

# Winning Formal Recruitment (aka Rush)

Formal recruitment is difficult to define because it carries different meanings from campus to campus; however, the following elements are commonly found in the formal recruitment setting.

1. Dates are specified, usually three to 10 days.
2. Time is limited, specific time(s) and location(s) dictated.
3. Bidding is not allowed until a specified day.
4. Organized by the IFC or school.
5. Recruits have equal exposure or opportunity to visit all fraternities.
6. Formal recruitment is surrounded by numerous rules and regulations.

## THE PITFALLS

Formal recruitment became a very noticeable practice in the 1980s and early 1990s as an increasing number of fraternity communities attempted to create a systematic method of introducing potential members to each fraternity in an equal light. This theory of equality in recruitment is taken from a practice that has been used by many sorority communities for years. The problem is that this theory actually favors the strong, well-established groups and places even more emphasis on the superficial side of recruitment. In trying to make things equal on the playing field, rules are created that suffocate the community by its own regulations (quotas, spending limits, forbidden displays of Greek letters, etc.). Some communities have devolved to the point that fraternity members cannot wear or display Greek letters or speak to anyone other than their own chapter brothers outside the formal recruitment period. Some communities even dictate what size of sandwich can be offered to a recruit during a function. The fact is that formal recruitment by itself does not bring parity to the system; it stagnates creativity, limits the number of recruits and turns the IFC into a policing body rather than a promotional sounding board for the entire community. The real tragedy is because the chapters on their campus normally govern the IFC; the ridiculous rules and regulations are self-inflicted.

Ideally, an IFC should be like a good chamber of commerce. A chamber of commerce does not grab shoppers by the hand and lead them to every store and regulate the amount of time they can spend there. Nor does it tell each store what they can or cannot do to market themselves. If this were the case, no business in its right mind would be a member of the chamber of commerce. A good chamber of commerce focuses its efforts on promoting the business community as a whole, attracting new businesses, providing programming that assists its members to operate better and trying to entice consumers to their community.

Potential members should be every male student who is not already a member of a fraternity. Formal recruitment severely limits the market by forcing fraternities to focus only on those who sign up for recruitment. The problem is that the recruits are nothing more than a finite number of apples in a barrel, with every fraternity vying for the best. Even the quality of the best could be marginal, leaving the bad apples for those willing to compromise their standards or be forced to take a smaller number of new members compared to competitors.

The largest population of the best potential members often never sign up for rush. In other words, most of the best apples never make it into the barrel. Do not limit your chapter to the barrel that gets shuffled around in formal recruitment. Go straight to the tree (campus) to pick the best apples.

If your community uses formal recruitment, particularly if this is the only time recruitment is allowed, begin a campaign to eliminate this debilitating practice. It is no coincidence that as more campuses adopted formal recruitment in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and as more rules made their way into the recruitment process, the number of men signing up for recruitment and ultimately the number of men joining fraternities decreased. SigEp and the North-American Interfraternity Conference support year-round recruitment, free of restrictions and rules, allowing both the individual and the fraternity to openly exercise their rights of Freedom of Association and Freedom of Free Speech as provided by the United States Constitution.

If your system allows you to recruit outside of formal recruitment, then place more emphasis on that time outside of the formal period. However, during the formal recruitment time, especially if this is the only time you can bid, you must do it better than the other fraternities to ensure that the good apples, the best men, end up with Sigma Phi Epsilon.

### **BEING THE BEST AT FORMAL RECRUITMENT**

*“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.”*  
~ Aristotle

**Step One:** Don’t complain about the rules that are applied in a rush week environment. Every fraternity is subject to the same guidelines; just do formal recruitment better than everyone else. Treat it like another field of competition.

From a marketing standpoint, the element of time is a key factor. The importance of time in formal recruitment lies in the fact that there is so little of it. Regardless of whether or not it is fair, you must remember that formal recruitment favors the strong, well established fraternity and places more emphasis on appearance. A potential member must decide, within a very short time—usually a week—which fraternity he will join for life. The more fraternities he’s exposed to, and the more hectic the rush schedule, the more likely he will make his decisions based on superficial considerations. Although this system makes little sense, your charge is to run the program that will best succeed when these conditions exist.

