The best-selling author, Order of Constantine and Significant Sig on paying it forward for the next generation of Sigma Chi leaders

INSIDE: SIGNIFICANT SIG ROB REIFSCHNEIDER SPONSORS VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE; FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 2022 TO 2023 ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

FALL 2022
ON THE COVER:
Order of Constantine and Significant Sig Bill George, GEORGIA TECH 1964, joined wife Penny and the George Family Foundation to make a transformational gift to the Sigma Chi Foundation in support the Authentic Leadership or “Self” track of Sigma Chi’s Transformational Leader program. George discusses his Sigma Chi journey and how the Fraternity’s new leadership curriculum can change the Greek-letter world. (Cover image: Jay Ford)

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LEADING THE WAY

The Sigma Chi experience taught him how to become a leader. More than six decades later, the pioneer of Authentic Leadership, best-selling author, Order of Constantine and Significant Sig Bill George, GEORGIA TECH 1964, is helping a new generation of Sigs find their True North.
he was eager to become a leader the moment he arrived at the Georgia Institute of Technology and pledged Sigma Chi. But Order of Constantine and Significant Sig Bill George, **Georgia Tech 1964**, found out that leadership was more than winning an election, it was earning the respect of his peers.

Decades before becoming a senior fellow at Harvard Business School, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic and best-selling author, whose books **Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value** and **Discover Your True North** inspired a generation of business and organizational leaders across the globe, George discovered how to lead authentically within a chapter 800 miles from his home in Michigan.

“I think I learned more during my pledge time and then as an undergraduate Sigma Chi than at any point in time in my entire life about leadership,” George recalled.

“I’ll never forget, some people pulled me aside and said, ‘Bill, no one’s ever gonna want to work with you, much less be led by you ‘cause you’re moving so fast to get ahead, you don’t take time for other people.’ And they were absolutely right.”

After losing multiple elections in his first semester on campus, George learned to be himself and value his relationships with his brothers and others. The elections he lost as a pledge shifted his way as a sophomore, junior and senior through the roles of assistant magister, magister, pro consul and consul.

“I learned so much about how you lead people and how I could really relate to people from very diverse backgrounds,” George said. “That’s why I’m so loyal to Sigma Chi because it really helped shape me as a leader. And all these years later, I think about those lessons every time I’m asked to lead an organization, a board or a committee. That’s how important it was.

“I remember as magister, which I enjoyed probably more than anything else I ever did, it was really an opportunity to help people develop to reach their full potential. That’s still my goal, to help people reach their full potential.”

One of his pledges, Significant Sig Kary Mullis, **Georgia Tech 1966**, would earn the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Another, Significant Sig Robert H. Frank, **Georgia Tech 1966**, has changed the outlook on behavioral economics globally through his writings.

“We just had an amazing group of people and I realized that all leadership is a two-way street where we learned from each other,” George said. “And we learned about our differences and (how) you have to accommodate your leadership to people’s differences. And I’ve tried to take that out into all the leadership teaching I do at Harvard Business School, all the mentoring, working with CEOs from very different perspectives, to really learn how to listen, something that was hard for me early on, but I learned how to do it.”

His leadership within the chapter and on campus and success in the classroom helped George earn the Fraternity’s prestigious International Balfour Award and set the stage for a storied career undertaking a number of leadership roles and board service for global companies including Target Corporation, Exxon Mobil, Mayo Clinic and Goldman Sachs.

“One of the great opportunities of my life was learning to really understand the White Cross, which I define as knowing who I am. And I learned that in Sigma Chi,” George said. “Finding one’s True North really is essentially the same thing. Before we can go out and lead other people, we have to know who we are, because the hardest person you’ll ever have to lead is yourself.

“Understanding my White Cross really helped me translate this into True North, which is really the same idea. When you know who you are, then people will resonate and wanna work with you and they wanna follow you. And that gives you opportunities to really make a difference and to step into opportunities to lead.”

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Many of the lessons George learned along his life and career — particularly values of authentic leadership brought mainstream within his pioneering books, particularly True North — are now impacting many
of today’s young Sigma Chi trendsetters through the Fraternity’s Transformational Leader member development and education program delivered by the Sigma Chi Leadership Institute (SCLI).

George had a bird’s eye view at the Authentic Leadership certificate program debut at the 2021 Krach Transformational Leaders Workshop in Oxford, Ohio.

Already a longtime advocate of Sigma Chi’s leadership initiatives, including sponsorship of the Fraternity’s Sigma Chi Online platform, elements of the Horizons Huntsman Leadership Summit and a local four-year program based upon his leadership philosophy within his home Beta Psi chapter, what George saw at Miami University inspired him to further his support and help Sigma Chi change the Greek-letter world forever.

