to maximize resources and organizational success.
- \* Teach members about how the chapter serves its members, alumni, Inter/National organization, community and charitable organizations.

#### Step 5: Know Your Product

Step 5 is about knowing your organization inside and out. This includes understanding the history of your organization, understanding its internal organizational structure, and understanding the unique value and benefits it brings to its members.

After new member education, can each of your members explain *what your organization is, what your organization does, and what makes it uniquely valuable in the lives of each of its members?* Most fraternity/sorority members we've talked to around the country can not answer those questions very well.

When it comes to recruitment, Step 5 teaches the importance of being able to communicate the benefits of membership to a prospective member. It further teaches members how to handle the concerns of prospective members by teaching quality responses to the most common questions about membership. These are absolutely vital skills that must be taught to all members.

Step 5 also provides the perfect opportunity for a membership education curriculum to focus in on the organization's history. But beyond just looking at dates and biographies from decades ago, work hard to apply the lessons learned by past organizational successes and failures to your chapter's present endeavors.

This portion of the curriculum is often the *only* thing that some traditional new member education programs truly teach. Obviously, it is important, but there is so much more to learn.

#### Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 5

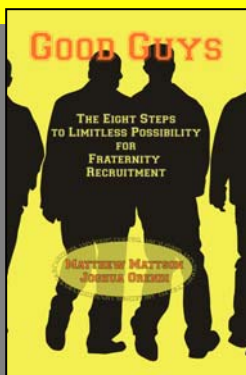
- \* Teach members the history of your organization.
- \* Teach members how to talk about the unique value and benefits of membership in your organization.
- \* Teach members to articulate the chapter's vision of excellence.



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- \* Teach members the internal organizational structure of your organization.
- \* Teach members how to handle the most common excuses given by prospective members for not joining with quality responses (see: **Good Guys**)

### **Step 6: Develop Skills**

There are a lot of skills that a productive fraternity/sorority member needs to have mastered. From communication, to organizing, to event planning, to financial management, there are a confluence of skills that account for the operation of any chapter.

It would be very difficult to teach *all* of these skills to anyone over the course of a four year period, so imagine the difficulty of teaching them during a traditional ½ semester new member education program. So, we recommend focusing on the skills that drive the most significant results for any chapter – interpersonal communication skills.

Interpersonal communication skills are at the core of recruitment results, community relationships, organizational negotiations, alumni-undergraduate relations, and really everyone's personal endeavors. Most fraternities/sororities believe it is their responsibility to help their members become prepared for the "real world," and teaching interpersonal skills is one of the most important things a chapter can do to achieve that.

Teach your members how to shake hands, dress appropriately, start conversations, network professionally, behave at recruitment events, swoon for romantic relationships, negotiate for discounts, give inspirational speeches, or close a sales deal. Whatever is important to your chapter, these interpersonal skills should be taught to all members – they truly can improve your brothers'/sisters' chances for success as members and in life. Phired Up Productions' publications, *Dynamic Recruitment Workshops*, consulting and coaching services are great resources to learn skills that will improve the results that your members can deliver. Also, look to alumni for their experience and expertise with these skills – they can be a great resource. Greek Life campus professionals and Inter/National Headquarters staff members are incredible resources as well.

### **Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 6**

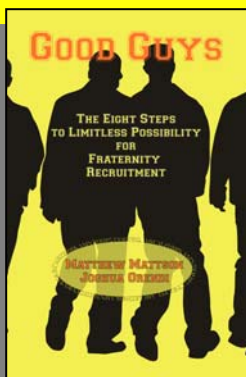
- \* Teach your members the skills they need to be successful members.
- \* Teach interpersonal skills to improve recruitment results and your members' ability to work with all constituencies.
- \* Allow for members to work on skills that are of unique interest to them (if they want to be treasurer of the chapter, focus on financial skills; if they want to be Vice President, focus on management skills, etc.)



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### **Step 7: Grow Wiser**

The Pursuit of wisdom is the most influential, life-altering step of the eight step system. Wisdom is attained in two ways, lessons learned through personal experience and lessons learned through the experiences of others.

"Lessons learned through personal experience" is really just a euphemism for "failure." That's right, we're promoting failure. Teaching new members to see their failures in life as stepping stones to success is an important lesson. The more times you fail, the more you'll be prepared for success. Fraternities and sororities serve as a great testing ground for personal development, and a great place to be able to make mistakes and learn from them.

Teaching your members the value of mistakes will help them understand that it is safe to take calculated risks during membership, and to try innovative, creative ways to make the chapter experience even better.

By seeking wisdom from the experience of others, you minimize the mistakes you have to make personally through internalizing the best practices of those who are qualified to offer you advice. If a new member education program can teach one truly valuable lesson, it should be the importance of continual learning and lifelong education.