During the hectic days of formal recruitment, many recruits select a fraternity that is well recognized. The large, powerful fraternities with the “big reputations” are way ahead of the game. If you happen to be one of the “outsiders,” here’s what you can do to even the odds a little. If you are one of the top competitors, heed this advice also, because you can never be complacent with your recruitment program.

Understand that recruits are not going to look past the spectacular fraternities and flock to the “real brotherhood” that small chapters often try to claim is unique to them. A few blue chippers get turned off by the “big timers” and end up in one of the smaller groups, but when you look at the percentages, you’ll realize they are very few in number.

Accept the fact that most of the top recruits are not looking at all the fraternities. So much is being thrown at them in such a short time, that they almost automatically eliminate any fraternity that doesn’t “appear to be” one of the better ones. Fraternities make it easy for the recruit to choose from among “groups” of chapters. The good ones look and sound very similar, and the weak ones look and sound similar. The secret is conveying, through accurate explanation, to potential members the SigEp experience is the best on campus.

Remember, image precedes reality. For potential members, image is reflected in how the chapter conveys its plans for the short-term future. Many potential members are freshmen or sophomores who are making

their fraternity choice based upon the next two to three years of the chapter's life. If your chapter expects to compete for the intramural title, talk about how. If you expect to compete for the scholarship cup, tell potential members why you will win. Never lie to or mislead potential members. The key is communicating to the recruit that your chapter has been a winner, will be a winner, and how exciting it is for him to be a big part of that success.

In Sigma Phi Epsilon, we define balance as excellence in all areas. This thinking is derived from the ancient Greek definition.

*Words are one thing, but make sure your appearance and actions are consistent with the image you want to project. The non-verbal elements are more important than you think. The chapter should look like winners, act like winners, and talk like winners.*

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Studies have shown that it takes between five and 20 seconds to make a first impression, yet first impressions last up to five years. Be sure that the entire chapter understands this and is prepared to put its best foot forward.

The best way to make a good impression is to use the One/Two Punch:

1. Strong visual impression, followed immediately by
2. Great friendliness, reflective of the brotherhood offered by your chapter.

Face it; you've got to look good to make a strong visual impression. You wouldn't go to a job interview with a ball cap, T-shirt, bad breath and a two-day-old beard. So don't do it when you are trying to convince a stranger to make a lifetime commitment to the Fraternity. If you want to be the best, look like the best. This approach sets SigEp apart in recruitment. If recruits are uncomfortable, it won't be because you are dressed better than them, it will be because you are unfriendly.

Recruitment is the process of making friends, so become a friend of the recruit. Each brother must be sincere, enthusiastic and interested. Take the initiative. Ask the recruitment questions he hasn't been asked. Find a "hook," something that he's interested in, and let him talk about himself. Once you get him there, listen to him. He'll think you are a great guy, and he will want to come back. A sharp looking group of men could be intimidating, but when combined with a smile and sincere friendliness, the combination equates to a powerful, positive first impression.

Remember, recruits will likely interact with a large number of chapters during the week. Set your chapter apart from the pack. If everyone on campus traditionally gets pizza from the same place for rush events, perhaps you may cook steaks on the grill. Plan events that are a "cut above" your competitors.

Everyone is going to be SAYING they are different—or better. Your job is to SHOW them. Brothers must be able to articulate the Balanced Man Ideal: Sound Mind, Sound Body, our values, and the expectations of membership. Brothers should be prepared to give specific examples of chapter functions he has attended that reinforce what he is saying. For example, when talking about Sound Mind, perhaps a brother may mention how great it was to attend a symphony with a sorority, how the sorority women loved the event, and how much fun it was to spend a formal night with brothers and dates. Have rooms filled with pictures of brothers in action living the Balanced Man Ideal. It will show top prospects you aren't "all talk." Details are important and make an impression; attention to detail will make SigEp memorable for the recruit.