“I was so impressed and really moved at how the young men had gone through this program just for a series of days and how it had been transformative for them,” George said. “And they were sharing what they had learned so deeply with each other, from their heart, because leadership today is not just about the head, it’s about the heart. It’s about your humanity, your passion, your compass, your empathy, and they got it. And I can see those people who have gone through that program already stepping up to make a difference. And that was exciting to me.”
In June, the Sigma Chi Foundation announced the substantial commitment by George, his wife, Penny, and the George Family Foundation to support the overarching Authentic Leadership or “Self” track of the Transformational Leader.

Combining grant support from the George Family Foundation and a personal and estate commitment from Bill and Penny, the gift will bring the George family’s collective lifetime support of Sigma Chi’s leadership initiatives to $5 million upon completion and bring the ideals and principles behind Authentic Leadership to thousands of young Sigma Chi leaders across North America. They will have the opportunity to earn the overarching Bill George Authentic Leadership Certificate upon completion of the three separate contributing certificate modules comprising the “Self” or Authentic Leadership track of the Transformational Leader program.

“Sigma Chi has far advanced over any other Fraternity in what it’s doing in terms of leadership,” said George. “And I think what it’s done through the Sigma Chi Leadership Institute is just an incredible thing. ... Here is this set of programs that really are very much in tune with my belief about Authentic Leadership. And so that’s why Penny and I were proud to put our names on the Authentic Leadership program and to look at the modules, which include values-based leadership, and all the things that we learn as young people on how to be leaders, and then we can go on to other more complex things in dealing with other complex situations, other people and complex societal things.

“But from that core of Authentic Leadership that the Fraternity has now adopted, I think we’re gonna see other fraternities, other sororities and, frankly, other academic institutions adopting these same ideas and teaching these same principles, which is thrilling to me.”

As one of the four key Transformational Leader pathways, the Bill George Authentic Leadership Certificate (or “Self”) track is rooted in self-understanding and an ability to recognize and celebrate passion and purpose that leads to transformational change.

Participants will embark on a path of self-discovery toward Authentic Leadership, engaging in three separate but related certificates to establish a foundational understanding of leadership as a process rooted in authenticity and candid self-reflection about one’s own values, crucibles, strengths and areas for growth.

These certificate pathways include True North Leadership (formerly Authentic Leadership), based on George’s seminal authentic leadership book Discover Your True North, Reifschneider Values-Based Leadership (see page 10 to learn more) and Foundational Leadership.

“Sigma Chi has always been a leader among other fraternities and sororities in being a role model, of being a value-centered organization that helped people grow into leadership,” George added. “Yes, it’s a social organization, but it’s so much more. And I think a lot of the other fraternities in particular have fallen back and just (been) pure social organizations and have gotten themselves in a lot of trouble. So I would hope that Sigma Chi’s leadership example through SCL will set the standard for the entire Greek world, and that academic institutions that are skeptical about fraternities, and the media, by the way, will see the benefit of being in a smaller group.

“You can’t relate to being in a university with 40,000 people. You need that small group of 40 to 100 people in your organization where you can really build deep, deep relationships, and that’s where authenticity comes from. So that’s why I think this is such an opportunity for Sigma Chi to make a difference and to take its leadership courses in the universities as well, because this is the way we should develop leaders. And it’s not just about developing managers. We don’t need more managers, we need more leaders in this world in all walks of life.”

The book, which will be featured in depth in a future edition of The Magazine of Sigma Chi, aims to inspire young leaders to step up now and reach their full potential by discovering their true north.

Long before global leaders such as former president George W. Bush released Authentic Leadership platforms, it was George’s inaugural book, the 2003 Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value and its 2007 follow-up Discover Your True North that brought Authentic Leadership principles to the mainstream.

In an August interview with the Foundation, George discussed his books and much more.
What inspired you to write the first book, Authentic Leadership, and how did that evolve into the true north principle and the successful True North series of books that you’ve had over your career?

BILL GEORGE: “When I was CEO of Medtronic, leadership was all about money, fame, power, charisma, a lot of things I thought didn’t really matter. And I felt at variance with a lot of other CEOs, and particularly the academics writing about it. I didn’t believe in power-based leadership. I believe in empowerment. How do you empower everyone else? And I’ll guarantee it, an empowered organization will outperform a top-down, power-based organization every time. So I came out of Medtronic and I had put a 10-year limit on being CEO, and I was still in my late 50s. So what am I gonna do now? And so I decided I’m gonna take all my leadership ideas and convert them into a book.

