



Leading Through Crisis

Communications Approaches to
Protect Your Chapter

Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.

- C.S. Lewis

Put another way:

Crisis doesn't build character. It reveals it.

Friendship, Knowledge, Service, Morality, Excellence

A definition in this context

Crisis

An event or situation that threatens your chapter's reputation or disrupts your operation, and requires a significant response and action on your part.

You can be the cause of the crisis, or the the party affected. Both still require a values-based, thought-through response.

Determine the **Type** of Crisis

1. Is the situation **life threatening**?
2. Does the situation demand **medical attention**?
3. Have **laws** been broken? University rules?
4. Does the crisis involve your chapter **directly** or another chapter of campus?
5. How long will it **last** - an hour, two, days, weeks?
6. Does it involve **brothers** or guests?

Your leadership sets the tone.

The way you respond to a crisis will be judged as much as the crisis itself.

Values in action

Friendship

Respect and work with each other, show sympathy when needed, treat all affected with grace

Knowledge

Know your risks, have a process, get the facts, use good sense

Service

Cooperate, fix, make amends

Morality

Do the right thing, act responsibly, and quickly

Excellence

Decisions in the best interest of the chapter and campus



Ferocity Against Fiji:
University Of Oklahoma
Shooting

Not your average Wednesday night.

FIJI Responds to Allegations of Racism at Construction-themed Party

Several organizations released an open letter detailing their concerns on May 8. The campus chapter of FIJI responded to the allegations raised by MEChA and other groups in an open letter shared online on May 9.





[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Weather](#)

[Sports](#)

[Lifestyle](#)

[Watch Now](#)

[Home](#) ▶ [News](#)

NAU Students Gathered for a Suicide Prevention Walk

Chicago Tribune

Northwestern's fraternity system faces crisis amid sexual assault reports



Death at a Penn State Fraternity

Tim Piazza fought for his life for 12 hours before his Beta Theta Pi brothers called 911. By then, it was too late.

What are the kinds of issues you see on campus?

What are the threats to your chapter's reputation?

If you've experienced a crisis, big or small, how did you respond?

Be proactive, please.

Own the Crisis - Be in Charge

- **Plan in advance**
- One brother is in charge – **that's you**
- Immediately **alert** graduate advisors, undergraduate brothers + international headquarters staff
- Keep in **constant** communication with undergraduate brothers. Get them all together if needed.
- **One message, one voice**

Engage with Stakeholders

- Provide appropriate updates to **graduate brothers** and key stakeholders
- Ensure these stakeholders know the **graduates are engaged and working to address the crisis**
- Focus on the **solution** needed to address the crisis

Demand **Accountability**

- **Apologize** immediately if an apology is warranted
- If the situation allows, admit your mistake first (**proactive**) so it doesn't appear that the university is **pressuring** you to do so (**authenticity**)
- Explain the **concrete** steps the chapter is taking to address the situation + corrective measures being implemented to ensure the situation doesn't happen again in the future (**solution**)

Tell the **Truth**

- Be **accurate** + as transparent as the situation will allow
- Journalists, investigators + Bill Martin can **sniff** out half truths + inaccuracies
- Lies prolong the **pain**
- Don't use "**secrecy**" as your cover

Speak Like a **Human Being**

- Never try to “**spin**”
- Offer clear, concise acknowledgement of the **pain** you have caused
- Simplicity = **authenticity**
- Avoid fraternity “**jargon**” that doesn’t convey well to the broader community

A word about social media

- Talk with your brothers to set some guidelines for use as associated with the chapter
- Recognize everything can and will be filmed and posted
- Don't argue or get off message; what you post is public statement (Reporters can and do use it)
- Monitor comments
- What is social becomes mainstream news without warning
- One person should be in charge of your channels during a crisis

A word about working with traditional media

DO:

- Consult with graduate leaders and IHQ
- Appoint a single spokesperson (That's you, a graduate leader, or IHQ staff depending on the situation)
- Create statements and language for media and social channels

DON'T:

