

Winning Strategies

'The Membership Perspective'

Know When You Are Getting an Error Message

I recently read “Everybody who writes wants their stuff to be stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, wail, howl in pain, desperation, and anger! However most of those folks work for Microsoft, writing error messages.”

In the club industry we get error messages all the time. Unfortunately, we don't always realize it when it happens. Being a General Manager or Board Member in today's industry can bring with the position many problems. Normally most of those problems are generated by less than 10% of the membership. So let's look at some of the belief systems that generate those problems.

1. Truth or Member Conclusions

There is an old adage in the club industry that says “If a member does not know the answer, they will make one up that appears most logical to them.” I managed a club many years ago where a group of 10 to 15 older members would gather in the men's grill in the morning and would talk about the club. It was amazing the comments that came out of that group. On a regular basis I would come down and visit with them to insure they had the facts and dispel any rumors. A rule I always believed in was over communicate with people who have too much time on their hands.

2. Why Doesn't Everyone Think Like Me?

Members develop specific opinions regarding a variety of issues at the club. They, and normally a small click of friends, make assumptions regarding how issues should be handled. It can be anything from where capital dollars are spent to the price of a beer or the speed of the greens. They just cannot understand why decisions that are made at the club do not mirror their opinions. To that end it is incumbent on the leadership to make logical decisions based on facts and to have current information regarding the majority opinions of the membership. Therefore, every club should do a comprehensive survey of the members at minimum every three years.

3. The Grass is Always Greener Problem

I worked with a small club in a rural market that had good down home food. The members rated the club's food and beverage services very high. There were no other great restaurants in that town to compete. I had another client in south Florida with what I thought was fabulous cutting edge F & B. The members rated their food poor. How can that happen? Well, there was a bunch of other high end clubs competing with them. Members get around to other clubs and cannot understand why their club isn't as good – at least in their minds. Understanding the competition you face and then trying to stay ahead of the game can be critical to long-term success.

4. The New Minimum

It is always a great feeling when the club is able to improve a service or provide a new product to the membership. The members' reactions are very positive and everyone is pleased with themselves for taking the initiative to enhance the member experience. The problem is that there is a rule called the New Minimum. Once the newness has worn off, it is no longer special and, in fact, it is the minimum level of performance expected by the members. You better not let the service slide or try to cut back or take away

that product. Leaders must always understand that their job is to provide new opportunities at the club before members even know they want them.

5. Representative Government Versus Pure Democracy

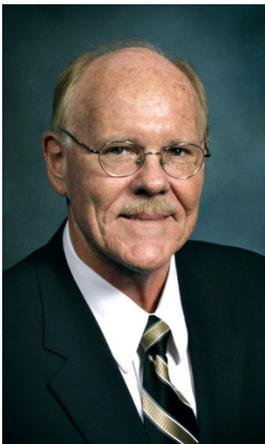
Unfortunately many members believe that clubs are democracies - one member and one vote. However, they don't want to vote on everything. They just want to vote on things that impact their use of the club. A golfer does not care about a change you may make in the tennis area but, if you want to take down a tree on the golf course, they want to vote on it. Club members elect the Board to make decisions and then cannot understand why they don't get their feedback before making a decision. So what to do? Leaders need to be both gracious and strong. They need to communicate, solicit feedback but then also be able to say no.

So What is the Answer?

To summarize the trend for the upcoming year is to get back to the basics of sound management. You need to:

- Over communicate
- Understand the majority member opinion and member opinions sorted demographically
- Understand the competition and react to market forces to stay ahead of the game
- Be creative by instituting new ideas while being diligent in maintaining existing standards
- Present logical arguments and be willing to confront problems as they arise as well as problem members

There is a saying that “anyone in the club business can tell you that if you have no ulcers then you are not carrying your fair share of the load.” I don't know that I agree totally. If you can address all problems in a reasonable fashion, no matter what the outcome, then you should be able to sleep well at night. I know I would.



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