

Fluff and Fold a Community

It may seem a little strange at first. What does laundry have to do with building community? Laundry is a mundane task that we administrators dread just like our residents. It piles high and is never ending. This is actually the beauty of laundry though. Laundry is an instant connection with residents—an instant commonality regardless of age, experience, and position. All that really matters when we are folding our laundry is that we have created a vulnerable moment where our students may recognize that we too fold our socks together or accidentally washed a red T-shirt with our white towels. We are just like them.

This too may sound odd, and honestly it is a bit strange to be writing about laundry. However, this is the exact point that I want to discuss. I remember way back when, during my freshman year in college, my Hall Director did his laundry in the same hot, crowded, laundry room as the residents. He set a standard that when a load was taken out of the dryer, you folded it and placed it on top of the same machine. Regardless of the fact that it wasn't his laundry, he folded it.

The laundry-load owner would eventually come down and be surprised that his or her clothes were warm, fluffy, and properly folded. The trend spread across our four-story residence hall. Soon students were folding other people's laundry, because a load of their laundry was mysteriously folded. Keep in mind, this was a very small college campus. Eventually residents knew who owned the laundry load by looking at the clothes. On their way back up to their room they would leave a note, "Surprise! Your laundry is done!"

This all started by our hall director folding one load of laundry. Not only did he do his laundry in the same manner we did, but also he gave of himself to us for nothing in return. He accidentally created an environment where respect carried over to the roommate, neighbors, floors, and hall, which created a tight community.

Yesterday, I found myself doing laundry with my own residents in my residence hall. I think back to this simple task that not only altered my college experience, but excited me about the residence halls enough to become a Resident Assistant, and ultimately a Hall Director myself. I find that the "accidental" community builders are what makes it all worth it. Knowing that people respect and genuinely care for one another is a great way to put your feet on the ground each morning. There are other little things—learning the resident's names, leaving your door open, eating in the dining facility, being visible—that accidentally help to create a community. However, realizing that I am one of them



Jessica Pettitt believes in her fluff and fold to build community theory.

and that they are a part of me is where it all starts.

Sure, theft, vandalism, policy violations, paranoia, and anger make our jobs frustrating at times, but we have to remember that as administrators the students see us as separate entities. Think back to the powerful moments of childhood when you bumped into your second grade teacher at the grocery store. Remember feeling shocked to find out that your teacher left the school building? Your teacher actually ate REAL food and maybe even had a REAL family. Give your residents a chance to see you fold your underwear and button up your work shirts. Better yet, start a trend and fold their laundry. Just once. One load is all it took for me. Imagine if building a community were this easy. Imagine that I might just be right. Imagine if you could really fluff and fold your community.

Submitted by
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