

Club Director

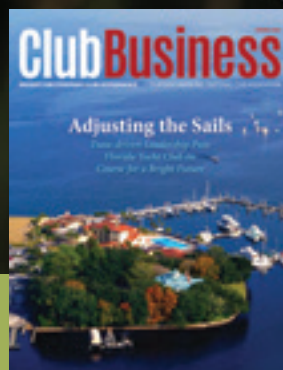
SPRING 2022

PERSPECTIVES FOR LEADING PRIVATE CLUBS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL CLUB ASSOCIATION

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Forest Creek's Partnership
with LPGA's Ana Belac
Boosts Membership



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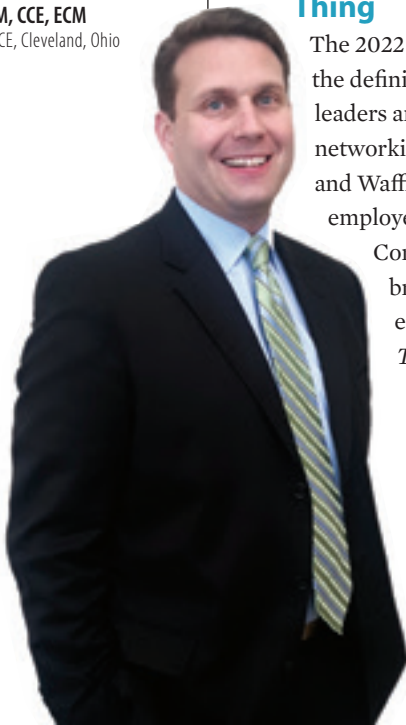
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MAYBE YOU ARE FAMILIAR with writer and humorist Randy Cohen's interview show, "Person Place Thing." It is based on the idea that people are not particularly engaging when they speak directly about themselves but become so when they speak about something they care about. Guests talk about one person, place and thing that are important to them. I have taken the liberty of borrowing that premise for this column.

Person

As you read in this space last issue, Cindy Vizza retired as vice president of communications after 15 years at NCA and 50 issues of *Club Director*. As sad as we were to lose someone of Cindy's skill, character and experience, we are equally excited to have Kim Fernandez, CAE, join the NCA team as vice president of communications. Kim is an experienced communications executive, publications and digital publishing director, and editor/writer, who will oversee all aspects of NCA's communications program and lead NCA's role as a primary information resource for the private club community.

Place

The pandemic has brought many challenges but also many opportunities. I am not aware of an industry that has capitalized on the opportunities more than the private club industry. This extends to NCA headquarters and our ability to embrace a much stronger work-life balance among the team.

The NCA team began working from home in March 2020 and has, in testament to them, continued to do so, responding positively to the change and being more motivated than ever to serve our members and the private club community. Thanks to this and the ability to enhance our already excellent work-life balance, we've embraced work-from-home. I am happy to report that in March, the Association's headquarters moved across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., to Alexandria, Va., already home to many national associations. The move offers both substantial cost savings and a design built for the mostly-from-home work environment that's evolved from COVID-19. Staff can spend more time with their families, less time and money commuting, enjoy a potentially more healthy and less stressful life, and take advantage of a high-tech office designed for productivity and face-to-face collaboration when that's optimal.

Thing

The 2022 National Club Conference May 15-17 in Charleston, S.C., will once again be the definitive national forum for private club leadership, showcasing prominent thought leaders and solution providers at best-in-class facilities with extraordinary recreational and networking events. Speakers will include leaders of such iconic brands as Harley Davidson and Waffle House. Other presentations will cover current supply chain issues, member and employee mental health, hospitality and overcoming unimaginable adversity. This year's

Conference also welcomes the Excellence in Club Management® Awards dinner, bringing our community together to recognize the best in the industry. If all that's not enough, wait until you see this city! Charleston is the No. 1 city to visit according to *Travel + Leisure*. Register today and we'll see you there.

Henry Wallmeyer
 President & CEO

It's Not You, It's Me

Sometimes life, both good and bad, gets in the way of your membership and it's time to leave the beloved club you hold so dear.

THE CALL CAME in mid-September 2013, as I waited at a gate in a large mid-western airport. No one had died or been in an accident. No one was in labor.

“Mr. Smith, your membership is approved and we look forward to seeing you this season.” As the verbal acceptance quickly turned to joyous thoughts of warm winter days on bright green Bermuda, post-round cocktails on the patio with clients and friends, and untold numbers of blackened grouper sandwiches, I had to metaphorically, or at least privately, pinch myself. I was a member in good standing at an exclusive Top 100 private golf club. A “big-boys club,” if you will.

Intentional spoiler alert: After nine great seasons I left that club on December 31, 2021.

Why join a private club unless it's special to you in some way? The country club down the street, the lunch club downtown, the sailing club on the lake or the destination “retreat” golf club located in far more civilized temperatures and dew points all offer wonderful facilities, activities and people allowing you to get away from the noise.

But all good things must come to end.

Sometimes life, both good and bad, gets in the way of your membership and it's time to leave the beloved club you hold so dear. Financial and medical hardships happen. Divorces happen. Excruciating traffic happens. Pandemics happen. Life happens. Sometimes it hurts. I'm told the happiest day of a boat owner's life is the day they sell said boat. Not so with your club. The old axiom of, “If you love something, set it free” holds no water here, yet employing the five stages of grief is apropos.

Of course, club-related factors like financial instability, declining service, personality conflicts, disciplinary actions and

(heaven forbid) bad food and drink have led to many an annulment. These are unfortunate but understandable reasons to leave.

On the bright side, life often changes for the good in a way that you and your club simply grow apart. Irreconcilable differences aren't always negative. Weekend baseball, soccer, hockey and lacrosse tournaments can do irrecoverable harm to your relationship with your club. A beach or mountain house can quickly become the other woman or man. Maybe the kids go off to college and, since we live in an era where parents seem to go to college with their kids, you plan to be away from home more often. Retirements and, even better, early retirements, professional opportunities and new hobbies or interests eventually lead to significant transitions and lifestyle adjustments.

Back to me and “the call” and the membership that came with it. When I joined in 2013, my spouse and I were blissfully childless and petless, living in a downtown condo in a city with a direct commercial flight to the club's vicinity. Fast forward to now, when we are busy and (mostly) blissfully attending to the needs of a yard, two children, two fish and a 10-week-old puppy. Five years ago we chose to leave the big city for a slower pace to raise the kids, but with that decision, we also chose an airport with far fewer direct flight destinations. Getting to my now former paradise these days takes a half-day of flying that includes a stop at the kiss of death of flight travel—the major hub.

I created my own hurdles. I made choices that required trade-offs. Now I've left a club that once embodied everything that was important me. Like you, I would make those same choices over and over again, but as Boyz II Men reminded us

with their Motown cover in 1991, "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday." (I just turned 50 so please excuse the musical homage to my freshman year of college.)

The pandemic has brought with it far too many hurdles, changes, divisions and delays to the global society and economy. National Club Association (NCA) members are far from immune to both the disease and its cures. Shutdowns make for precariously difficult times in our business. When paired with mask and social distancing mandates, labor challenges and supply chain shortages, it's a wonder the club industry is not only surviving, but in many cases, thriving. This phenomenon is a testament to resilient boards, general managers, members and staffs.


It's no secret that many clubs in warm-weather, lower-tax states are currently

limited only by their own capacity limits and the aforementioned labor and supply chain issues. Would-be members are glued to their mobile phones seeking homes and club memberships in desirable locales, sight unseen.

While this situation should certainly be categorized as a great problem to have, there are consequences. The inverse effect of the bounty presently keeping some of our members buried in a good way is, of course, potential outmigration of members that lead to other clubs get buried in a bad way based solely on their geography and state and local policies.

Action-forcing events put all of us in position to make choices and trade-offs. This yin and yang is happening every hour of every day at private clubs across the country. Members are coming and going at

a breakneck pace as are federal, state and local pandemic policies. NCA is the go-to source to help guide our members through this maze of threats and opportunities.

As for my former club, I know they are doing just fine without me and I might even be welcomed back for a round every now and again. It may be true that you can't go home again, but sometimes a pleasant memory reminds us of both another time in our lives and the reasons why that time is a memory. A Valentine's Day mail order of stone crabs can make you pretty happy where you are, too. 



Robert Smith is an NCA board member and serves as Chair of NCA's Government Relations Committee and a member of two other clubs.



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Looking at Capitol Hill's 2022 Calendar

"Everyone wants to save the world, but no one wants to help Mom do the dishes."

– P.J. O'Rourke

I HAD THE OCCASION to meet and speak briefly with libertarian humorist P.J. O'Rourke and attended a book release at the CATO Institute in 2018 where he spoke about *How the Hell Did This Happen?* The book was an exploration of and attempt to understand the 2016 election. As you might imagine, it was not your typical book tour event. I remember it taking the entire afternoon for my face to recover from smiling and laughing at his observations and colorful, sometimes blue commentary.

O'Rourke published 20 books and countless articles full of keen observations on a range of topics, laced with his acerbic wit. He passed away in February but his was a truly unique perspective and a life well lived. Perhaps his best-known work is his take on how our government works in *Parliament of Whores*, in which he quips, "The mystery of government is not how Washington works but how to make it stop." Indeed.


While it might be the case that legislation will slow in 2022, the same cannot be said for the regulatory calendar. The Biden Administration has made it clear that agencies will be moving forward with regulations in a number of areas affecting private clubs. In particular, the Department of Labor (DOL) continues to be active with regulatory activity related to the overtime threshold for exempt and non-exempt employees, independent contractors and heat illness prevention. The

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is also moving forward with rulemaking that would repeal the Navigable Waters Protection Rule and capture additional water features into the definition of navigable water under federal jurisdiction.

