

Founders' Day Luncheon
Delta Kappa Gamma Big Bend Chapters
May 16, 2015

Dr. Rhonda Work, Presenter

Thank you so much for inviting me to be your guest speaker. The Big Bend Coordinating Council decided we should take a different tact regarding Founders' Day. Instead of formal presentations about each founder which most of you have heard year after year, I am going to weave a single story that highlights our founding.

Dr. Annie Webb Blanton, who envisioned the society we know today as Delta Kappa Gamma, recalled how a man once told her that women would not advance because they would not work together. That made her angry and as a result, the comment became the catalyst for the formation of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society in 1929. She had a vision that she shared with eleven other women whom she invited to participate in the formation of this new society. What was the original dream of these founders?

As presented in "The Forgotten Dream," a DKG presentation, the dream included:

- *the need to lift women teachers out of a submissive mode;

- *the need to make it possible for them to have an inner growth;

- *the need to give women a platform to act and demonstrate, to carry out certain responsibilities, and to participate and lead others to that dream.

The twelve founders established a mission, which was to unite women educators, and a set of purposes as represented by the following:

- *to counter discrimination against women in education and to give recognition to women for excellence.

- *to pursue legislation supporting improvements in education.

- *to help women gain equal representation in professional organizations.

- *to establish financial assistance programs for women preparing for careers in education.

- *to offer an avenue for women to feel a sense of unity and cooperation.

Today our mission reflects the original mission and purposes by “promoting professional and personal growth of women educators and promoting excellence in education.”

How are we doing as members, as chapters in pursuing these ideals? Since 1929 there have been tremendous changes in society and in education. Some of these changes are evident and relevant to DKG. Indulge me for a moment – I was initiated in 1961 (yes, I’m ancient) when one wore formal gowns to initiation. Hats and gloves were expected attire at luncheons and absence from meetings required a written explanation. I don’t remember when times changed, but aren’t we glad we are past that era? Well, maybe a fancy dress occasion now and then would be fun. Perhaps the most significant aspect of society membership was that you never said “no.” No matter what the request, you willingly accepted the responsibility as it meant you were willing to

be an active member and that you were recognized as a leader. Can we say that of ourselves today?

As I look around the room, I feel like I am about to preach to the choir. I probably could have made the reservation list for today a month or more ago. I didn't need your reservation as you are the ones who always attend our functions. It is good to see a few "new" faces today, but by and large this room is full of the "old faithfuls." Where are the rest of our members? Of the approximately 170 members in the Big Bend, 16% of you are here today. Why is it so? Is that acceptable? It won't surprise some of you that I believe we have a failure in engagement, in commitment, and in communication. I'd like to focus on these three areas.

Area 1: Engagement through Recruitment and Orientation

Every year we have a big push to seek new members and bring them into the Society. We invite them, give them some information about Delta Kappa Gamma, initiate them, and then expect them to become an integral part of our chapter. But do they really know what DKG is and what it has to offer? When was the last time we planned a special orientation meeting and took the prospective members through the new members' packet? What did we do to make this introduction to DKG meaningful? Do we focus on recruiting and orientation without focusing on meaningful relationships and relevancy within the chapter?

Area 2. Commitment through Participation

One of the greatest benefits of DKG is participation. There are many opportunities to become a mentor, to develop leadership skills, to hone presentation skills, to engage in group planning, and to be a contributing

member of the chapter. Have we established a mentor program? Once we initiate a new member, do we encourage participation and attendance? Do we provide meaningful opportunities for leadership development? Do we have a strong committee structure? Do we have engaging, thoughtful, motivational topics at our meetings?

Area 3. Communication through All Channels

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Society business is communication. Recently I read the book, “Still Alice” about a 50 year old psychologist/linguist who developed early onset Alzheimer’s – it was made into a movie. The most difficult aspect of the disease for her was the loss of language, the inability to communicate. Have we lost some of our communication channels? In this world of technology, are we relying too much on the quick and easy? When was the last time we used the telephone in addition to or instead of the computer?