Once in a while, top fraternities forget the importance of a first impression and they get lazy and overconfident. They don't pay attention to how they look in rush week, or they don't pay attention to the

recruits. See to it that your chapters does not make such mistakes. Getting ahead in formal recruitment depends as much on avoiding the wrong things as it does on doing the right things.

### **THE FORMAL PRESENTATION**

Presentations are common in formal rush. A good presentation is a must when you have only a short period of time in which to make a lasting impression. In those cases where recruits visit in groups and/or there is an established time for their arrival and departure, a formal program is best for the following reasons:

1. A formal program answers many questions before they are asked.
2. A formal program presents the caliber of organization the chapter wants to demonstrate.
3. A formal program allows the chapter to put its best foot forward by pointing out its attributes, e.g., scholarship, athletics, campus leadership, and brotherhood, and how it lives the Balanced Man Ideal.
4. If done correctly, a formal presentation can draw the recruit into an enthusiastic association with the chapter.

### **CONDUCTING A FORMAL PRESENTATION**

Invite recruits to sit or stand among the brothers facing the front of the room. Don't let all the brothers group in the back, leaving the recruits sitting by themselves. The Vice President of Recruitment, if he is a good speaker, should act as master of ceremonies and begin the presentation by welcoming the recruits. Introduce chapter officers, campus leaders, alumni, and have them stand. This lets the recruits see the most outstanding men in SigEp. Keep this portion of the presentation to a few minutes. A joke or a short skit interjected here breaks the formality, and the recruits are more relaxed.

The Chapter President or the best speaker in the chapter should be introduced, and he should briefly outline the chapter's major accomplishments. He should point to displays, trophies and charts which, strategically located, drive home the facts he is presenting. His presentation should focus on how balance equals excellence. This will tell potential members that the Balanced Man Ideal equals a great college experience.

At this point, hammer SigEp's Balanced Man message home by having a brother in the chapter who lives Sound Mind, Sound Body talk about the Balanced Man Ideal. He should talk about how SigEp has positively impacted his academics and physical fitness. He should be able to speak about how SigEp has rounded out his college experience. Finally, he should provide an example from his life that tells recruits about SigEp's strong reputation with sororities on campus through gentlemanly conduct.

Don't waste time emphasizing social events and brotherhood. Every recruit already knows these elements come with the fraternity experience; besides, they'll be tired of hearing every group claim they've got the best of both. As mentioned earlier, the best way to communicate brotherhood is by showing it off. Have a calendar for the coming school year that shows a schedule of events, school activities, etc. Brotherhood is another word for friendship; display your friendship by simply making friends with the recruits. At the end of the presentation, the master of ceremonies should conclude by drawing all of these areas together. A sample closing might go like this:

“Gentlemen, you have seen where SigEp has succeeded in the past, and you are now aware of where we will succeed in the future. We have been and will continue to be the best fraternity on campus. We are very proud of our accomplishments, but we are even more proud of each other. To those of you who have decided you want to be a SigEp, I

offer my congratulations because you will never regret being a part of this team. To those of you who have decided to join another fraternity, I also offer my congratulations. And further, I offer to you this thought. Put every ounce of energy and effort into your fraternity, because every time you meet SigEp, you're up against a winner. Thank you."

At this point, the brothers should have been cued to stand and give an enthusiastic ovation followed by a SigEp cheer. This will cause many of the recruits to also stand because the conclusion came about so fast and with such an impact. Each standing recruit will look around and realize that he is agreeing with what has been said. You've almost got him. The total presentation should be short and to the point, usually around 25 minutes.

## **ORGANIZATION**

All rush week activities should be organized to the last detail, regardless of whether it is a 10-minute function or a two-hour function. You should give complete attention to each recruit so that the allotted time is maximized. There should be a systematic method of organizing the chapter, the recruits and the information gathered from each recruit. If you have done your homework on recruits over the summer and/or first term, the Recruitment Committee should recognize many of the men at recruitment events. A friendly, recognized face at an event will put the recruit at ease.

