

## **THE MILLENNIALS AND THE BALANCED MAN PROGRAM**

By Thomas P. Jelke, Ph. D.

### **They're Here!**

They are already starting to show up on campus, all around you. They have made a big enough statement in the world around them that countless newspaper columns, magazine articles and books are being written about them. They are going to make an impact in colleges and universities, in the community, and in any organization they join. Even fraternities have taken notice (Spencer, 2002) and some are asking its members to get ready for them.

Indeed, we should be prepared for them, because they will be making up the population of our fraternity for the next 20 years. They are the *Millennials*, the generation of students that were born between 1982 and 2002; a generation of students that is predicted to be drastically different from its predecessors, according to Neil Howe and William Strauss, author of *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000).

These incoming students are redefining what it means to be young and are destined to take their place in history among the greatest generations of Americans.

SigEp chapters need to understand the Millennials to best recruit and develop them to benefit from everything the Millennials have to offer. A program that redefines member development is an ideal situation in which to place these new students. And when you make a side by side comparison, one thing is clear: because its tenets align closely with these students' interests, personalities, characteristics, traits and tendencies, Sigma Phi Epsilon's Balanced Man Program is an ideal development program for the Millennials.

### **Interested in Big, Cultural Change**

Millennials are very interested in being a part of a group or a team, but not interested in being a part of the status quo – they want to make their own mark on the world. They are interested in thinking big and changing the culture of their world. Millennials come to us with naturally positive attitudes- a change from the attitudes of Generation X and the Baby Boomers.

Moreover, the Millennials are concerned about respect for self and others. They are attuned to traits such as manners, courteousness, and appropriate behavior and will seek that from people around them. What better way to harness that positive attitude and interest in mutual respect than with a program that concentrates on positive reinforcement and development of every member, starting from the moment you join the chapter?

Finally, these students are consumerists – they want to make sure they are getting the best out of every situation and every transaction. They are going to join an organization that provides the greatest benefit to them. An organization that treats new members as an equal will certainly have an advantage over those that do not.

### **Academically Focused and Seeking Continuous Challenge**

The research shows that the Millennials are smarter and more interested in intellectual development than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000; New Strategist Editors, 2001). SAT scores are rising, more students are taking Advanced Placement classes, more students who graduate from high school are going to college, and more students who go to college are interested in pursuing advanced degrees.

The bottom line is that they are smart, and they want to be treated that way. Not surprisingly, the Balanced Man Program caters to these types of individuals in several ways:

The **Sound Mind and Sound Body** aspect of the Balanced Man Program is a concept that Millennials can understand and can relate to, as it is part of their life-goals. Chapters that emphasize the development of a Sound Mind typically adhere to expectations of high academic achievement and have built-in mechanisms that help members excel. Chapters that help develop a Sound Body push their members to stay healthy, and thus bolster their confidence. The support structure of the Balanced Man Program allows Millennials to pursue activities that will

cultivate their cultural interests, social understanding, and mental development that reaches far beyond academic walls.

The **Continuous Development** portion of the Balanced Man Program is especially appealing to Millennials, because they are going to join and prosper in college organizations that can provide them with opportunities for growth, development, and advancement throughout their *entire* time in college. All members, from freshmen to seniors, in Balanced Man Program chapters are expected to take part in programs that challenge and develop their intellect, character, and leadership. The program provides stimulus to members beyond just the first six months of their fraternity experience by challenging its members to grow and develop throughout their entire time as an undergraduate member. Millennials are used to being continuously challenged and meeting those challenges, which aligns perfectly with structure of the Balanced Man Program.

The **Mentoring** relationships that are structured into the Balanced Man Program provide a great advantage when trying to recruit and develop students from this new generation. Aside from being there to help them focus academically, these mentors appeal to the Millennials' desire to seek out strong relationships. They come to us with a belief in family and a respect for authority figures. They aren't afraid of seeking guidance or mentorship from those around them or from adults and have the desire for a lot of feedback regarding their personal development.

More so, the mentoring component of the Balanced Man Program plays perfectly with the Millennials because it goes well beyond the "Big Brother" concept of pledging model programs. Throughout each phase of development, members are asked to find a mentor – someone who will guide him and teach him about different aspects of the fraternity and about life. The mentorship role even extends into the community and to alumni, allowing members to benefit from the rewards of mentorship from those outside the undergraduate circle. The Millennials will appreciate the way that the Balanced Man Program structurally provides mentors for them, and keeps adults involved in the mentoring process.

### **Expecting High Standards and Accountability**

As a whole, Millennials are less likely to engage in deviant behavior and are accustomed to being held to high standards and accountability for their actions. They did not grow up with the mixed messages of "Just Say No" and "Just Do It." Rather, they come from a world of "Zero Tolerance." Some high schools now "enforce their rules 24-7, every hour of every day, and troublemakers face a coordinated front among the schools, police, and community leaders" (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 193).

The most interesting part about the new model of accountability is that the majority of these students are in support of the high standards it creates. In fact, Millennials want to see it applied to everyone – much like you would expect from a successful Balanced Man Program chapter, with high standards and accountability measures in place and tracked. Dead weight becomes less of an issue in a Balanced Man Program chapter, because you are constantly challenged and expected to excel. This drive and motivation appeals directly to the Millennial student.

### **Service and Community Oriented**

Another trend that has increased from the previous generation is the care, concern and focus on the community. Over 80 percent of this year's college freshman performed volunteer work during their final year of high school (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2002). Those students are now in college and looking for opportunities to enhance the community around them at that level.

The Balanced Man Program places a great deal of emphasis on the community and expects all members to fulfill meaningful community service requirements within each challenge of the Balanced Man Program. Indeed, to become a Sigma Phi Epsilon Fellow, the highest level of personal development for an undergraduate, a member must coordinate and participate in a 500 hour or 60 day service project. This focus on community service is one that will attract and retain service-minded individuals out of high school, and, statistically speaking, there will be more and more of them every year.

### **Values Based Individuals**

Finally, and most importantly, the individuals who are beginning to make up our college undergraduate population are more values-minded than previous generations. This means they have a clearer sense of their own values and

will be coming to college with a better understanding of what they are looking for from organizations, colleagues, friends, and especially fraternity brothers – if they choose to join.

The Balanced Man Program places a strong emphasis on the values of Sigma Phi Epsilon, embodied in its Cardinal Principles of Virtue, Diligence and Brotherly Love, as well as the fraternity's commitment to the Balanced Man Ideal of Sound Mind and Sound Body. In a well run Balanced Man Program chapter, these ideals are introduced and explained to potential members during the recruitment process, and reinforced throughout various crucial components of fraternity life: member education, standards and accountability, leadership development, and of course, the practicing of Ritual.

As in the past, incoming students who can understand and relate to the values of Sigma Phi Epsilon will be more apt to join, and more likely to become positive contributors to the fraternity experience. Specifically, the Millennials bring an especially appealing dynamic to our fraternity because of the congruence between what the research shows of their espoused values (Doing the Right Thing, Working Hard and Achieving Academically, and Developing and Nurturing Close Relationships) and what we know to be the values of Sigma Phi Epsilon (Virtue, Diligence, and Brotherly Love).

### **Are You Ready?**

As a whole, you and your chapter will be infinitely more prepared than your competition for the oncoming generational change if you begin to understand the type of individual that has started to attend college campuses. Chapters that implement the Balanced Man Program properly will have an advantage over other Sigma Phi Epsilon chapters because the program inherently brings with it concepts, ideals, and mechanisms that appeal to and benefit this new generation of student.

Don't watch them pass you by!

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