The National Club Association is engaged in all these issues and submitted comments to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on establishing a standard for exposure to heat in indoor and outdoor workplaces. The NPRM provided little insight into the details OSHA is considering for a standard, so NCA's comments were general in nature and focused on the fact that most clubs already make arrangements to address the issue without a standard in place. The comments also urged the agency to avoid rigidity in developing any potential standard and foster collaboration between employees and employers.

On the political front, things are hurtling toward wrapping up redistricting and the mid-term elections, which always influence conversations in Washington. While things can change by the moment, the principal issues voters are concerned with are crystalizing depending on who they voted for in 2020—with one notable exception: the economy. According to polling by Redfield & Wilton Strategies, both Biden and Trump voters ranked economy/inflation as the top issue determining who they will vote for in the 2022 mid-term election. Biden voters ranked health care, COVID-19, environment and abortion as their other top issues. Trump voters, on the other hand, ranked immigration, government spending, COVID-19 and health care as their top issues after the economy.

At press time, 31 House Democrats had announced they will not run for reelection this year. This is a significant number of retirements—a 30-year-high—and many are in districts likely to flip in what most believe will be a tough election season for Democrats. At press time, Republicans are leading in generic congressional polls by an average of 3.4 points, which on the surface doesn't sound like a lot, but historically Republicans have needed to be less than 4 points behind to maintain their position in the House. Being an average of 3.4 points ahead shows a strong likelihood Republicans will gain enough seats to retake the majority when the next Congress convenes in January 2023. Republicans will roll out a series of legislative proposals on major issues this spring and into the summer, aimed at explaining their plans to voters should they control the House. With President Biden's approval rating sagging to Trumpian levels, Republicans will be looking to nationalize the election on the issues they believe him to be weakest: inflation, crime, immigration and education.

It's shaping up to be a very interesting fall and I'm sure we'll all be told by both sides of the aisle that this is the most consequential election in our lifetimes—come to think of it, so was every other previous election. They're busy saving the world after all. I just wonder who's going to help Mom with the dishes. 



Joe Trauger is NCA's Vice President of Government Relations. He can be reached at trauger@nationalclub.org.



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Marketing That Increases Member Satisfaction

Forest Creek Golf Club's Foray into Pro Sports Sponsorship

WHEN LPGA TOUR professional Ana Belac teed it up for her first tournament of 2022 at the Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio Golf Club, Boca Raton, Fla., she sported the Forest Creek Golf Club logo on her hat, shirt and golf bag. While sponsoring an LPGA Tour player may be more the province of manufacturers and major brands than it currently is for private golf and country clubs, Forest Creek Golf Club's sponsorship of Belac is a source of pride and engagement among our membership and an indicator of our support of women's golf.

The club's sponsorship of Belac began in 2021. Colony 9, the private group of investors who own the club, recognized that sponsoring an LPGA professional whose character and work ethic clearly mirror key club values was a meaningful marketing opportunity, both internally as well as externally. From the minute it was announced, we've seen a positive response with club members and staff alike. While tracking marketing ROI on something like this is not necessarily an exact science, the bottom line is that our association with Belac has been extremely well received and reinforces our strong commitment to the game.

The Club

Forest Creek Golf Club in Pinehurst, N.C., is ideally situated in the Sandhills of the state, a region known as one of the nation's most historic and storied golfing meccas. The club was founded 25 years ago on beautiful tract of land that had been owned by one family for nearly a century. Acclaimed architect Tom Fazio was commissioned as the course designer and was given carte blanche to craft two distinct 18-hole courses, a 37th



Courtesy of the LPGA

playoff hole and extensive golf practice facilities. Only after the courses were routed did the club's owners decide where to place the clubhouse.

Forest Creek was founded on a strong passion for golf, and it still attracts discerning members from across the nation who feel the same—including Belac. It has become the professional player's home club and serves as quiet retreat where she can practice on two award-winning courses without interruption when she's away from the Tour.

"I'm proud to be a part of a club with Forest Creek's standards and quality of

course conditioning," Belac said. "On top of all that, I sincerely enjoy the club's friendly and welcoming atmosphere both on and off the course."

The Sponsorship

When I accepted the GM/COO position at Forest Creek in 2020, the ownership group (named Colony 9 in recognition of North Carolina's status as the ninth original American colony) made it clear that prioritizing the member golf experience was paramount to the club's mission, and the focus included the entire family. We determined that improving the women's golf experience at the club was a "sooner rather than later" imperative worthy of a significant capital investment. We began by developing a master plan that includes a newly renovated women's locker room and lounge building. Our men's locker room is consistently ranked as one of the best in the nation, and we believe our women's facility needs to be of the same quality and distinction.

To further emphasize this commitment, Colony 9 took a highly innovative step, signing the sponsorship deal with Belac, who was then a promising LPGA Tour rookie and former Duke University golfer. In addition to financial compensation, this sponsorship includes a club membership, giving her full access to our courses and practice facilities. And in addition to sporting our Forest Creek Golf Club logo in her tournament appearances, her arrangement includes scheduled participation in certain club events. We viewed the sponsorship as an investment in the future of golf.

Belac is a standout golfer with ties to North Carolina and a record of



Courtesy of the LPGA

success that evokes her intelligence and dedication to the game. This makes her a role model to our younger members and perhaps reminds older members of the goals they set for themselves at the start of their own careers. Born in Slovenia, she became a recognized junior golfer there. During her time at Duke, she received the 2020 All-American Strength and Conditioning Athlete of the Year award, was a member of the 2019 International Palmer Cup Team, was selected for the 2020 ANNIKA Award Watchlist, and was named 2020 Golfweek and WGCA First Team All-American. Most notably, she led her team to the NCAA Championship in 2019.

After graduating from Duke with a degree in statistical science, Belac became a rookie on the Symetra Tour (now Epson Tour). Her first professional win came at the 2020 Carolina Golf Classic played at Pinehurst No. 9 in October 2020, which was when she captured our attention.

Named Symetra Tour Player of the Year, she finished first on the 2020 Symetra Tour Money List, securing her LPGA Tour card for 2021 and prompting Forest Creek Golf Club to start an inspired conversation with her team.

In her first season, she earned full LPGA Tour Status for 2022 and Top-100 CME final ranking. For Forest Creek, however, it was more personal. We cheered her on, including providing regular updates to membership in club communications and post-round conversations, particularly when we could watch a Tour event on television. It was exciting for our members to know she was practicing at the club, and equally exciting to see Ana sporting the Forest Creek Golf Club logo as she competed on the national stage.

The Return

Although I don't have specific empirical data to back it up, anecdotally, the entire

club became more invested in the women's game, paralleling the substantial commitment we're making to renovate and significantly upgrade our women's facilities. It was only logical that following Belac's success in 2021, we would expand our sponsorship with her in 2022.

While we certainly also allocate dollars to traditional membership marketing initiatives, I believe sponsoring an LPGA professional of Belac's caliber is a valuable program that combines brand exposure for Forest Creek with the benefits of an ongoing positive member experience. It's an investment that clearly defines the club's priorities and our commitment to enjoying golf in the present day while also investing in its future. [cd](#)



David Dew, CCM, CCE is a Partner in Colony 9, and serves as the club's GM/COO. He can be reached at 910-295-9000 or ddew@forestcreekgolfclub.com.

NCA Weighs in With Florida Appeals Court

In effect, the ruling meant that notwithstanding any amendments clubs may have made to their bylaws, the bylaws in effect at the time a member joins are a static and unalterable contract.

IN JANUARY, the National Club Association (NCA) filed an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief supporting an NCA-member club appealing an unfavorable lower court ruling in Florida. The ruling would have had an enormous negative impact on all clubs in the state, and NCA weighed in to assist in having it overturned.

The case involved member-owned golf community Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers, Fla., and arose over a disagreement about a change in the club's bylaws with respect to assessments. When the community was formed, the bylaws stated that all member assessments would be 100% refundable. That was a common practice when the club was founded in the '90s, but it is not a sustainable, long-term model for most clubs.

In 2012, the membership voted to change the bylaws to state any prospective assessment issued after Jan. 1, 2013 was no longer refundable. The club properly followed its procedures to amend its bylaws and all seemed to be well.

In June 2018, members voted to assess themselves \$9,000 to fund improvements at the club. Under the new bylaws, duly passed by the membership in 2012, this assessment would not be refundable. At this point, a group of unsatisfied members decided to file suit against the club claiming the change was in violation of the bylaws of the club in effect when they joined the club, which stated that assessments are 100% refundable. They argued that the bylaws are a binding contract that cannot be amended by one party alone and therefore, the \$9,000 assessment must be refundable to members

who joined prior to the 2012 change in the bylaws.

After briefs were submitted by the plaintiff and defendant, the judge issued summary judgment in favor of the plaintiff, agreeing that the bylaws in place at the time members joined were a binding contract between the club and the members. The Court stated: "The plaintiffs have a vested contractual right to the terms of the Bylaws in place at the time of their purchase of the Equity Certificates . . . the Club is not permitted to amend its contractual obligations to deny the Plaintiffs a full refund of the assessments, as required by the Bylaws in place at the time of their purchase of the Equity Certificates." In effect, the ruling meant that notwithstanding any amendments clubs may have made to their bylaws, the bylaws in effect at the time a member joins are a static and unalterable contract. Ominously, this meant that any club in Florida that amended its bylaws in the last 10 years would need to review them and retrospectively apply the bylaws in effect when each member joined—a potential administrative and operational nightmare scenario.