Each chapter member should carry a pen/pencil and some blank recruit information cards in a concealed location. Small spiral pads are also commonly used. After a member meets a recruit, immediately following their conversation, the member should discreetly fill out an information card and/or spiral pad and make notes about the person. This information should then be immediately handed to a person in charge of compiling the information on all the recruits into one place. Among this information should be a method of recognizing what grade should be assigned to the recruit. That way, the Vice President of Recruitment will know what the priority order is and which men he and his committee need to focus their attention.

During a function, every chapter member should have an assigned duty. The following system is an effective method of utilizing every chapter member.

**Greeters** — These are the first men the potential members will meet. Immediately upon the arrival of the recruits, each greeter swiftly selects a recruit to welcome with a firm handshake and a smile. Make sure that no recruit is without a greeter. The man is then taken to the sign-in desk where he is introduced to a receptionist. Upon signing in, the greeter introduces him to a stringer and then returns to his station for the next group of recruits. If a group of recruits arrive who appear to be good friends, it's best to break up the group, with each greeter taking an individual and then letting each go through the process alone.

**Receptionist** — This person could be a member or a female friend of the Fraternity. The receptionist sees that each recruit fills out the potential member profile (if this information has not yet been obtained). Regardless, each recruit should sign the guest list and get a name tag. It is also important to keep a record of who attended the function and their phone numbers and emails.

**Stringers** — These men should be confident, outgoing people. Each stringer should select a recruit while at the sign-in desk and take the man from the greeter. There can be a greeter and stringer with the recruit long enough for general introductions, but a stringer's objective is to find out enough about the recruit, so that he can introduce him to a host who has something in common with the recruit. The stringer asks his questions fairly quickly, listens diligently and observes the non-verbal aspects that will enable him to best pair the recruit with a host. The stringer should take the recruit to the host and introduce the two. Ideally, in the introduction, the stringer would refer to a topic that he believes the host and recruit have in

common. For example, “Jim here played lacrosse in high school. Steve, since you play for the club team on campus, I thought you might be able to tell Jim about it.”

The stringer should not leave the two until he is confident that there is good conversation taking place. The stringer may wander from conversation to conversation, introducing himself when needed, but listening to make sure there are no dragging conversations. If there is an awkward and/or dragging conversation, the stringer should jump in to spruce it up. If necessary, the stringer and/or host should introduce the recruit to a new host who may be better paired with that man.

**Hosts** — The hosts are individuals who always focus attention on recruits. The man’s name should be said as often as possible throughout the conversation. In order to identify quality men, the questions should be centered around the recruit, getting him to talk about himself. If there are so many recruits that more than one must be paired with each host, both the stringers and hosts must make an extra effort to make sure no one is left out of the conversation. Each host will need to make mental notes about each person and then convey those thoughts onto an information card and/or a small spiral pad. This information should be discreetly recorded immediately after ending conversation with the recruit. They may want to confer with the stringer in doing so. The card or pad should be quickly given to a person in a back room who is compiling the information.

**Floater**s — Floaters are hosts and stringers who have not yet been assigned to a specific recruit within their respective duties. They should walk around introducing themselves, listening to conversations, looking for the blue chippers and making sure all recruits are talking with someone. Members should not congregate into their own groups unless a recruit is present and is the center of attention.

**Secretary** — The secretary should be in charge of compiling all the information gathered on each recruit. With the feedback from the information cards, etc., provided by the hosts, stringers, and other members, the secretary should be able to ascertain which recruits should receive the most attention for follow-up. On the back of the information cards and/or on the spiral notepaper, a ranking should be given to each recruit:

- A. High priority (blue chipper) — Must follow up first.
- B. Second priority — Should follow up but not necessarily first.
- C. Don’t worry about any follow-up.

The secretary should place the recruits into categories of priority and then further segment them by their location on campus. This will help the Vice President of Recruitment/committee focus attention on the best men and assign members to follow up with those recruits. If three recruits live in the same dorm on campus, it would make sense to have the same member or team of members follow up with all three. If a recruit with a “C” ranking lives with or near an “A” or “B” recruit, the members following up should be aware of that fact. Segmenting the number of recruits is critically important to the Vice President of Recruitment/committee as this enables them to focus their energies on the right people, delegate effectively, and get a jump on the competition. When time is valuable, teamwork is essential.

