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## Remember Something Old, New, Borrowed, and Blue in Officer Transition

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*Something old, something new, Something borrowed, something blue,  
And a silver sixpence in her shoe. —English proverb*

It's a phrase that's been spoken for centuries, a tradition passed down to ensure happiness, success, and prosperity for young brides as they enter into marriage. Something old represents the family, friends, and traditions a bride brings to the union, while something new refers to the bright future she'll share with her husband. The borrowed item comes from a friend or relative who is happily (and often newly) married as a token of good luck. Blue historically signifies honor and faithfulness—carrying a blue item on one's wedding day is said to purify the union. And the sixpence coin in the shoe represents financial prosperity for the new couple.

More than simply an old wives tale, brides often think of the saying as a checklist of sorts—five must-have items necessary for a successful wedding. And now, the "Old, New, Borrowed, Blue" tradition may find new relevance in an unexpected place: student organizations.

*"It only takes one year of bad leadership to destroy a chapter."  
—Sigma Pi Fraternity member, Michigan Technological University*

As long as there have been student organizations at colleges and universities, there have been issues with leadership transition. Each year, an eager new group of students arrive ready to join and lead organizations. They bring with them fresh ideas and oodles of enthusiasm, but in their zeal often fail to consider current/past members, bylaws, rules, finances, and the daily workings of the office. No matter how much creativity and optimism a student brings to an organization, the group will ultimately struggle—even fail—without a proper leadership transition process in place.

Making the transition from old (outgoing) to new (incoming) leadership is a crucial practice for both the outgoing and incoming student leaders. The passage of knowledge, experience, accomplishments, and goals bring a sense of completion and closure to outgoing group members, while providing valuable advice and confidence to incoming members. It's about merging information and leadership styles, and forging a path for the group's success.

Time and again, student organizations suffer from poor leadership transition—the current president fails to pass on information, or the process is too informal. Well-planned transitions are important no matter what the position or organization; however, in a college environment where students' time is relatively short lived, it is especially crucial. Yet still it remains a struggle for many groups.

Perhaps the problem is that students view the process as just another task—a final chore in a long line of organizational work. Yet student orgs are about so much more than assignments and responsibilities; they're about relationships, community, and time-honored customs. The transition process should be given as much attention and respect as the ceremonies, events, and other traditions cherished by the group.

The "Old, New, Borrowed, Blue" concept provides an excellent framework for leadership transition. The concept is broad, allowing it to be easily adapted to fit any organization, from Greek to academic. It's something that most domestic students are familiar with, so it's easy to remember. It calls to mind a checklist of sorts, instilling the belief that certain items must be accomplished or attained before the "big event" can take place. And it symbolizes tradition and the merging of people, assets, and goals—the cornerstones of student life.

### SOMETHING OLD

Leadership is more than just a job or a title—it's a learning process. Outgoing leaders are extremely valuable assets; they have obtained a wealth of information about the day-to-day functions of the group. The time they spend educating new members about rules, regulations, and operations will pay dividends in the future. Items for review include: • Constitutions and bylaws • Calendar of annual activities/events • Advisor information • Office space/storage • Passwords for computer files, voicemail, etc. • Procedures for making reservations, updating the website, and more

### SOMETHING NEW

To flourish, one must be willing to change and grow. The same is true for organizations. While learning and respecting the existing structure (the "old") is an integral part of the process, it's equally important to embrace the ideas and goals of the new leadership. Organizations should consider building the following activities into their transition process: • Host an orientation for new leaders • Have a brainstorming session with all members to ponder ways to improve past activities and goals, as well as kick off new initiatives. • Create new risk plans

### SOMETHING BORROWED

No matter how prepared a new student leader is, at some point he or she will need help. Just like new brides borrow items from women with successful marriages as good luck, new leaders can borrow wisdom, ideas, and creative suggestions from those who've already served as successful leaders. When duties are over, true leaders don't simply pack up and leave; they remain a valuable resource for new members to "borrow" information from. Outgoing leaders can "lend" themselves in a variety of ways: • Be a friend and supporter who members can depend on when help is needed • When members are overwhelmed—during re-registration or during the planning of an annual event, for example—provide advice or assistance • Know of a good printer? An especially helpful IT employee? Share your knowledge—it will make the new students' jobs easier • Discuss recruitment and pass along any tips you've obtained • Discuss the importance of delegation and talk through some scenarios to help new leaders feel comfortable in positions of authority

### SOMETHING BLUE

The color blue represents faithfulness, loyalty, and purity. The "something blue" tradition should be seen as a trigger for team building and discussions about the organization's core purpose and values. It's a great time to reaffirm vows and build relationships. • Stress relationships and continuing ties to the group—"always a brother/sister/member" • Review and clean up membership lists • Discuss expectations—academic, behavioral, and otherwise—as well as sanctions for rule-breaking or inappropriate behavior • Create a process for recognizing and rewarding members for their accomplishments

### SILVER SIXPENCE

Like it or not, money makes the world—and most student organizations—go 'round. Financial health is crucial to a group's success, but dealing with money and bookkeeping is often one of the most overwhelming and worrisome responsibilities for new student leaders. Discussing details, sharing information, and making the process as simple and transparent as possible ensures that an organization will have a stress-free financial future. Before new leadership takes over, be sure to: • Have an honest talk about financial goals and expectations • Sign over financial accounts • Discuss funding resources and opportunities • Review account numbers and passwords

Students join organizations for a variety of reasons—tradition, friendships, résumé building, and as a way of exploring interests and talents. There is great honor in belonging to a group, and students take their roles seriously. The easier the leadership transition process, the stronger and more successful the group. "Old, New, Borrowed, Blue" can work for any organization; tailoring the framework to the specific needs of the group will help organize the transition process, leaving more time for activities, events, group bonding, and have some fun. And isn't that what it's all about?

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