The ruling was issued in June 2021 and NCA began looking into the case that September to determine what steps, if any, the Association could do to assist. It was clear from the ruling that the judge had not considered recent case law on the subject of vested rights as they apply to club memberships and recognition the law provides for clubs to amend their bylaws. Just months before the ruling, NCA had formed a new Legal Committee comprised of top attorneys

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in the club space and chaired by Tom Lenz, partner at Atkinson, Andelson, Loya, Ruud and Romo in California; he is also an NCA Board Member and a frequent contributor to *Club Director*. At a regularly scheduled committee meeting, its members discussed the case and necessity of ensuring the best possible outcome in the appeals process. Ultimately, the committee gave the go-ahead to pursue filing an amicus brief in support of Fiddlesticks' appeal. Through referral from another NCA member, the Association engaged with former Florida Appellate Court Judge Frank Shepard to submit a motion for leave to file an amicus curiae brief on behalf of the broader club community.

With the motion agreed to by all parties, NCA began work on the substance of the brief in November and December.

It was evident from the ruling that the amicus brief was going to have to argue the law and educate the appellate court on some of the fundamentals of how clubs operate and govern themselves. In assembling needed information about the club community, its governance practices and financial structures, NCA naturally pulled from its own resources, but we also worked with the Florida Chapter of the Club Management Association of America (FLCMAA) and Ray Cronin at Club Benchmarking. This collaboration was instrumental in providing the needed information and

resources to craft what we believe to be a very solid brief and a template for how NCA can bring club expertise together to build the strongest case possible to ensure the health and vitality of the club community whether it be in the courts, agencies or legislature.

The main argument we needed to impress upon the Court is the fact that there is already case law in the state of Florida recognizing that clubs routinely amend their bylaws. As long as it is clear in the governing documents that there is a process by which the club can change the bylaws and the club follows that process, the bylaws are not in and of themselves a nonbinding, unalterable contract between the club and the member. The



The National Club Association (NCA) filed an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief supporting an NCA-member club appealing an unfavorable lower court ruling in Florida. The ruling would have had an enormous negative impact on all clubs in the state, and NCA weighed in to assist in having it overturned.

brief argued that the contractual issue is not a complicated one and the trial court misapplied the law. It further pointed out that we were unable to locate any published Florida opinion that has concluded that a club's bylaws create any vested right. To the contrary, the only Florida appellate court to consider the issue—the Fourth District Court of Appeal—has concluded that a club's bylaws do not create vested rights *because* they are subject to amendment. In the case of *Hamlet Country Club, Inc. v. Allen*, the Fourth District Court of Appeal ruled “that the members did not have vested rights” because “the alleged vested rights are all contained in the bylaws which are subject to amendment.”

To educate the appellate court, the brief explained that FLCMAA had conducted a recent survey of clubs in Florida regarding recent changes to their governing documents. Of those clubs responding, 80% were nonprofit organizations and 30% indicated they were homeowners' associations similar to Fiddlesticks. Each of the respondents said they have a process under which the bylaws can be amended and 94.6% of them had done so in the last 10 years. Of the respondents that were homeowners' associations, 74% indicated they had a process to change their bylaws and 58% had done so in the last 10 years. Clearly, if the ruling were to stand, its effects would reverberate through the club community in Florida and the Appellate Court needed to understand the impact of the erroneous lower court ruling.

To further drive home the point that clubs must have the ability to amend their bylaws to respond to economic and financial realities, the brief cited Club Benchmarking's work on capital funding models that have been shown to be unsustainable—one of which is a 100% return on capital investments paid by an equity member. Club Benchmarking noted that this model essentially means

that a club member never has to pay for the assets they consumed during their tenure as members—thus not accounting for the members' share of the depreciation expenses. In the spring of 2019, Club Benchmarking published “Measuring Capital Health,” in which they make the case that one of the most critical aspects of club sustainability is capital income from the members and capital investments in the physical assets of the club to meet member expectations and that capital emanates almost exclusively from joining fees and special assessments.

The brief concludes by restating that the club amended its bylaws in accordance with the applicable laws in effect at the time and that the Florida Legislature is fully capable and knowledgeable enough to legislate further in this area if they desired, but they haven't shown an inclination to do so.

To support this amicus effort, NCA established a Legal Action Fund to offset the necessary legal fees associated with drafting and filing the brief. An email seeking support for the Legal Action Fund was sent to clubs in Florida and the response was gratifying. Clubs from all over the state recognized the threat posed by allowing the lower court ruling to stand and contributed \$500 or \$1,000 toward the fund. More than \$13,000 was raised within three weeks and fully funded the amicus. On behalf of NCA, I would like to thank those clubs that contributed to the Legal Action Fund—your generosity and support is critical in defending the interests of private clubs in Florida and around the country. We expect the appellate court to issue a decision sometime this summer. **CD**



Joe Trauger is NCA's Vice President of Government Relations. He can be reached at trauger@nationalclub.org.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Within NCA and its Member Clubs

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee of the National Club Association (NCA) developed talking points and a DEI blueprint as a guide for clubs to use in their own DEI efforts. These documents are a starting point for clubs and should be considered, customized and used in a way that's appropriate for each organization's unique needs and situations. These resources were carefully designed to spark conversation among members of club boards, staffs and leadership teams to begin the process of moving toward a strong, DEI environment. NCA thanks the members of the DEI Committee for their work on this project and looks forward to continued conversations and work on DEI in the private club industry.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Talking Points for Private Clubs

As club leaders think about the landscape of diversity, equity, and inclusion from a global perspective, it includes club members and club staff. These connections can be identified as internal stakeholders and also includes the board of directors. Additionally, we need to include external stakeholders such as vendors and community members.

Definitions

Diversity

Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin and political beliefs.

Inclusion

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. An inclusive club promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect for the talents, beliefs, backgrounds and ways of living of its members and staff.

Equity

Equity provides the means and prospects for proportional representation in our critical four categories of staff, members, vendors and community. For example: opportunities to level the playing field. It further ensures that all stakeholders (internal and external) feel valued, respected and welcomed in their ability to participate and contribute to the club.

Why DEI is imperative

As you consider where we are at this moment in time, the reality is that our society has forever changed and those changes will only continue to expand when we think about such demographic areas as population age, population growth, millennials, minorities, women, ethnicity, gender, education, income, marital and disability status, education, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and others that may or can be considered as primary dimensions of diversity and contribute to our identity. While those things impact DEI, they only represent an exceedingly small percentage of the things we need to consider when we think about how DEI impacts our environment from a club perspective. Areas that impact our value systems, such as our choice in music, friends, family, neighborhood, religion, beliefs media/TV/internet and other factors that contribute to who we are, become equally as important as they change over time.

As members of the National Club Association (NCA) and at our respective clubs, we cannot solely focus on demographic diversity. This limits our ability to see people as full persons and it makes it easier for us to label people and stereotype. This also makes it easier for us to marginalize and discount others and the possible contributions they can make that will allow us to get better. DEI is not a zero-sum game where some win and others lose. DEI is a positive-sum engagement that enhances the ability for all of us to benefit from the rich and myriad experiences that are a part of the human experience, and we all contribute to the human experience regardless of factors that we have no or limited control over due to demographic considerations.

There can be no denying that people who have been marginalized in our society due to purely demographic issues, such as the color of their skin, have suffered from systemic racism and their ability to be afforded the ability to compete for opportunities on an equal basis has been compromised.

While we cannot rectify these past transgressions, we can and must learn from the past to make things better for the future, which will allow us to build a stronger club community and strengthen relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Also, we affirm that more needs to be done to support others so we can increase our ability to widen the scope and breadth of our team members. In that regard, we must be “exclusively inclusive” in our efforts to look for internal opportunities to allow people to contribute to our growth and understanding of issues regarding DEI, and we must continually examine our processes to ensure equity for all as we move forward. Further, we must expand our reach so that we put ourselves in positions where we can meet people where they are by moving outside the confines of our local club environments. We must create positive interactions with external stakeholders that will allow us to narrate a more positive and inclusive message that will bring in people who represent something different than what we have seen in the past. By valuing diversity, we recognize the meaningful contributions that disparate groups have made to our society, and we welcome them into our clubs.

Key Takeaways

- Demographic issues impact DEI, but DEI encompasses more than issues of race and gender.
- There is diversity in each of us and a more global DEI perspective concerning looks at it from a perspective of humanity and values.
- Having discussions about DEI and the historical impact of systemic discrimination is hard but it is needed if we are to move our institutions forward.
- We (NCA and its member clubs) must increase awareness by helping to provide the tools, resources and information that will enable clubs to act on matters of DEI for the betterment of our clubs, and our internal and external stakeholders.
- We value diversity when we acknowledge the contributions of all, and we look to include a wide variety of people and perspectives in our environments.

Reasons People Resist Acceptance of DEI:

- F.E.A.R. (Fantasy Experienced As Reality).
- A sense of a lack of control or participation in the process.
- Lack of information and/or limited exposure to people who represent difference.
- A desire to retain the status quo.
- A misunderstanding of the key components of DEI and the benefits it brings.

The Benefits to be Derived From DEI:

Diversity can benefit us in a number of ways including, but not limited to:

- Improves decision making.
- Promotes creative thinking.
- Enhances self-awareness and social development.
- Increases our knowledge base.
- Provides opportunities for the utilization of multiple perspectives.
- Provides the opportunity for deeper interaction and engagement with diverse populations.
- Broadens our customer pool and therefore benefits business growth.
- Elevates our standing in the communities around us and that we serve.

DEI Financial Considerations/Inducements and Business Sustainability

In order for clubs to survive, they must be able to meet their financial measurements that will allow them to keep the doors open and provide the environment that induces members to continue to seek the services they provide. Financial stability is essential to any club, but no club can survive in the manner they used to, especially given our changing demographics. While clubs traditionally have not been truly diverse, this is changing, and every club needs to emphasize the importance of building mutually beneficial long-term relationships with their community, vendors, staff and members, which will ensure ongoing business viability.

