

What a Wink and Nod Cost

By Mark Webb, Delta Chi Fraternity

What does that oath mean to you? Rules and by-laws are only as good the Chapter's devotion to them. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what the rules are if the character of the Chapter is lacking. Consider the following:

"We had a minimum GPA, but when a Brother flunked out, we gave it a wink and a nod and let him remain active, or become an "early alumnus," anyway. We had enrollment requirements, but when a Brother took a year (or two) off, we gave it a wink. There were bozo pledges that we didn't weed out. Sure enough, they became bozo Brothers who were a cancer on the Chapter, but hey, we could overlook that. We had rules regarding dues, but we gave them a wink. We had rules regarding Chapter participation, but we gave those a wink, too.

"The university, national Fraternity, and the Chapter had rules regarding hazing, but the 'big' houses on campus did it, so we gave it a wink. We had rules about the upkeep of the house, but we gave that a wink as well. We had rules against underage drinking, but winked when a pledge was passed out over the balcony rail. We performed ritual, without respect, making jokes the entire time we were up there 'leading by example.' Yeah, it was funny, but it also showed our true devotion to our Chapter and our Fraternity. We swore a blood oath to honor and we winked yet again.

"The last time that I visited the house was, I guess, the summer of 1993 or 1994. It wasn't the old good house, the old southern mansion with the big columns. The Chapter was now renting out a ratty old apartment house, and a new Fraternity had moved into the old house. I guess we just couldn't make the rent. We, myself and a few other alums, were greeted by three Brothers who were swigging a bottle of Jack Daniels on the front porch. The house was a sty. Crap was strewn all over—empty cans and bottles, old newspapers. The bathrooms were a science project and smelled like vomit.

"The last thing I remember was some drunken kid asking me to donate a keg. I left that night and never had the urge to go back.

"Well, the chickens came home to roost. I got a letter back in June saying that the Chapter had folded, again, for the third time in 30 years. It took longer than I had expected; really, this was a 17-year run. They had lost their wallow of a house, apparently, and the pledge/initiation numbers, listed in our Alumni magazine, had been dwindling for years. I was surprised that I even received a letter, because Lord knows, no Chapter Brother had ever taken the time to write.

"I work in a high-rise that overlooks my old house. I really loved that house and the time I spent there. I loved the guys that were in the Chapter with me. I loved those days. I loved the notion that a Fraternity was about something noble, and enduring. The ideas that my Fraternity espoused were worth devoting the best years of my life to; it is my deep regret that we did not honor with our actions what we honored with our lips.

"Character is something that comes with maturity, and I guess we didn't have much of that either."