Step 7 encourages you to include knowledge and insight from beyond your chapter walls in the membership education curriculum. Bring in lessons from great books, bring in lessons from experienced alumni, bring in lessons from mentors, bring in lessons from parents and siblings. Use your outside resources to expand your members' knowledge base and truly espouse the fraternal value of Wisdom.

Some practical ways to apply these concepts include: Alumni speakers at meetings, leadership conferences, book discussions, values-centered movie viewings/discussions, sharing each member's academic expertise, speakers at meetings from the Greek Life Office, intellectually challenging magazines laying around the house, etc.

### **Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 7**

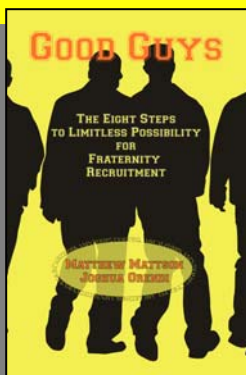
- \* Teach your members the value of continual learning.
- \* Teach your members that they can receive a lifetime worth of knowledge in a few hours by committing to reading the books of great men and women.
- \* Teach your members the value of mentorship, and how to find and use a mentor.
- \* Teach your members the value of making mistakes, and the concept failure as a teacher.
- \* Connect your members to on-line learning resources such as Phired Up's blog, free recruitment resources and Facebook group (find information on all of these at [www.PhiredUp.com](http://www.PhiredUp.com)).



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### **Step 8: Repeat**

Fraternity/sorority chapters are consistently inconsistent. Most chapters lack a long-term system that consistently creates success, and instead they have regular peaks and valleys in their operational success. Often just one bad leader can come into a chapter and take it from being great to non-existent with a few bad decisions. Therefore, it is vital to any chapter that they establish a system of success that will repeat itself ad infinitum.

Step 8 teaches the importance of building a repeatable, teachable system for success. Any fraternity or sorority that has a long-term system for success has three elements:

1. Members understand the necessary daily habits of a successful member.
2. The chapter shares information about how to do organizational tasks with each other so that all members are prepared to serve successfully.
3. The chapter has a year-round, values-based, dynamic recruitment system in place that consistently brings in a high quantity of high quality members.

Here, at the end of a new member education cycle, it is important to teach the lessons that will help the newest members keep the cycle of membership going. Teaching the importance of daily habits, the importance of sharing organizational knowledge (think: officer transitions), and the importance of consistently recruiting high quality members is at the core of an organization that has long-term limitless success.

In practice, this part of the curriculum is probably a facilitated discussion about how best to keep the organization going forward, and what daily practices are necessary to be the best chapter possible.

Step 8 is the departure point of the curriculum, but before learners leave they comprehend that it is their responsibility to keep the cycle of membership going. They must now focus on *people* and *purpose* in order to build a smooth system so the fun and camaraderie of fraternity/sorority life can happen easily.

### **Key Teaching Points for Week/Step 8**

- \* Teach your members the value of positive daily habits.
- \* Teach your members to write down their plans – commit to positive patterns of behavior by putting those commitments on paper.
- \* Teach your members where they can find organization information about how to do the tasks of the fraternity/sorority (e.g. officer roles, institutional knowledge).
- \* Teach your members the cyclical nature of Greek organizations and how to keep the cycle of membership and learning going.



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These *Eight Steps* offer a framework for a membership education that is built to deliver long-term, limitless possibility. The sky is the limit for fraternities and sororities, and we need to make a strong effort to ensure we are teaching each other the most results-oriented lessons, and truly preparing our members to be successful.

Evaluate your membership education program to see what is getting results and what is wasting time. Perhaps at least portions of *The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility* can help you teach your chapter members more effectively.

**Phired Up Productions** is an education firm providing recruitment services to membership organizations. Our message is for customers that desire a higher quantity of higher quality individuals involved in their organization(s) – and who are interested in long-term, limitless success.

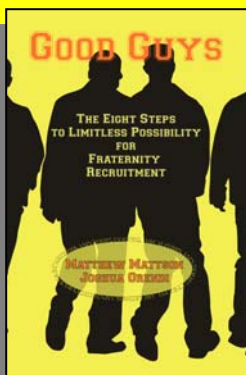


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**Josh Orendi** is co-founder and Chief Operations Officer for Phired Up Productions. Applying successful backgrounds in business-networking, nonprofit expansion, corporate management, and executive recruitment, he delivers a fun, demanding style of training that empowers individuals with the belief and skill necessary for achieving limitless possibilities. Josh is the co-author of **Good Guys: The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility for Fraternity Recruitment**.

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