An increased emphasis on DEI creates the conditions for an “exclusively inclusive” environment that will allow NCA and its member clubs to have an infinitely more sustainable model. This will ensure increased business viability as it exposes more individuals to member clubs and the benefits of membership and increased involvement in them. This will provide an opportunity for more divergent streams of thought that more closely and better reflect the interests and needs of a wider constituency. It is vital that we understand that the focus on DEI will continue to

grow over time and words such as belonging, awareness, allyship and others will continue to expand this concept.

Key Takeaways

- Financial stability is essential to all member institutions, but a purely financial focus is not a sustainable long-term model given the changes we are experiencing in our society.
- By any measure, a more diverse environment is a key component in creating a more engaged community (staff, members, vendors and other stakeholders).
- DEI is hard but necessary work that will continue to evolve.

Ways to Enhance Acceptance of DEI:

- Get to know people as people and learn their stories.
- Share your story with others.
- Display empathy and don't be afraid of being vulnerable.
- Challenge your assumptions and biased/negative viewpoints of self and others.
- Get comfortable with and embrace discomfort.
- Speak truth and don't be afraid if you don't have all the answers.
- Create an environment of understanding.
- Normalize the discussion about DEI by incorporating it into your daily routines and creating an environment of understanding and curiosity.
- Ensure DEI training and professional development .
- Keep team members informed—communicate, communicate, communicate.

Levels of Valuing DEI

As with most things in life, we are available for the things that we value and the priority we place upon them, and DEI is no different. There are four levels of valuing DEI in our lives and workplace as follows and how we show them to others impacts their ability and desire to do the same.

Tolerance

This is when we put up or endure something because of a myriad of reasons or pressure (real or imagined) we believe are connected to an issue. Tolerance is not where we need to be as it is a poor window dressing for real involvement, connection and support of DEI. Further, if tolerance is the baseline criteria used to value DEI, it will be seen as hypocritical, and it will hasten the demise of the enterprise as people will see through it and withdraw from the enterprise.

Acceptance

This is when we acknowledge and give credence to issues of difference that result from adherence to principles connected to DEI. While it is a step up from tolerance and points us in the right direction, it is the minimal level of recognition that we must demand from all club stakeholders. It is the bridge that begins to consider the contributions of others and how we can benefit from them.

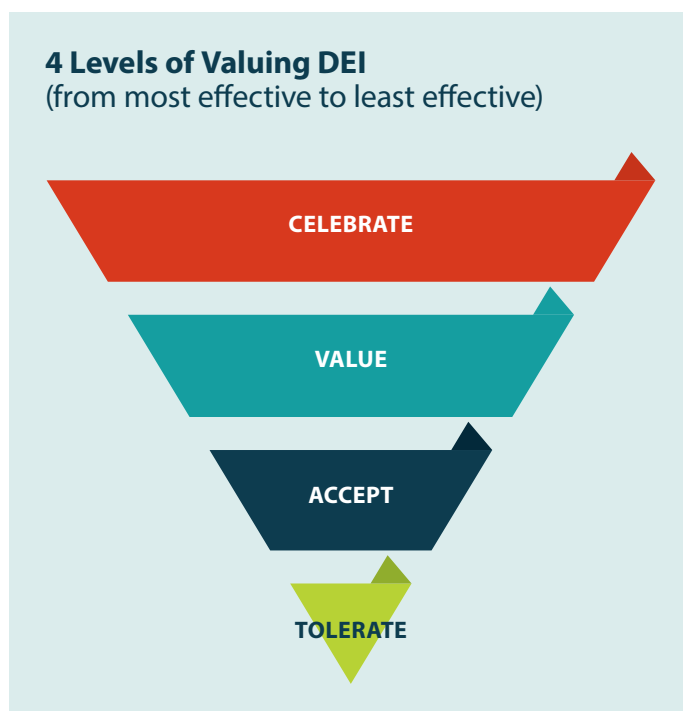
Value

This is when we are open to the differences present regarding DEI and we see the person(s) contributions as worthwhile. Further we support these differences by being an active voice for others as we have been invited in as an ally for those who have traditionally been marginalized.

Celebrate

This is when we undergo the exceedingly difficult and hard work to truly and deeply understand and respect points of view that are different from our own and we openly and actively support those viewpoints whenever needed. When we celebrate DEI, we commit to the interdependence that we need to act upon the larger web of human life that connects us all.

A graphic representation of the levels of valuing DEI is shown below.



NCA DEI Blueprint

This blueprint is a tool for *club leaders* (both management and board members) to evaluate our clubs' policies and procedures to create programs and guidelines to hire the best staff and offer opportunities for advancement, to ensure a vibrant membership group, find vendors who follow best diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices, and promote positive relations with your local community. Based on IIICONIC Blueprint created by DEI expert Heather Kim Degenhardt-Stifanic

Every club has its own unique culture made up of traditions and history. With that in mind, this blueprint is for your use. The National Club Association (NCA) DEI Committee hopes that you will find in conducting the exercise of the blueprint, it will help you form a DEI program that best suits your club.

Diversity + Inclusion = Equity

Diversity

Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin and political beliefs.

Inclusion

Inclusion is involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. An inclusive club promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect for the talents, beliefs, backgrounds and ways of living of its members and staff.

Equity

Equity provides the means and prospects for proportional representation in our critical four categories of staff, members, vendors and community. For example: opportunities to level the playing field. It further ensures that all stakeholders (internal and external) feel valued, respected and welcomed in their ability to participate and contribute to the club.

The following DEI Blueprints follow similar outlines that can be applied which can be applied to other areas that have not been included in this list.

DEI Blueprint—Staff

1. Clarify the purpose

- a. What is our motivation to have a more diverse team?
- b. What outcomes and benefits will we see?
- c. Agree on a shared understanding of what diversity, equity and inclusion means to us and our club.
- d. Obtain buy-in from all stakeholders on our purpose.

2. Review the culture

- a. Guiding principles. Mission, Vision, Values.
- b. Ask current staff to define the workplace culture they experience.
- c. Understand the characteristics of our current culture before trying to implement a diversity plan.

3. Audit the people and processes in place

- a. Understand the process for reporting workplace harassment and discrimination, the investigation process and progressive discipline steps to resolve employee matters.
- b. Implementing exit interviews will help gain valuable insight about the employee work experience.
- c. Ensure human resources practices, policies and procedures are void of biases before implementing a diversity plan.

4. Conduct baseline assessments

- a. Collect diversity statistics and demographics at all levels, including ethnicity, age, gender, veteran and disability status.
- b. Utilize lifecycle data to create a human capital index that captures: employee function, seniority, staff reporting to female managers, staff reporting to minority managers, promotions, raises, bonuses, board of directors, committees, candidate pools, voluntary and involuntary attrition rates, complaints and complaint resolutions by age, race and gender.

5. Collect feedback and experiences

- a. Conduct in-depth research via surveys, diversity assessments, focus groups, one-on-ones and town halls. Create feedback channels at every level to encourage a continuous flow of information from employees and members.
- b. Determine the levels of transparency for sharing this data so better and broader solutions can be generated.

6. Evaluate learning and development

- a. Does the current training plan include DEI learning?
- b. Recommended training: unconscious or implicit bias training (gatekeepers for hiring), cultural awareness (all management), annual anti-harassment policy review (all staff) and inclusive mindset (executives).
- c. Review training allocation to ensure equity and access for available professional development opportunities.

7. Align diversity process with the strategic business goals

- a. Prioritize. Determine what issues of DEI we want our club to focus on, list the desired outcomes.
- b. Create DEI statement and integrate into all business and operational plans.
- c. Set specific action plans and assign ownership for each goal.

8. Encourage collaboration with cultural teams

- a. Create opportunities for staff to better connect in the workplace.
- b. Intentionally allocate time to bring different teams together to share work experiences, ideas and collaborate to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
- c. Invite diverse guest speakers from different industries to offer fresh perspectives to inspire the team.

9. Invite diverse talent to the recruitment process

- a. Diversify sources for hiring.
- b. Align a diversity commitment statement and inclusion values with brand messaging and recruitment practices.
- c. Follow EEOC hiring guidelines. eoc.gov/prohibited-employment-policiespractices.
- d. Post the club's non-discrimination and DEI commitment statement in all recruiting and onboarding communications.
- e. Conduct post-interviews with diverse candidates to gain honest insight into the interviewing process.

10. Expand access. Create an accessibility statement

- a. Educate staff on accessibility and how to better assist employees and members with accommodation requests.
- b. Update the use of the word "handicapped" to "accessible" in all print and signage. Create an accessibility statement to elevate club services offered to all people. Reach out to diverse associations and advocates for the preferred language and the best practices for accommodations and accessibility.

11. Seek out opportunities to celebrate diversity

- a. Acknowledge different holidays and observances. Recognize federally designated diverse holidays, months and days. Utilize employee workforce demographics to identify cultural events and observances that are personal to your staff.
- b. Consider floating benefit days to empower employees to select the diverse holidays that are most meaningful to them.

12. Prioritize metrics to measure and reward impact

- a. Design simple measures. Monitor metrics that reflect the most impact. Scorecard metrics to monitor: Applicant sourcing, hiring, promotions, training allocation, retention, internal mobility, and succession planning.
- b. Consistently seek feedback from employees to measure the inclusion climate and DEI progress.
- c. Include DEI metrics as part of the annual performance review and rewards process. Diversity, equity and inclusion goals exceeded should be rewarded like any other business metric.

13. Celebrate and reward success

- a. Share inclusion success stories of employee engagement, hiring and promotions, and mentoring.
- b. A member of the marketing team should be included in all diversity councils, they are instrumental to ensure the full amplification of your DEI success.

