

Winning Strategies

The 'Leadership Strategy Survey' **Building Consensus on the Issues?**

As any manager can tell you, boardroom experiences can vary based on individual personalities and agendas. The old story that a board deliberated 30 minutes over what brand of ice cream should be served at the club has been floating around our industry for two decades. Why can't boards stay focused on the issues?

Normally competing agendas are at fault. Let me qualify this statement and the article to follow. There are many fine clubs with excellent boards that have weathered crises and helped propel the organization forward. However, as we travel the country, it is more common than not to find clubs with lack of consensus among the board members on major issues facing the club. What progress can be made when competing factions are trying to pull in different directions? Many times the most powerful, or loudest voice, wins the battle based on peer pressure.

Lack of board direction and consensus can also be hard on general managers. It reminds me of the following story:

A club general manager, on his deathbed, called his friend and said, "Bill, I want you to promise me that when I die, you will have my remains cremated."

"And what," his friend asked, "do you want me to do with your ashes?"

The GM said, "Just put them in an envelope and mail them to the club "Attention: Board of Directors. Write on the envelope, 'Now, you have everything.'"

How many managers feel that way? What steps can be taken to get the board members focused on the issues?

In a recent *Boardroom* article I discussed the strategic planning process in depth. No matter what your issues are, they can be dealt with in a systematic process. The first thing that is necessary is to understand the opinion of the BOD, both individually and as a group, on all the crucial issues facing the club. The way to accomplish this is by using the "Leadership Strategy Survey" approach.

What is a Leadership Strategy Survey?

First a survey must be developed dealing with critical issues regarding membership, products and services, facilities, finances, and governance issues. The survey is normally 50 or so questions asking board members to rate their opinions on issues. The questions are not open ended comment style questions. The survey is emailed to each board member so they can fill it out independently of others' opinions. The surveys are then tallied into a template with the following style answers:

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- No Opinion
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

How does the Club use the results?

Once the data is entered, you will generate an agree percentage (a combination of Strongly Agree and Somewhat Agree) and a disagree percentage (a combination of Somewhat Disagree and Strongly Disagree). The No Opinion answers are not factored in the equation. Once complete you will understand if the board is leaning in favor or against the issue.

Many clubs expand the survey process outside of just the BOD. The strategic planning committee is surveyed. Clubs will then add the 6-8 immediate past presidents and survey them. You will then have opinions from:

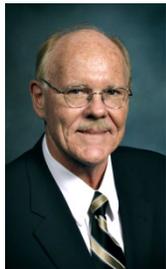
- Past Presidents - The Past
- Current BOD – The Present
- Strategic Planning Committee – The Future

The information is then tallied demographically with a grand total of all participants.

Once completed, a strategy session is held. Each participant is given back their individual surveys so they can see how in sync they are with the rest of the leadership. Normally the process generates extensive discussion with a focus on the right direction the club should take on key issues.

The Leadership Strategy Survey process should be a central component of any strategic planning effort. Unfortunately this is not something that can be done on your own. The club will need a competent facilitator to set the focus and lead the group. However, the results can clarify options and set the club on the right agenda with support from the past, present and future leaders. It will give direction to management to pursue solutions and keep the organization moving forward.

If the club is progressing, the GM, on his passing, can reroute his ashes to the IRS with the same comment “now you have everything.” It won’t be the first set of ashes they have gotten.



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