

Le'Go My Eggo

by Joe Martin

We've all seen the commercials before...a young brother and his sister are sitting at the kitchen table waiting for the last Eggo waffle to pop up out of the proverbial toaster. While each sits in nervous anticipation, hoping to fulfill their sugary fantasy, both try to rationalize in their minds why he or she is more deserving of the "last waffle."

The brother grumbles under his breath, "*You know I missed dinner last night, and I'm really starving.*"

The sister quickly responds, "*But I'm the oldest, and I deserve it; besides, you don't even like waffles as much as I do.*"

In utter frustration, both immediately realize that when it comes to matters of hunger, negotiation is not an option.

Then suddenly, the waffle springs from the toaster. Both siblings reach and grab the waffle at the same time, yelling out in unison, "*Le'go my Eggo!*"

When it comes to committing our time, talents, and resources to a student organization, we can often find ourselves in a similar situation. The "*waffle*," in this particular case, represents the position you desire to have within your organization. And your "*ego*" represents your reasons why you want the position. The problem develops when students are unwilling or reluctant to "*let go of their egos*" (i.e., their personal reasons) in order to serve the greater good of the organization.

Having served as a president for my professional student organization years ago, it was difficult for me to determine what was more discouraging...having to literally beg apathetic students to join our organization or working with self-serving students who joined the organization for all the wrong reasons.

In a *perfect* world, the ideal reasons to join a student organization would be to improve the campus community; promote the cause of the organization; and inspire, motivate, and train students to become better leaders.

However, in the *real* world, we know that many students join organizations with entirely different motives. Unfortunately, some of those motives may be self-serving and destructive to the organization, resulting in morale problems and high member turnover. Some students may join an organization or run for a position for any of the following reasons:

- to be in a powerful position ("*Step back, I own this Eggo.*")
- to be in the spotlight ("*Hey everybody, look at my Eggo.*")
- to build a resume ("*This Eggo might actually help me get a job.*")
- to socialize with others ("*I love talking to others about my Eggo.*")
- to increase their dating pool ("*Hey, could we get together sometime to discuss your 'Eggo'?*")
- to make some extra money ("*I wonder how much this Eggo is worth?*")
- to network and make professional contacts ("*I want to meet the person who made this Eggo.*")
- to get free meals and other extras ("*Wow, this Eggo didn't cost me anything!*")

In addition to destroying morale and lowering retention, self-serving egos can also cause your organization to be less productive; weaken your relationship with campus administration; and attract negative publicity, which in turn hurts future member recruitment efforts. In plain English, ***misguided egos can become the parasite that ultimately sabotages your organization's success.***

The best way to deal with the “ego” problem is by identifying it, so you can prevent it from entering your organization in the first place. I’ve designed a quick exercise that I believe every student in your organization should complete.

I’ve done a longer version of this exercise with more than a thousand college administrators in an effort to help them expose their egos and salvage their careers. The exercise is easy, but it’s very revealing; all it requires is honesty. Here are a few of the exercise questions:

1.) *As a student leader, does your responsibilities give you more headaches or heartaches?*

In reality, your position should give you more heartaches (*i.e., the pain of not seeing an objective reached, a student empowered, or the campus improved*) than headaches. As painful as it may sound, heartaches should be the reasons WHY you joined the organization in the first place.

Your sincere passion (heart-felt enthusiasm) to improve student life, build the organization, and instill a sense of community, are the ingredients of true student leadership. Heartaches give you the drive to keep getting up after you’ve been knocked down by the headaches. Trust me, there’s always room in your life for the organizational headaches (*i.e., paperwork, bureaucracy, phone calls, student apathy, etc.*), but space should be limited.

2.) *Would you continue to serve your organization even if you weren’t recognized for your contribution?*

Everyone likes to feel appreciated, and everyone should be. But that’s not always possible. If you feel you always “*have to*” be praised for your efforts, you might want to reevaluate your purpose for being a member.

3.) *Do you get more excited about going to organizational planning meetings or missing them?*

Believe it or not, you “*should be*” excited about attending the meetings. The mission of your organization should be the thing that drives you. A meeting is an opportunity to launch new ideas, evaluate old ones, and discuss the potential impact of your organization.

4.) *If serving students was a crime, would there be enough evidence on your campus to convict you?*

In this country, you are innocent until proven guilty. But in this particular case, *you want* to be found “*guilty*” of serving too much. Start compiling your evidence; who knows, you might even be asked to prove your case.

5.) ***Is my attitude helping or hurting the organization?***

It’s so easy to identify what’s wrong with the “weak link” members in our organization. However, if you truly want to improve your organization, you must (and should) start with improving yourself. The largest room in your house should always be *your* room for improvement.

So, start today by identifying some your personality “blind spots,” and commit yourself to strengthening those areas. Because it’s almost impossible to improve yourself and NOT improve your organization.

How did you do? Are you serving your organization or are you serving yourself? If you’re really courageous, you might even suggest that your members discuss their individual answers as a group (*for additional questions to this exercise, E-mail me at jmartin@rwuniversity.com*). This exercise can help you find out what makes your members “tick,” and also understand why they do what they do (*and vice versa*).

During this exercise, if you discover that either you or someone in your group is an “Eggo-maniac,” always remember your options:

1. Option 1: Resolve

If you want to remain in the organization, and your actions and attitude have caused pain for others, make a public apology to your group admitting your misguided motives. This will not be an easy thing to do; however, if you’re sincere, you will mend some unspoken wounds, and at the same time, earn the respect of your members.

2. Option 2: Reprioritize

If you want to remain in the organization, and you’ve successfully managed to camouflage your selfish motives, simply reprioritize and refocus your efforts. Commit yourself to putting your group’s needs above your own. Don’t just tell your members what you plan to do, show them.

3. Option 3: Resign

If you know that you or another member of your organization will have a better chance at winning the lotto than letting go of his or her ego, graciously resign from the position. Until you realize that your needs will only be met to the degree to which you meet the need of others, you may actually serve your organization better by leaving it.

So the next time you decide to satisfy your leadership appetite by reaching for the “Eggo,” forget about the “waffle” for a minute, and take a moment to examine the “*real*”

reason(s) why you want it. Trust me, there will *always* be more *Eggos*, but you only have one *ego*; make sure it serves others and your organization.

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