

Make Hazing History: Recognize, Prepare, Act

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Hank Nuwer once said, “Hazing is an extraordinary activity that, when it occurs often enough, becomes perversely ordinary, as those who engage in it grow desensitized to its inhumanity.” This desensitization is apparent every day. From the moment we open our cell phones, we are bombarded by atrocities— mass shootings, war, murder. Consequently, switching the news on to hear that a college boy with a peanut allergy died after he was forced to eat them in a hazing initiation is not surprising, and may even be trivialized. However, hazing, called ragging in South Asian countries, is a common practice around the world. It begins at a young age, as 1 in 5 American high schoolers report being hazed, and often continues to adulthood. When we see events like hazing occurring over and over again, it becomes expected, and unwillingly— accepted. Herein lies the issue we must change.

RECOGNIZE: “To solve a problem you have to recognize your share of responsibility.”

As humans, we possess the undervalued trait of empathy. We see the embarrassment of our peers as they collect their scattered papers from the floor and feel bad. We feel uncomfortable on their behalf, but more uncomfortable with speaking up. This contributes to a larger network of societal norms that lead victims of hazing to believe that their experience is customary, traditional, and proper— when in reality, it is anything but. I have faith that recognizing hazing as an issue will pose no difficulties. The real challenge is embracing the feeling in our gut that says “this is wrong,” and recognizing the responsibility we have to do something about it.

PREPARE: “Preparation is key.”

Imagine a practiced nurse and a coding patient. The nurse’s prepared fingers know how to perform CPR, know how to save the patient’s life, illustrating perfectly the power of preparation. This mantra applies to all arenas of life— including hazing. Nearly every institution has a policy against hazing, however they are often unknown. We must familiarize ourselves with these rules, and as it is so often said, “If you see something, say something.” By knowing which numbers to call (such as the Greek Anti-Hazing Hotline) and which officials to report incidents to, we are one step closer to eradicating hazing.

ACT: “Actions speak louder than words.”

Now, you can take the Hazing Prevention Pledge, retweet an anti-hazing article, but in the moment— if you freeze— it is wasted. Intervention is imperative when there is a human being, with human feelings, who deserves to be treated with respect, at stake. To truly be an activist, a revolutionary, it is vital that you recognize the difference between sympathizing and synthesizing. You can sympathize with the cause. You can sympathize with the recruit being beaten in front of a crowd. But you can fail to act. Or you can synthesize. Synthesizing means, at its core, creating. Creating change. Creating a movement. Creating a revolution out of the feelings of disgust and discomfort that accompany hazing. Synthesizing is stepping up to the plate and saying—with conviction— “This is wrong. Stop. I am calling the police.”

In the end, as a society we can only hope to eliminate such inhumane practices as hazing. To do so, we must refuse to be shepherds of ignorance. We must refuse to be members of the crowd, bystanders, with our phone lights flashing, videos recording. Instead we must RECOGNIZE the issue,

PREPARE to intervene, and ACT when we see it happening. We must be Herculaneum in our principles and together— we can make hazing history.