DEI Blueprint—Membership

1. Clarify the purpose

- a. What is our motivation to have a more diverse membership?
- b. Market analysis. Who are we unintentionally excluding and what are we leaving on the table experientially and financially?
- c. How will our club grow culturally and fiscally with a focus on diversity?
- d. Agree on a shared understanding of what DEI means to the club and obtain buy-in from all stakeholders.

2. Conduct baseline assessments

- a. Collect diversity statistics and demographics at all levels including ethnicity, age, gender, veteran and disability status.
- b. If we don't capture this information from the membership office, consider a voluntary inclusion survey for new members to increase diverse member representation.

3. Collect feedback and experiences

- a. Understand the member experience before implementing changes to promote a DEI plan.
- b. Conduct in-depth research via surveys, diversity assessments, focus groups, one-on-ones and town halls.

4. Align diversity process with the strategic business goals

- a. Prioritize. Determine what issues of DEI we want the club to focus on, list the desired outcomes.
- b. Create DEI statement and integrate into all business and operational plans.
- c. Set specific action plans and assign ownership for each goal.

5. Invite diverse talent to the recruitment process

- a. Diversify your membership marketing sources. Utilize gender neutral words in recruiting documents, avoid prohibitive and exclusionary language.
- b. Instill diversity into the membership recruitment process.
- c. Ensure the board and membership committee charters include the club's diversity statement along with a standard for ensuring the makeup of the Board, committees, and recruitment teams remain diverse.

6. Expand access. Create an accessibility statement

- a. Educate staff on accessibility and how to better assist members with accommodation requests. Consider offering assistive technology, website, screen readers, open or closed caption, larger print and text options.
- b. Update the use of the word "handicapped" to "accessible" in all print and signage.
- c. Create an accessibility statement to elevate club services offered to all people.
- d. Pre board new members by offering a dedicated communication channel to request accommodation needs to best experience the club.

7. Elevate the club's marketing strategy to be more inclusive

- a. Align the diversity commitment statement and inclusion values with brand messaging and recruitment practices.

8. Prioritize metrics to measure and reward impact

- a. Measure attrition rates by gender and race.
- b. Measure the number of diverse events offered.
- c. Measure diverse representation on committees and boards.
- d. Share the DEI scorecard with internal and external stakeholders.
- e. Consistently seek feedback from members and employees to measure the inclusion climate and DEI progress.

9. Celebrate and reward success

- a. Share inclusion success stories of board and committee appointments and diverse partnerships.


A Starting Point

NCA's DEI Committee developed the Talking Points and Blueprint as starting points for clubs to begin conversations. This is the beginning of those conversations and more resources are in development for clubs to use, consider, and customize on their individual, unique journeys. There's lots more to come.

DEI Blueprint—Vendors

1. **Clarify our purpose**
 - a. What do our vendors think about us and why should that matter?
 - b. What is the impact on the club if our vendors perceive us negatively?
2. **Align diversity process with the strategic business goals**
 - a. List the desired outcomes, then prioritize. Expand the vision to articulate what the club aspires to achieve. Create a diversity, equity and inclusion commitment statement. Set specific action plans and assign ownership for each goal. The DEI vendor scorecard should be anchored to these established goals.
3. **Diversify the supply chain**
 - a. Get to know the supply chain. Understand who makes the purchasing decisions and why certain vendors are being used. Invite other departments to the procurement process to expand sourcing ideas.
 - b. Survey current suppliers and inquire about ways to embed diversity into their procurement practices.
 - c. Update your purchasing department's current bidding policy to require a diverse slate of vendors to be considered.
 - d. Connect the local and state certified MWBE (Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise) directories to expand your sourcing program.
 - e. Support your local and national supplier diversity councils—they offer great resources and networks for diversification of your supply chain.
4. **Elevate the club's marketing strategy to be more inclusive**
 - a. Align the club's diversity commitment statement and inclusion values with brand messaging.
5. **Celebrate and reward success**
 - a. Share inclusion success stories of diverse partnerships, broadened philanthropy and community outreach.

DEI Blueprint—Community

1. **Clarify our purpose**
 - a. What does our community think about us and why should that matter?
 - b. What is the impact on staffing and membership if our community perceives us negatively?
 - c. What are we leaving on the table experientially and financially when many people in our club markets will not consider club membership because of the perception of our club not focusing on DEI?
2. **Conduct baseline assessments**
 - a. Collect community demographics and measure it against the club's membership demographics. How far away is the club from being as diverse as the community around it that can otherwise afford a membership?
 - b. Search the internet for articles and online reviews of the club.
3. **Align diversity process with the strategic business goals**
 - a. Set actionable goals for changing the community perception.
4. **Diversify points of contact with the community**
 - a. Survey the club's participation with community groups.
 - b. Consider existing charitable policies, etc.
 - c. Consult MWBE (Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise) directories.
5. **Elevate the club's marketing strategy to be more inclusive**
 - a. Redefine how the club represents different generations and multicultural people in marketing, events, promotional, human resources and training materials.
 - b. Align the diversity commitment statement and inclusion values with brand messaging.
 - c. Invite other departments and diverse members to share their insight to help create a diversity style guide for authentic brand representation.
6. **Celebrate and reward success**
 - a. Share inclusion success stories of diverse partnerships, broadened philanthropy and community outreach. 

NCA DEI Webcast

Join the conversation: Please plan to participate in an NCA webcast about the DEI Talking Points and Blueprint along with larger issues in the DEI space, Thursday, April 21 at 2 p.m. Eastern, led by DEI Committee members Julius Rhodes, SPHR, the mpr group; and Cynthia Enanoria, general manager, Town and Country Club. Free for NCA members. Mark your calendar and register at nationalclub.org/education/webinars/.

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PLANNING BETTER CLUBS
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A large donation led to the development of the William Hyndman III Room at Huntingdon Valley Country Club in Huntingdon Valley, Pa. Hyndman was an accomplished, longtime member of the club.

Club History Confidential



I have worked with clubs and club history as a curator for 33 years and have gained many valuable lessons along the way that might prove useful. I intend to give these trade secrets away in one sweeping shot in this article. Perhaps this is not the best career move on my part, but I've had a good run.

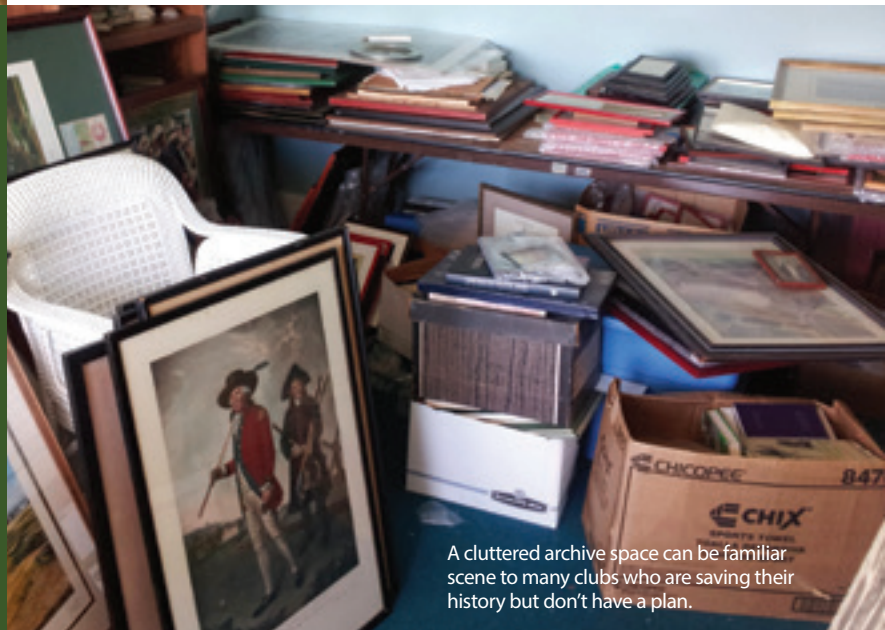
All clubs seem challenged by the same issues, regardless of championship pedigree. For the most part, you are all essentially in the same boat. You have inadequate storage; you aren't sure what's historically significant or what should be tossed; you're unsure how to properly keep or display your historical assets; you may not even know what elements of your history make you special. You are unaware of the value of your collection and therefore, it may not be adequately insured. Your staff is too busy to handle ongoing archival projects, and your members might not care about history anyway. I could go on, but you get the idea.

History can become a valuable asset, and I can provide some hope and direction. Examples of success will be used throughout, but don't be intimidated by the high-profile club—the basic message will work on any level for just about anyone.

For many clubs, history is a vague concept with few concrete benefits. How can you take a memory and turn it into a series of proactive, tangible initiatives? The first step is to understand that these ethereal memories relate to actual people and events that produced a marker in time deserving of recognition. With enough of these milestones strung together, you can represent club evolution and help members understand they are part of something special. I call it a continuum of club history that generations of members have passed forward.

The Secrets to Developing an Active Heritage Program

By Andrew C. Mutch, PhD



A cluttered archive space can be familiar scene to many clubs who are saving their history but don't have a plan.



Belle Meade Country Club's (Nashville, Tenn.) well-organized and maintained archive room showcases their collection.

Define Your “Chapters”

It may seem simple, but clubs often fail to identify the key characteristics that make them unique. I worked with a club whose leaders didn't know they hosted a USGA championship. Other seemingly simple facts might be overlooked but are actually significant. For example, another club discovered they had a tee-to-green underground watering system in place in the 1890s—that's bragworthy!

Most club stories are filled with people who made their mark, famous guests, important championships, sporting traditions and prominent clubhouse or golf course architects. You may also have a unique tie to regional history, a formidable founding history, lasting social traditions, or traumatic fires, floods or natural disasters. Task No. 1 is to identify your key chapters—the chapters of your club's history—and place them into a chronology.