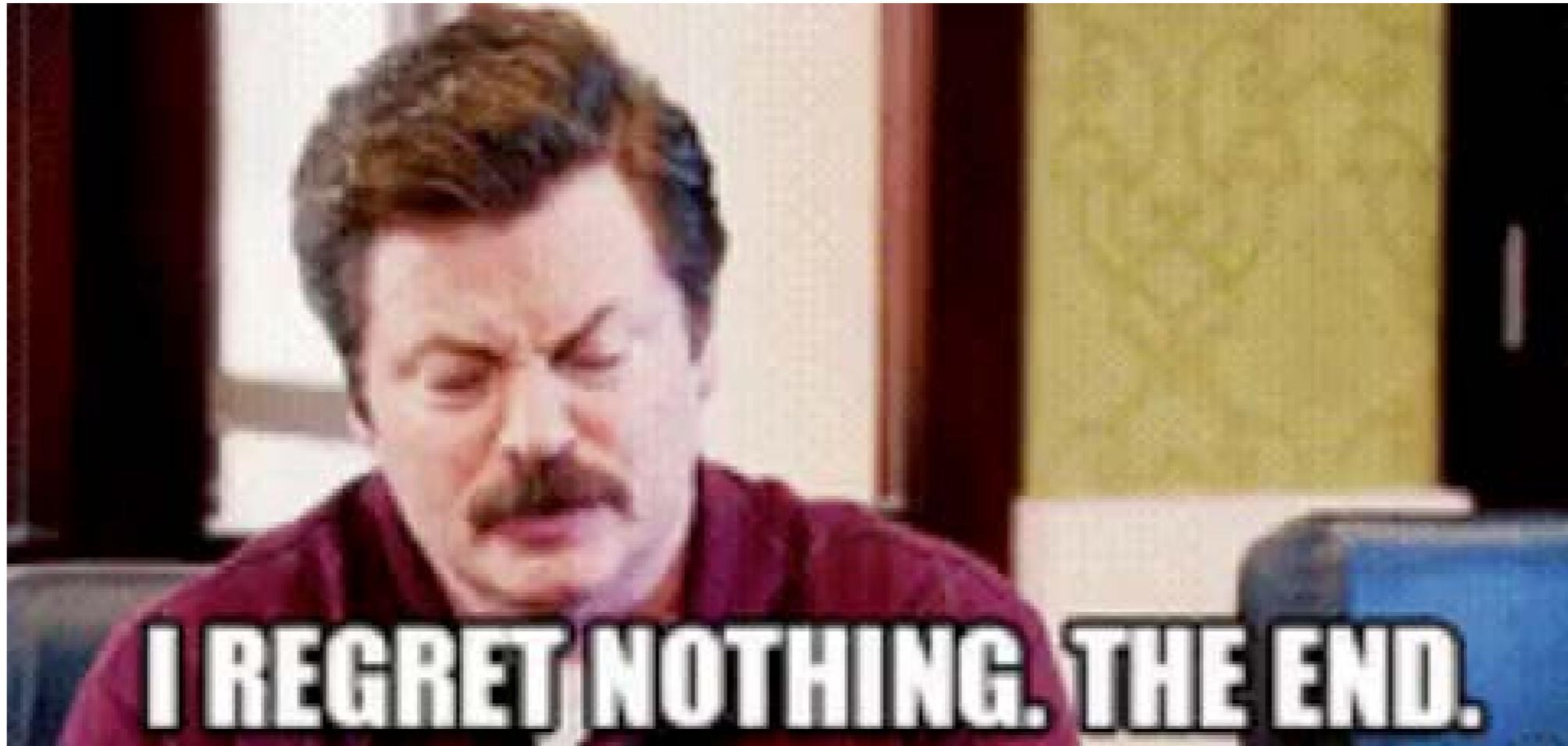
- 'No comment'
- Go 'off the record'
- Speculate

Note: Your campus newspaper is important, and depending on the situation, you may consider engaging with it.

My ask of you...

When you get back to campus:

- Call a cabinet meeting to discuss this.
- Have an open conversation with the chapter, and include your graduate leaders.
- Do use your resources – you have graduate advisors and IHQ staff to rely on



Mike Sacks
James Madison University, '04

Holla at me:

mobile: 703-201-8817

email: sacksmb@gmail.com

twitter: @mikebsacks