O.K. I’ve raised a number of questions. I certainly don’t have all the answers, but I would like to offer a few suggestions.

1. Let’s spend the entire year seeking the individual who would be a great candidate for membership. Even though we hold joint initiation in the fall, there is nothing in the by-laws that prohibits us from initiating other times during the year. If it is more convenient for the prospective member to be initiated in January, for instance, let’s do it.

2. Conduct a thorough orientation for your prospective members. Engage your membership in the preparation and delivery of an orientation session. Make it meaningful and memorable.

3. Put some thoughtful planning into the initiation ceremony. Whether it be joint or individual(s), ensure that everyone is on the same

page and that all the paraphernalia is assembled. Again, make it meaningful and memorable.

4. Once the initiates become members, please, please don't drop the ball. The sponsor has a responsibility to mentor her initiate. Call before a chapter meeting and offer to pick her up and take her to the meeting. Introduce her to the members. Remember when you were initiated and at the next meeting there was this sea of faces and no names came to mind? Don't expect "newbies" to be able to name everyone. And be certain your initiate is in the loop for chapter news and meeting news. Also, there are members who may not be able to attend meetings because they do not drive anymore or at night. Call them and offer that ride to the meeting.

5. Wear name tags at every meeting. It takes time to remember everyone's name. Give all of us the courtesy of easy recognition.

6. Seek out and support members as they take on new responsibilities in the chapter. Leadership is NOT a one way street. Our leaders need to share/delegate responsibilities . Our members need to support our leaders and accept responsibilities. Develop each other's leadership skills through strong committee work. Be a mentor and a coach. Look to former leaders for guidance. There is nothing that says you can't serve more than once in any position.

7. Yes – we need committees. Your Executive Board provides the framework for the chapter activities, but committees are at the heart of the chapter. I don't mean busy work for committees. The Society has excellent suggestions for chapter activities, for chapter growth. Set your priorities and then go after them. Be responsible for programs that enlighten, enhance, and energize your members.

8. Planning is paramount. It is not an easy task to plan meeting dates in Tallahassee. There is SO much going on, but we have access to many calendars to help us avoid any major conflicts. Believe me, when the BBCC plans initiation, Legislative Day, and Founders' Day, it is not an easy task. Foresight and forbearance will accomplish a lot.

9. The Society website has a myriad of rich resources that every chapter should tap. Go to the website and be surprised at what you will find. It certainly gave me some ideas for today.

10. Now to my favorite – COMMUNICATION. How can we do it? How many ways? Let's not rely on one approach. We can improve our communications with members by:

*implementing timely and precise communication. Planning ahead will always save frustration and confusion due to inaccurate and late communication. Based on the number of requests I received for a copy of the reservation form for today's luncheon, I would have to say that somewhere communication broke down.

*utilizing more than one method. Relying on email is a rocky road. Believe it or not, we have members who do not have email. We owe them the courtesy of snail mailing or phoning them.

*develop and use a telephone tree. There are times when that personal phone call has the most meaning for a member. Checking via telephone on someone who has been ill or someone who hasn't been to meetings lately is giving that person the sense that she is not forgotten.

Here is my challenge to you. Before your next chapter meeting, look at your chapter roster. Whom haven't you seen in a long time? Who has been going through a difficult time? Call that member – talk to her –

make her know she is loved by her chapter – make plans to meet for lunch or offer to take her to the next meeting. Bring her back into the fold. It is up to each and every one of us to energize our inactive members. If everyone in this room made that one small gesture, think of what we would do to make someone feel that their membership is important. Think what it could do to strengthen our chapters.

And finally – think out of the box. We are intelligent, creative, very special women. Let's be proactive and put our best thoughts into making Delta Kappa Gamma what we know it can be for each and every one of us.