Round up Assets

Now that you know the chapters of your history, what do you have to represent them? For this, collect all relative artifacts, images, newspaper clippings, artwork and ephemera. These items might be on display in the clubhouse or perhaps in a box in some corner of the basement, but an inventory should be made of their existence. No stone should be unturned in this process. I once discovered an entire steamer trunk of founding documents and property deeds sitting among holiday decorations in attic storage. In fact, not a site visit passes without a discovery of some importance in obscure spots. If you have two old, color golf

lithographs by Douglas Adams, there is likely a third print somewhere else in the building.

A final note on your treasure hunt: Superintendents are pack rats who hoard important early routings and maps for their reference, and the head pro thinks something in the office or pro shop belongs to them when it is actually club property. One pro left his post and took with him all original hole routings and diagrams because “they were mine.” Sure they were.

Find an Archive Room

This found material needs to go somewhere. I know you don't have storage but in truth, the storage you have is likely disorganized. When you learn the surprising value of your collection, it will be easier to set aside a large closet or spare room somewhere dedicated specifically to your historic assets. This is key.

Merion Golf Club's archive, in Ardmore, Pa., serves as the model, developed 20 years ago from a collection of mixed assets stored in cardboard boxes above the pro shop. From these humble beginnings, they committed to the process and found a great space for the archive to grow.

Understand that stored materials will not just sit in one place and do nothing; they will become activated in many positive ways. The collection will continue to grow in scope and value, so make sure to plan for this eventuality. Make best efforts to pick a spot that is free from overhead pipes, windows or secondary access, or fluctuations in temperature. The archive room will make a statement to membership that the

club's history is a priority. An archive room can also be envisioned as a spacious business center with hardwood cabinetry, display cases for visible storage and comfortable furniture—just ask the Country Club of Detroit (see image right).

Document the Collection

Enter all your artifacts into a database. This can be as simple as a spreadsheet or as complex as a custom software program. It is vital to document exactly what you have. Create customized fields in the form to include accession number, media type, location, value, year and condition. You can also create specialized fields that link items to one of your history chapters, key club events, sports and types of recreation, past presidents, prominent individuals, etc. This diversity is the main reason a club database is completely different than a standard museum or library database. Databases are more useful and easier to sort when there are plenty of specialized fields.

When your archival database is complete, insure the collection. A word of caution: Don't make the values known to a wide audience. Thieves removed one club's archive room door by pulling the hinge pins the day after values were mistakenly circulated.



The Country Club of Detroit's new Centennial Room combines polished archival storage space, historical displays and a business center.

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Create Order

The ideal time to improve the storage of the collection is while you're documenting it. The main component to this step is to order and implement archival supplies, such as acid-free files, folders and boxes. This isn't expensive, so set up an account with an archival supply company.

Archives are best arranged into useful sub-collections like photographs, clippings, administrative files, ephemera, multi-media, artwork, three-dimensional objects, flat files, decorative arts, equipment and clothing. This is important because each type of material requires somewhat different storage, making it more effective to keep similar items together. Include a workspace, computer and scanner.

I once worked with a club that was founded in the 1880s and had all their stuff piled in a room so densely that the door wouldn't open. The project seemed insurmountable to the club, which led to years of inaction. Once started, the organization only took four days.

Form a Committee

Every club has a person who is far too interested in club history. Almost every club historian I have ever worked with was self-appointed. That's OK, because that person is probably the only one committed enough to devote significant hours for free.

A History or Heritage Committee of no more than five people, including a board liaison, should be formed. These individuals will safeguard the collection, oversee archival initiatives and promote the club's heritage. They will need a mission statement along with short-term and long-range goals.

Create firm policies and procedures that relate to the use and care of the collection. Assign an annual budget for history work, usually to include framing, archival supplies, conservation, equipment or special projects. The Oakland Hills Country Club Heritage Committee



Above: Proper archival storage and documentation prolongs the life of historic assets and allow for more ways to use the collection to the club's benefit.

Right: The Oakland Hills Country Club has published two anthologies that showcase the historical writings of their Heritage Committee.

hands out research and writing assignments for publication in the newsletter. These wonderful history articles are then periodically collected and bound into an anthology for the members.

Upgrade Condition

The “condition” field in your database should note all items that are deteriorating and in need of conservation. Make a list of these items and prioritize them for annual preservation projects. Ask yourself what you can least afford to lose. Start with founding documents, club minutes or other materials with real value to the club.

In our digital world, it is urgent to scan anything that isn’t moving. Photos, clippings, club minute books and ephemera should be top targets for scanning. It’s also the ideal way to engage the committee. I have numerous clients scanning their minute books with optical character recognition software (OCR) so the information is preserved and fully searchable.

Find a flatbed scanner with 11 x 17-inch capability for in-house jobs and identify a reputable firm to outsource larger bulk scanning projects. Scans are better for display because the images can be manipulated, improved and re-sized. They also pose less risk of theft or damage.

Understand that the work put into developing displays is essentially the same work put into developing website content, newsletter features or a club history publication.

Activate Your History

There are many ways to get your collection working. Start by displaying your chapters throughout the clubhouse. Pick a surefire winner for your first project to gather momentum. Refrain from mixing themes or shoving everything into one space. A walking tour of the clubhouse should allow for a full presentation of your story. Include relevant text in a consistent location so the “turtles” can get their information while the “rabbits” look at the big pretty pictures. Understand that the work put into developing displays is essentially the same work put into developing website content, newsletter features or a club history publication. The images, artifacts and storyline should be put to multiple use.



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Above: A collection of memorabilia relating to Charles "Chick" Evans, Jr. on display at the Western Golf Association Evans Scholars Foundation headquarters in Glenview, Ill.

Below: A collection of trophies on display at Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, Pa., representing The Grand Slam won by Robert Tyre "Bobby" Jones, Jr. in 1930.



Often, a club unveiling their multi-million-dollar clubhouse renovation will receive kudos for the new displays rather than the selection of paint, carpet, drapes, furniture, windows, etc. Great exhibits can be powerful.

Enact Special Programs

Clubs should create special initiatives that benefit their history. This can be done in many great ways, such as a trophy acquisition campaign to raise enough funds to replicate or acquire representative trophies. Other clubs have achieved state and national historic designation that allowed for the creation of a tax-exempt foundation. Still other clubs have created an oral history program to interview longstanding members for their memories.

Surely, you have an anniversary of some sort on the horizon that will require special events to celebrate history. You can embed a cornerstone, hold a speaker series, commission a portrait or bronze, place cast-bronze markers on the grounds or course to commemorate milestone events, or hold a silent auction of old clubhouse decorations that will otherwise never again see the light of day. One club created an Acoustiguide audio tour for the clubhouse that was narrated by Jim Nantz. The possibilities are endless if you've prepared the collection for activity.

More Secrets

Take every precaution to secure your collections and displays with locks, magnetic contact and glass-break alarms or closed-circuit television. One club had its silver stolen by a guy who came back the next week for the trophies he missed. Don't hang anything valuable near an exit door and make sure important items are behind glass, not sitting loose on an open bookshelf. Start a reading library but not a lending library. Be vigilant. Search for and acquire items that fill gaps in your history. Accept donations with no attachments of perceived use, and credit the donor. Educate the staff on the club's history; they are the main point of contact for members and guests. Include a history or archive section in your newsletter. Don't be intimidated by history work and remember that most successful programs make lasting progress over a five-year period.

Final Reminders

I'm sure I've missed a few things, but here is a helpful rundown of reminders to keep you on track:

- Define the characteristics that make your club unique.
- Build a proper archival collection that reflects your chapters.
- Activate the collection through displays and special programs.

You can do this. **CD**

Andrew C. Mutch, PhD is Founder & CEO of Golf Curator Inc. He can be reached at amutch@aol.com.



WE'RE BUILDING BETTER TECHNOLOGY **TODAY** FOR TOMORROW'S CLUB.

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- Texting



Clubshelp

ON THE GROUND

By Jeff Babineau

Indian Hills in Bowling Green, Ky., is a ClubCorp Network property that dates to 1956, when it opened with nine holes and a “dancing house,” which is what members called the clubhouse. Course architect William Langford added nine more holes to the facility in the 1960s. The course features undulating fairways and good elevation, and has been described as “tough but enjoyable.” Indian Hills has 475 members—it netted 100 new members in 2021—and will cap membership at 500. General Manager Ken Crowder, PGA, said the club has worked diligently to grow.

When Crowder interviewed for the general manager position, membership still was reeling over a December 2019 fire that destroyed the clubhouse that was finished just a decade earlier, its sturdy wood and indelible memories reduced to piles of charred gray ashes. With a new clubhouse under construction as he interviewed, Crowder met with club members, club staff and board members. He returned home with great admiration for the group’s overall spirit and resiliency. He was offered the job, accepted it, and started as GM on March 1. Within months, he would come to learn a great deal more about his membership.

Tornadoes

In early December 2021, nearly two years to the day of the fire and just a month past the grand opening of a beautiful new \$5.5 million clubhouse at Indian Hills, Bowling Green faced disaster again in the form of five historic, deadly tornadoes that ripped through the southern part of Kentucky. The tornadoes hit in the wee hours of a Saturday morning. When daylight appeared, Crowder had to find a back path into the club, past debris that was tossed and strewn everywhere.

What he saw: The club's back nine had lost more than 200 trees, rendering five previously tree-lined holes all but barren. There was not a patch of green fairway or rough even visible beneath the fallen limbs. Trees had pierced the roof of the cart building. Tornadoes had destroyed a bathroom on the course and ripped through the back side of the maintenance building. Crowder said he held his breath as he approached the new clubhouse, fearing the worst. And there it sat, just 50 yards from havoc, virtually untouched.

