

Winning Strategies

What is Under Your Rock?



Being Proactive Rather than Reactive

The following story may be one of the most important lessons that can be learned in the Club Industry or any other industry for that matter. A pastor once told a story that went like this:

“He took on a new church and on his first visit he entered the lobby and was looking around when he noticed a large rock in the corner. He asked one of the church leaders what was the purpose of the rock? The leader responded that the flooring was weak in that area and so they put a rock there so no one would trip. The pastor asked ‘don’t you want to tear up the flooring to see what the problem is?’ The leader said it was no big deal and didn’t want to go to the trouble or expense. Later that month the church was having a cleanup day. The pastor asked the volunteers to help him move the rock and figure out what was the problem with the floor. When the floor was uncovered they found a huge nest of termites that had eaten the stabilizing beams under the church and almost caused the building to collapse.”

In the past decade it is amazing how many clubs we have worked with that finally moved the rock and now needed help to fix a large problem when, if done on a regular basis, would have been much easier and less expensive. Let’s look at a case study that represents a combination of issues from multiple clubs. The problems with this imaginary club are in four areas. They include governance, management, membership and finance.

How the Imaginary Club nightmare began?

The Imaginary Country Club (ICC) had a long history of the Board running the club. The Board made all the decisions and insured that like-minded people were continually nominated. Decisions were made based on the desires of the Board members and their friends. The golf course was always the number one priority at the expense of the rest of the club. Dues were a hot button issue and it was not uncommon for the club to go years without addressing dues increases.

The GM was the caretaker of the club and followed the wishes of the Board without ‘stepping out of bounds’ so-to-speak. No one was allowed to move the rock!

How the Nightmare Expanded?

In actuality the ICC had placed several rocks in the way. **Rock #1** They failed to address the needs of the younger women and children by removing restrictive rules. **Rock #2** They didn’t keep up with the trends in fitness. **Rock #3** They refused to fund needed capital at a level necessary to address some immediate needs. **Rock #4** They did nothing when their biggest competition built a new clubhouse and resort style pool. There were several other rocks at the ICC. Then someone moved one rock and then the next!

How Pro-Active Leaders Addressed the Problem?

The ICC GM finally left for another position and the club got a new GM. He convinced the Board they needed a strategic plan. One of the pro-progress Board members chaired the committee. Yes, there were a couple of them on the Board. They put together a diverse group of business people who understood the need to think strategically. They hired some professional help and surveyed the membership. The results showed the members were not very happy about the way the club was being run and all the rocks they bumped into everywhere. The plan was developed and many initiatives undertaken. Then they came to the biggest rock. How to underwrite a major capital program? They did all the right things (too much to go into here) and today the ICC is well placed moving forward.

The question becomes “can the ICC position its self to not allow any new rocks to be placed in the club in the future?”

Be Pro-Active and Don’t Allow Nightmares to Happen!

Being pro-active is actually quite easy. Just make your strategic plan a ‘LIVING DOCUMENT’. What does that mean? Present your strategic plan to the membership at the beginning of the year. Tell the membership that this is what they can expect from the club in the next year. Communicate with them quarterly on how the plan is progressing. Update the plan at the end of the year. At the next annual meeting remind them of the plan and everything that was accomplished the past year. Then tell them what they can expect next year from the updated plan. Never allow the plan to go dormant. Manage the plan to insure its success.

Remember two things and you will be successful. Never try to catch a falling knife and never put a rock over a problem.



NOTE: More information on these concepts can be found in The Boardroom article archives or at Clubwiseconsulting.com/publication/articles.

Jerry N. McCoy, MCM, is the President of Clubwise, LLC, a consulting firm specializing in strategic planning, master planning, operational audits and governance issues. Clubwise was the 2013 Consulting Company of the Year by BoardRoom Magazine.

He is the author of The Director’s Guide for Understanding Club Governance, The Governance Checklist and The Board Resource Manual, all of which are publications of CMAA’s Premier Club Services®, the new Strategic Management handbook for private clubs, and is an extensive contributor to the new CMAA Facilities and Amenities Texts Volumes I & II, which are available through Bookmart. He can be reached at www.clubwiseconsulting.com or CMAAMCM@msn.com