**War Room** — This is a back room where the secretary does his work during formal recruitment. It is an area for members to take a break, freshen the breath, straighten the tie, comb the hair, etc. The recruit information cards and/or spiral pads with comments on the recruits should be discreetly delivered to this room immediately after the potential member leaves the premises.

The greeters, stringers, and hosts system is designed to give the recruit a great first impression of SigEp. The second he steps into the sight of SigEp members, he is greeted warmly. Within a few minutes, he has

met several friendly people and within no time he is in good, sincere conversation about himself and having an enjoyable time. He doesn't realize he is being worked through a highly organized process, but he does realize he is making friends with some sharp, kind, and considerate people.

### **WHAT TO REMEMBER WHEN EXTENDING A BID**

Never issue a verbal bid to more than one man at a time. You may recruit 50 or more men a year, but each of those men joins SigEp only one time, so make it special. Every man wants to be considered individually, not as part of a "package deal" or as part of a chapter's quota.

Pick your own place to bid. Sometimes the surroundings are as important as the words you say when issuing a bid. Some chapters issue bids during recruitment events, but the Vice President of Recruitment or Recruitment Committee member pulls each recruit aside individually and extends a bid in an isolated and quiet area. Once the recruit accepts the bid, he is brought back to the event, an announcement is made, and he is welcomed by all of the brothers in attendance.

Assume that he will join. You have already done all the preliminary work. You have thoroughly sold the recruit on the chapter, and you believe he will say yes. You have anticipated his objections and have answered them. Now that you are ready to have him join, here is an example of what you might say: "Dave, I'm the Vice President of Recruitment as you know, and in a minute, I'll be officially inviting you to become a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon. But first, let me tell you why we have chosen you and why we feel you would be an excellent addition to the chapter."

At this point, you will be completely focused on the recruit. You will be able to tell by his reactions whether or not he will accept the bid. Explain how he fits into the chapter. Concentrate on his areas of interest such as athletics, social life, campus activities, etc. Let him see how he and the chapter will benefit each other.

"Now, Dave, the entire membership wants you in our chapter because you're going to help us stay on top (or get back on top). Are there any last concerns that you would like addressed or any reservations you have about becoming a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon?"

Once all of his questions have been answered, proceed. "On behalf of the brothers of Sigma Phi Epsilon, I'm extending to you the official bid to join our Fraternity. Now, all it takes for you to accept that invitation is to sign on that line." (Once he has signed, smile, and shake his hand.) "Welcome!"

You have assumed that he will join. Now, instead of your waiting for him to say yes, he will have to go out of his way to say no. If you've done your homework, he'll be ready to join. If he needs a slight nudge, this will provide it. Recruitment is a confusing time for these men. You should help him make the right decision. Some people are just afraid to make that final decision. If you've followed the right strategy, the only decision will be Sigma Phi Epsilon.

**Remember:** Because of the short period of time and the hectic hours of the usual formal recruitment program, the Vice President of Recruitment must have exceptional organizational ability. The chapter must give him complete responsibility and authority for conducting an effective recruitment program. Further, the support of the entire chapter is necessary if the program is to be successful. After the Vice President of Recruitment has developed the specific program to be utilized, he must then proceed to instruct each member about his job and drill the members until they know their jobs perfectly. He should actually "walk the chapter" through its paces for each function. Always keep in mind that being organized helps motivate the chapter.

The support of the entire chapter is essential. If the chapter sees recruitment as the ultimate field of competition, formal recruitment should be a fun challenge. Everyone must work as a team to be successful. It is necessary for the chapter to understand that the importance of the superficialities is a fact. Looking, talking, and acting like a winner is a must; however, the best possible image will not be achieved if great friendliness does not accompany the strong visual impression.

The window of opportunity is limited during formal recruitment, so the chapter can spare no time for idle and aimless chatter. Like a successful advertising campaign, a very powerful urge to join must be created by tempting every sense of the recruit. While a man can be talked into joining, it is better to create within him the desire to belong, let him experience the friendship first hand.

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