"I don't think a patio chair moved," Crowder said, still marveling at the sight. "I really don't know what the right adjective is. Eerie? Amazing? It's almost like Mother Nature said, 'You know what? You've been through a lot, so I'm going to miss the clubhouse.'"

Crowder was careful to not be insensitive to the overall devastation the Bowling Green community endured, much like smaller Kentucky communities such as Mayfield, which sits a couple of hours drive to the west, tucked in the southernmost corner of the state. These communities face long roads to recovery. Some families lost everything. Crowder knows buildings and structures eventually can be rebuilt and replaced, but human lives lost cannot. Indian Hills, though hit by winds that exceeded 150 mph, was, in the grander picture, spared, certainly in terms of human loss.

He and other Kentuckians continue to do their best to work through a difficult hand, and much work remains. What residents have learned in the wake of a devastating natural catastrophe—the tornadoes' death toll neared 90 and reduced some areas to appear like scattered matchsticks—is that it truly takes a village to rebound. On one clean-up day at Indian Hills, well-known member Jim Richards, who was men's basketball and golf coach at nearby Western Kentucky University, told Crowder he might know someone who could help.

Richards dialed a number and handed his phone to Crowder; on the other end of the call was Kentucky resident Kenny Perry, 14-time PGA Tour champion and winner of four PGA Tour Champions majors, including two U.S. Senior Opens. Perry lives in Franklin, Ky., where he operates his own golf club.

Operation BBQ Relief

Through a friend, Perry heard about ClubsHelp, a nonprofit started during the Covid-19 pandemic established to help those

Oakland Hills Country Club Relief Fund

The February 17 photos of the historic clubhouse at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., burning to the ground were horrifying. In times like this, the club community—clubs, industry affiliated companies and members of clubs—comes together to support each other and, in this case, the employees of Oakland Hills.

"We will rebuild and move forward, and be stronger than ever," said Christine Pooler, CCM, ECM, club general manager/COO. "And a big source of strength will come from how our friends in the club world are filling up our cup, for which we are truly and tremendously appreciative and grateful."

Since initial reports of the tragedy, the club community has generously donated tens of thousands of dollars to support the Employee Assistance Fund, which was created by ClubsHelp, the philanthropic partner of the National Club Association. Many employees of the club won't be able to return to work until the clubhouse is rebuilt, which may take up to two years. This fund will support their individual economic needs while alternative options are explored.

Rob Goulet, president and co-founder of ClubsHelp said, "We are grateful for the tremendous club industry support of the ClubsHelp Foundation fundraiser for Oakland Hills Country Club. It clearly illustrates the industry care and concern by coming together in times of need, which is our mission."

For additional information or to donate to the fund, go to donate.helpclubshelp.org/ohccfund.

in need and relayed that to Crowder. ClubsHelp (clubshelp.org) connected Indian Hills with Operation BBQ Relief, an incredible nonprofit operation started when a deadly EF5 tornado ripped through Joplin, Mo., in 2011. Operation BBQ Relief and ClubsHelp share a common goal: helping people in times of need. Crowder, from the midst of the storm in Bowling Green, was onboard, and generously offered the services of his club.

Operation BBQ Relief quickly got on the ground in Kentucky, setting up cooking operations in Lowe's store parking lots in Mayfield, which was hit hard, and in Bowling Green. Indian Hills had a food truck it used after the clubhouse burned in 2019 and lent it to Operation BBQ Relief operation. Many of Indian Hills' members pitched in to aid Operation

Damage to Indian Hills Country Club back nine restrooms after the December 2021 tornado.



BBQ Relief’s community volunteer efforts to help deliver food to those in need.

Operation BBQ Relief’s operation in Bowling Green included more than 200 volunteers, 6,200-plus volunteer hours, and served nearly 75,000 hot meals.

“It’s just that one meal that touches your heart,” volunteer Bryan Haupt told Bowling Green television station WFIE in late December. “You don’t realize when you hand a hot meal to somebody what it might mean to them. It’s not necessarily that meal itself, but just that act of giving and kindness. I had a lady last week, we hugged and cried for a good five to 10 minutes. It just touches your heart. That’s why we are here.”

ClubsHelp helps integrate and mobilize its more than 700 member clubs into relief efforts in rapid response to disaster needs across the country. A golf club at the center of a community might have a parking lot large enough for an operation such as Operation BBQ Relief to get set up to cook and help. ClubsHelp applauds the tireless work of Operation BBQ Relief and works to support the organization in any way that it can.

“Operation BBQ Relief is grateful to have teamed up with ClubsHelp to serve communities in Kentucky following the

ClubsHelp applauds the tireless work of Operation BBQ Relief and works to support the organization in any way that it can.

historic tornado,” said Stan Hays, Operation BBQ Relief’s CEO. “The mission of ClubsHelp combined with its dedicated members throughout the country, will continue to be a valuable resource for Operation BBQ Relief as we share this healing power with communities in need.”

Added Crowder, who had not previously known of Operation BBQ Relief and its mission, “That group is one well-oiled machine. They rolled in with this big food trailer, and these huge smokers.



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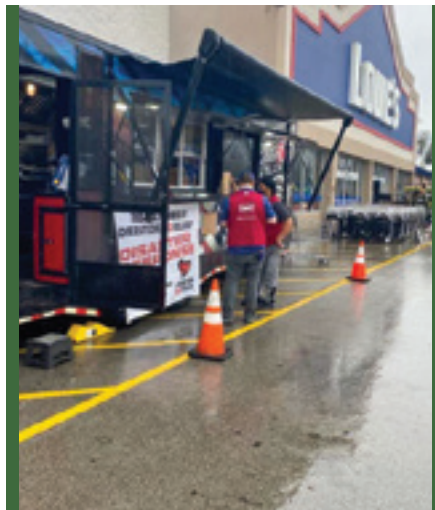


Operation BBQ Relief volunteers providing hot meals to those in the wake of devastation.

They started cooking nonstop, and they had volunteers from around town.

“A bunch of our members went in and took turns working shifts, delivering food to distressed neighborhoods and city blocks, to people who just didn’t have access. Operation BBQ Relief knows what they’re doing because they’ve done it before.”

As Crowder and about a half dozen staffers made their way in jeans and boots to the back nine at Indian Hills to begin clean-up efforts in the days immediately following the tornadoes, it was not uncommon for Crowder to be joined by



30 to 40 of his members. He had 75- and 80-year-old men, 50-year members of the club, out cutting limbs and dragging them to piles and wood chippers.

“It opened my eyes,” said Crowder. “Even though I knew this was a membership passionate about their club and community . . . to see how they performed during a time of crisis, it not only solidified my initial thought, but took it up a notch. It was impressive to see. **CD**”

Jeff Babineau is a golf writer and ClubsHelp supporter. ClubsHelp can be reached at contact@clubshelp.org.



The Club at Pasadera
Monterey, California

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Entrada at Snow Canyon Country Club
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PRIVATE CLUBS OF DISTINCTION



By Fredric Laughlin
and Henry Delozier

Private Club Governance, Strategy & Communications

The 2022 Survey Says...



The National Club Association (NCA), in collaboration with GGA Partners, recently completed a survey of club leaders and board members covering the topics of governance, strategy and communications. Two hundred seventy four clubs participated, of which 82% were from the U.S. and Canada. What did we learn? Quite a bit.

Governance

As we work with club boards to help them with their governance models, we start by comparing their model to the Club Governance Model¹, which is the standard of excellence in the club community. The result of this comparison is invariably a list of suggestions for bringing the clubs model more in line with the industry standard. We are pleased to see the survey results align nicely with our experience working with clubs around the world.

Board Size

The survey revealed that more than 75% of boards have between nine and 12 members, with almost one-third having exactly nine. We don't have a magic number for board size, but we believe nine is about right. The question involves a tradeoff between the efficiency of decision making and the distribution of board duties. A board is more efficient with fewer directors, but it has fewer members to handle its duties.

Board Terms

The survey results show the preponderance of board member terms (77.7%) is three years and more than half of boards (57%) allow for an additional term. Although the survey data don't indicate it, our experience is that clubs with four-year terms usually don't permit a second term. The issue with the length of terms and the availability of additional terms centers on the balance between allowing more members to serve on the board and the benefits of a more experienced board member. Generally, the quality of board membership improves with length of service. With that assumption, although allowing a board member to serve an additional term reduces the opportunities for club members to serve on the board, we believe it is a price worth paying for a higher functioning board.

Accordingly, we like the message of the survey showing a three-year term with the option of standing for election for an additional term. However, our support for this policy is conditioned on the requirement that board members completing their first term must stand for election for the second term, i.e., not be automatically included on the next slate of nominees. Their election must be based on the qualities they exhibited during their first term.

Election Processes

Arguably the most important process in the governance model of a private club is the election method for board members. Getting the right people on the board is a fundamental principle of good governance. Additionally, getting the right board members is far more likely using an uncontested election than a contested election. An uncontested election occurs when the nominating committee presents a slate of candidates equal in number to the number of vacancies to be filled. In a contested election, the Nominating Committee presents a number of nominees for the board greater than the number of vacancies.

The survey results indicate that eight out of 10 (84.4%) clubs have slates of prospective board members selected by nominating committees, but they also show close to an even split between the use of contested elections (48.5%) and uncontested elections (51.5%). While we would like to see a more pronounced tilt toward uncontested election processes, the survey data points in the right direction. Clubs are becoming increasingly aware of the pros and cons of each approach. Contested elections may be considered more democratic and may honor the voice of the membership in choosing their leaders, but they also can rely on a political process that can be divisive, discourage service from qualified members, and result in board members being elected on an agenda, popularity, seniority, or something other

than on their qualifications to govern fairly and effectively.

