




CONNECTIONS

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WHAT'S NEXT?

The Lifelong Membership Issue

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An aerial, black and white photograph of a dense urban landscape, likely New York City, showing a multitude of skyscrapers and buildings. A large, semi-transparent red circle is overlaid on the lower-left portion of the image, serving as a background for the main title.

Avoiding the Alumni Trap

How to Get
Involved,
Not
Overwhelmed

Lori Hanson • Learn2Balance.com


Wahoo! You're a college graduate.

Studies are done; it's off to the real world. Time to apply all the things you learned. It's an exciting time and I remember it well; starting my first "real" job, renting my first apartment and the move from Chicago to Rockville, Maryland. At the time, my goal was to be a hospital president so I was excited to have a job as Personnel Assistant for Compensation and Benefits for a local hospital. I was on my way.

But, with all this excitement comes lots of changes: making decisions on your own, living up to expectations of bosses and co-workers, and proving yourself in the big bad world. The best part for me was simply being out of school; I had more time to explore new hobbies, interests and friendships.

Some graduates step right in to marriage and starting a family soon after college. Others are taking on other new academic responsibilities such as graduate school. Most people don't even think about the fact that graduating from college can be a stressful time. Starting a new career? Stressful. Taking on a mortgage? Stressful. The process of adjusting to new situations can subtly add stress to and overwhelm your life.

So here you are, your first or second year out of college. Things are starting to come together for you and you're beginning to feel settled into the career world. You're climbing the ladder of success. Then you realize something is missing. As you ponder the thought—eureka! You realize it's the feeling of family you had with your fraternity brothers and sorority sisters in college. If you had a good experience being a part of a fraternity or sorority, you may decide you want to be an active alumnus/a by volunteering for a chapter in the college or university near you.



With this in mind, here are a few things you should consider.

I interviewed four students from the University of Southern Indiana and Colorado State University as well as a Fraternity/Sorority Advisor to get their perspective on this topic. With their help, I've created the following list of tips for how to get involved as alumni—without getting overwhelmed:

GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE LIFE TO WORKING LIFE.

This is one of the biggest changes you will have in life. You've just completed one of the most important phases of your life. Give yourself time to adjust to the new schedule, new responsibilities and new social life that you're developing as part of your career. It's great that you want to get involved and pay it forward, but don't rush into this decision. Make sure you've had time to fully exhale before taking on this commitment. The consensus of my interviewees was that graduates should wait a year before taking on active roles as alumni.

EVALUATE HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE TO GIVE.

Before you research the local volunteer opportunities fraternities and sororities offer, call them to ask how you can help. You need to evaluate how much time you can give and when it's practical for you to give your time. This is essential to creating boundaries and establishing balance in your life.

Ask yourself these questions to help the evaluation process: How much time can I realistically contribute on a weekly or monthly basis? The answer should be an amount that does not negatively impact your workload, family commitments, or ability to maintain balance in your life. Consider regular exercise, sleep, and making time to fuel your body with good solid food (all are critical elements to a balanced lifestyle). Second, does it make sense for me to help on a seasonal basis vs. a weekly or monthly basis? One of the stories I heard in my interviews was about a woman who has a teenage son and found herself in a position where she had more time to give than in previous years. She made an agreement with her husband and helps a chapter out every year during recruitment. Once recruitment is over, her volunteer role is complete until the next year. By waiting to help until her son was a teen, she had more of herself to give (undivided attention) and has offered a lot of wisdom and experience to the sorority she's helping.

DECIDE WHAT ROLE IS BEST FOR YOU.

What asset can you bring as a volunteer, mentor, advisor, or member of a national organization? Evaluate what area you can contribute to and be most effective. Are you a born mentor? Are you the right person to be an advisor?

Is recruitment where you really shine? Would you love the ability to travel the country as a national consultant and teach workshops? Offer the best you have so you can enjoy the experience, be effective, and add value from day one.

One story I heard while researching this article was about a student who just graduated in the spring. He's been looking for work and hasn't yet made the connection he needs. He decided to volunteer his time while he's interviewing and waiting to hear "You're hired." This alumnus has contributed and that shows knowledge.

And what does he get in exchange? The opportunity to build his resume with more experience. What a creative way to keep busy, add value, and make yourself look more attractive to your prospective employer.

REMEMBER TO LET GO.

You're on the other side of the fence now. When you first get involved there is a transition from being an active member of the fraternity or sorority and learning how to be a good advisor. This is an adjustment for some people but more difficult for others. Learning how to offer advice versus actively taking on roles within the fraternity or sorority takes a bit of getting used to - especially if you're only a couple of years older than your mentees.

Realize that boundaries are important. There are times to hang out and have fun and other times to be the leader/advisor. Remember, you're being viewed as a role model and are leading by example. Make sure your behavior demonstrates something that is healthy to emulate.



SET BOUNDARIES AND KEEP THEM.

One of the biggest traps I've seen as I travel the country and speak at college events is the amount of hours students are working. Yes, it's because of your level of passion and commitment, but the pace can be unhealthy and can quickly lead to burn out. The line is gray between work, social life, and personal time. This trap seemingly has no limits; I've seen it with advisors, deans, directors, women's center leaders, and more. Passion = good. Burn out = bad.

It probably happens before you realize it. It's fun, you enjoy the time with the students, and there's so much to do. It's hard to break away during the day to balance out the afterhours programs and commitments. And even though you're young when it starts—it will and does catch up with you. Our bodies and brains need rest. After all, we are human "beings" not human "doings".

If you don't set boundaries from the start, this is a hard habit to break. The cool thing is, it only takes 21 days to adopt a new habit, and in a mere six weeks it will become second nature.

If you're caught in this rut, evaluate what you CAN do, not what you CAN'T do. Did you know that the word can't sends the message to your subconscious mind that you're not in control? Think about it. As a very wise Yoda once said, "Do or do not. There is no try."

USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU CREATE BOUNDARIES:

Can you find pockets of time in a busy day to slip away for a couple of hours when you have a long day ahead?

Can you make time to take a walk and get away from the hectic pace you're running during the day?

Can you delegate some of the load to your team or the eager members of your sorority or fraternity chapters?

If you're a team of one, what creative ways can you come up with to lighten the load? Before you say there's no one to help, remember—anything is possible.

Having my dog Sasha (a Malamute) is one way I hold myself accountable. Every day around 4:30 she comes into my office and sits and looks at me, waiting patiently...if I don't acknowledge her soon enough she puts her paws on the arm of my chair to get my attention. Her eyes look intently at me and say, "Do you know what time it is? C'mon, it's time for our afternoon walk! Let's go, now...now...hello, right now". What factors and tools do you have in place to hold you accountable?

There are many ways to accomplish what you want to in life and not fall into overwhelm. With a little planning, you can Learn2Balance your life every day.

Learn the Lingo: LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

Collegian: undergraduate member

Adjective for anything describing a collegian: collegiate

Alumnus: man graduate member, singular

Alumna: woman graduate member, singular

Alumni: group of men graduates OR group of men and women, plural

Alumnae (pronounced a-LUM-nee): group of women graduates, plural

Alum: short for alumnus/alumna