“And that became Authentic Leadership, which came out in 2003, not too long after the Twin Towers came down and the dot-com crash. And we had Enron and all these fake companies with very bad values. And so I’m trying to say, ‘lead by your values.’ And then we went out and researched with a lot of people, 125 leaders in depth, a number of them Sigma Chis, about leadership. And what we learned, the most important thing, is for people to know their true north and to follow that true north, and that led to a succession of books.

“And the most recent of which is the Emerging Leader edition because now I think we’re going through a massive generational change in leadership.

“So the idea I originally had 20 years ago on authenticity has now become the gold standard, as the Harvard Business Review called it, but now I think we need to have emerging leaders step up and not wait until they get the big title or wait until they’re tapped on the shoulder, but step into leadership roles, because I think they understand how to lead in today’s very diverse world with people with so many different backgrounds and so many complex issues. Like we’re careening from one crisis to the next, and we need younger leaders to know how to deal with that, and not (try) to go back to the good old days of the ‘50s or ‘60s.”

When looking at today’s environment, particularly coming out of the global pandemic, why is the need for leadership from the millennial and Z generations important and relevant today?

BILL GEORGE: “I grew up in relatively stable times, but today, we’re careening from one crisis to the next. I think the COVID-19 experience of the global pandemic has had more impact on people rethinking their lives and their careers and what’s really important. And a lot of people are realizing what’s important is to be centered on your values and your true north and who you are and what you wanna do with your life. But we have other crises. We have high inflation for the first time in 40 years. We have Russia attacking Ukraine. There’s a lot of tension around China. But leaders today have to know how to lead through these things, lead diverse people and inspire everyone.”
"And so I think what’s really critical is we have leaders who are in the younger generations who can step up and take over now and go out and make a difference. You don’t have to wait till you’re CEO of General Motors. You can take it on right now, where you are, and make a difference. And I think the ultimate goal is to help everyone reach their full potential as a human being and as a leader. And if we can do that, think of what a much better world we’ll have."

Can you talk about the initiatives of the George Family Foundation and the impact that you and Penny have made locally in Minnesota and beyond, and why that philanthropic giving is important to you?

BILL GEORGE: “Penny and I were blessed that in my time at Medtronic, the stock went up a whole lot and we took about 40 percent of our net worth and put it into the George Family Foundation. And we’ve been thrilled to work together on that. Penny’s been the Chair more recently. We’re now co-chairs. Our sons, Jeff and John are involved, having a foundation which can really help other people.

“My philosophy of life is you can’t take it with you, so if you’re blessed with the financial resources, you need to give them back. Everyone needs to give them back because a lot of people are less fortunate. And so we’ve tried to, in Penny’s case, transform healthcare to look at the whole person, mind, body, spirit. In my case, transformed leadership, to look at the whole person, mind, body, spirit, and help support leadership programs. So the Sigma Chi Foundation and the Sigma Chi Leadership Institute program just felt perfect (as to) what we wanted to do. And we’ve done that in our community. We’ve sponsored programs of the World Economic Forum for young global leaders at a number of universities: at Georgia Tech; at Harvard Business School, where I went; and at Duke, where Penny has the Women’s Leadership Initiative. The whole idea is to help spawn more leaders and help people in their early stages, like they do in Sigma Chi, grow into leadership roles.”

Noting your longtime support for Sigma Chi, why is it important for alumni in general to give back to Sigma Chi, support these initiatives and pay it forward for our undergrads of the future?

BILL GEORGE: “I grew up with the motto, you come into this world with nothing and you leave the world with nothing, but if in between, you’re blessed with more financial resources than you need to live on, then I think it’s your obligation to give back. And where do we wanna give back? We wanna give back to the organization that helped us grow. There’s no organization that helped me grow more than Sigma Chi. And so I think that’s really important. I don’t want it sitting in some university endowment. I want the money to go where it can help young people become better human beings and better leaders. So that’s what Penny and I are trying to do through Sigma Chi, to enable more people to become authentic leaders who can transform organizations and society.

“In my own chapter, Beta Xi, we created a four-year program based around the principles of True North and Authentic Leadership. And it’s been the most powerful thing that’s ever happened to the chapter. Every year, there’s a retreat that we sponsor where 70 undergraduates and about a dozen alumni go up and work on leadership, and then they have small groups that continue on throughout the year. And there’s actually a four-stage program you go through as a freshman, sophomore, junior and senior that really has been transformative. I think these ideas can help so many people become better leaders ... and now we have a chance through SCLI to help transformSigma Chi further into a true leadership development fraternity that helps so many young men develop their full potential as undergraduates and as alumni. So I think it’s important for every alumni to give back to the fraternity that we care so much about, that’s helped us each in your own way.”