Uncontested elections are viewed with skepticism by those who see them as undemocratic and downright un-American. It seeks a ratification rather than an election from the members. To be sure, our support for the uncontested election process relies on the members' trust in the Nominating Committee's independence, objectivity and use of a board-approved profile in vetting candidates. The profile lists traits candidates must possess, including different perspectives, skills and experience desired to give the board access to a wide range of expertise. In summary, a respected, trusted Nominating Committee employing a rigorous vetting process based upon a well-reasoned board profile and using an uncontested election process is the best way for a board to get the right people on board.

**The survey revealed
that more than
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¹ A full description and discussion of the Club Governance Model is contained in GGA Partners' booklet "A Guide to Implementing the Club Governance Model."

Board Profile

Speaking of the importance of a board profile in vetting board candidates, we were pleased to see the top five most important candidate characteristics cited were:

- Experience on a committee.
- Known as a team player.
- Professional experience.
- Diversity of perspective.
- Prone to civil discourse.

Each of these traits is worthy of being used in the vetting process. We particularly like the personality traits of a team player prone to civil discourse. Good boards have a culture of community and mutual respect among the board members. They are more likely to reach decisions based a reasoned debate and a willingness to arrive at a consensus. Further, contentious boards are unattractive to potentially good board candidates—the same candidates who are open to serving on boards known for their collegiality.

As for the mention of diversity, the important qualifier here is “perspective.” Club members have various backgrounds, ages and interests, the voice of which is worth a place in the boardroom. To be clear, we are looking for perspectives, not representatives. A board member makes decisions for the club as a whole, not decisions that benefit their particular interest or age group. After all, one of the legal duties of a board member is the duty of loyalty, i.e., the board member’s loyalty being first to the club and then to his/her area of individual interest.

Committees

One of the most cited criticisms of boards is their committees’ dysfunctionality. The survey reported that 59% of club have between six and 10 committees, with a survey average of 8.46 per



To view all findings in the 2022 NCA Member Survey, scan the QR code or visit tinyurl.com/GGANCAsurvey.

club. Our experience suggests that more than 10 committees can result in far-flung, potentially uncoordinated groups of members. Fewer, well-managed and clearly focused committees make a good starting point with additional committees formed only when the need is obvious.

Other Governance Indicators

In the addition to the issues discussed previously, the survey results value other characteristics of club governance such as the frequency of board retreats, board and board president orientation, and various practices such as board evaluation, implementing the COO governance model and developing a board policies manual. They serve as additional reference points for clubs to consider as they look for ways to serve their members with good governance.


Strategic Plans Guide Board Decisions

The survey also queried the use of strategic planning, revealing that more than seven of 10 (71.3%) of private clubs have developed strategic plans to guide their decision-making process. The average plan cycle covers just more than five years, and more than half of all boards review their plans annually. Not surprising, the most important element of private club strategic plans is member satisfaction.

Effective Communications

When asked about the effectiveness of club communications, 77% of survey respondents rated their efforts as well done, with 6% of clubs ranking their communications as excellent. Private clubs are using a variety of methods to gauge member sentiment about brand and value, including member surveys, focus groups, polls and attitudinal surveys and most believe their communications are effective.

NCA Members Desire Continuing Education

When asked how NCA and GGA can best serve private club boards and management, the response was clear—updates on trends, best practices and continuing education encompassing all aspects of club management as the resources club want. 

Henry DeLozier and **Fredric Laughlin** are partners at GGA Partners, an international club management consulting firm that provides specialized services to more than 3,000 clients from offices in Toronto, Phoenix and Dublin (IR). They can be reached at henry.delozier@ggapartners.com and fred.laughlin@ggapartners.com.

TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT!



Show off your club, your colleagues and your creative eye in *Club Director's* first photo contest—you could win a free registration to the 2023 National Club Conference in Chicago!

All photos will automatically be entered into the Best in Show category—the Best in Show winner will receive a registration to #ClubConf23 and see their photo on the cover of *Club Director*—frame-worthy for sure!

Categories:

- Clubhouse.
- Grounds/landscape.
- Celebrations/parties.
- Food & beverage.
- People At the club.
- Funny/offbeat.

Between now and October 30, 2022, send your high resolution (size it came out of the camera or phone) JPG photos to photocontest@nationalclub.org. Make the category your email subject line and be sure to include your name, title, club, email address and a description of the photo, including where, when, and why you took it.

The Rules:

- Submit amateur photos only (no professional or commissioned photos) are eligible.
- Only photos taken after January 1, 2021 are eligible for this year's contest.
- All submissions are automatically entered in the Best in Show category.
- Please ensure you have permission to enter photos of people—you should have permission from everyone in every picture you enter.
- Enter as many photos in as many categories as you wish.
- You may enhance your photos to make them look their best, but no altering or editing them (moving features, deleting or adding to the image, etc.)
- A panel of judges from NCA will choose the winners.
- Winning photos from each category will be published in the fall 2023 issue of *Club Director*.
- The Best in Show winner will receive a free registration to the 2023 National Club Conference in Chicago and see their photo on the cover of *Club Director*.

Get out there and get shooting!

Questions? Email fernandez@nationalclub.org.

SOCIAL PROGRESS IN GOLF

*Clubs and the game
are paying more
attention to diversity,
for all the right reasons.*

By Lawrence A. Hirsh



This article is an excerpt from “The Culture of Golf,” by Lawrence A. Hirsh, CRE, MAI, SGA, president of Golf Property Analysts and member of NCA’s DEI Committee. The book covers many of under-discussed, yet prominent, facets of golf culture that impact the game’s health. The book is available at golfprop.com/the-culture-of-golf/ and on Amazon.com.

The issue of social progress in golf is critical to the future and growth of the game. This evolution has been slow. There are member-owned clubs, corporate/investor-owned clubs, benevolent dictatorships and board-run clubs. Club politics are rarely pretty. Change is often too slow to occur.

Many clubs have problems that need prompt attention. It could be deferred maintenance, necessary capital improvements to stay competitive or an evolution in membership indicating a change in culture. There's no one right answer for all clubs.

The most destructive change is when it occurs simply because club leadership changes. If a club is successful, the membership is happy and thriving and the club is financially secure, it's not uncommon to see a change in leadership seeking to "make their mark." Key staff are pushed out, rules are changed (or in many cases added) and the culture of the club is transformed. Sometimes, this type of change occurs simply because there is a change in leadership and those in power make the club their personal fiefdom.

I know of one club that upon the entry of new leadership had a director of golf for 30+ years, a general manager for 14 years, a head pro for 20+ years and a superintendent for 20+ years and by the end of a 5-year reign all were gone and the club is now on its 3rd general manager in that time-period.

The point is that "change" is both good and bad. Leadership needs to evolve to avoid unnecessary change elsewhere. A long-range plan should be adopted and adhered to by successive leadership. Change often needs to occur to get a club back on track or to evolve and update to be competitive. It's not at all uncommon for clubs that don't evolve and invest to fail financially because of a lack of leadership. That happened at my long-time club, Blue Ridge

Country Club in Harrisburg, Pa., which closed in 2017, and is now a mixed-use development. Conversely, there are clubs with over-aggressive leadership that create a negative environment and a change in culture that results from micro-management.

Every club should have a governance structure of leadership that is in place long enough for stability but that changes frequently enough to allow for appropriate evolution. Like in Washington, D.C., term limits are critical, and must be obeyed. Congress is somewhat dysfunctional because of a lack of term limits. Clubs often have the same problem ("same old crowd"). Has anyone ever tracked the terms of club leaders to ensure that they aren't enduring in violation of the club's bylaws?

One area in need of change is the diversity of the golfing population. In the U.S., approximately 25% of those who played

on a golf course for the first time in 2017 were non-white. 82% of all golfers in the US are white, while 25% of junior golfers (aged 6-17) were non-white. With 40% of the population being non-white, there's room for growth.

Much has been said and done to diversify participation in golf. It was thought 24 years ago that Tiger Woods explosion onto the mainstream golf scene would result in dramatic increases in participation rates among minorities and youth. It happened but didn't last. During the period from 2000 to 2020 the game has seen a decline in participation and in the number of golf course facilities, as many have closed or repurposed.

High-profile all-white private clubs lasted until the early 1990s, when the Shoal Creek Club in Alabama, while hosting the PGA Championship, faced mounting pressure from civil rights groups, corporate sponsors and PGA leadership to accept Black members.

Now, climate change might be revealing other discriminatory legacies of golf. Urban courses, popular among Black golfers, can be more susceptible to climate impact than private courses in leafy suburbs, experts say; and city golfers, white and Black, experience the heat island effect at higher rates. Hiawatha, in Minneapolis, MN provides a case in point, experiencing higher incidence of flooding than other courses in the area.

Brendan Shane, climate director for the Trust for Public Land, which ranks public park systems annually under a "Park-Score Index," said research shows persistent inequity in U.S. public parks, not only for recreational opportunities but also in park size, location and ease of access.

"Parks in lower-income and communities of color are often the ones who see the least investment. They're the ones getting squeezed," Shane said in an interview. "And of course, the problem runs headlong into the reality of increasing heat and increasing floods."

While climate change is being felt on all golf courses, Shane noted that urban public courses are often in floodplains or areas that are less desirable for other types of development.

The Langston Golf Course on the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C., opened to Black golfers in 1939 and was one of a handful of integrated public courses nationwide, according to the National Park Service, which owns the course.

Other urban courses are in hurricane zones, like the Golf Club in Audubon Park in New Orleans and the Gus Wortham Park Golf Course in Houston. Officials at both of those courses have tried to flood-proof fairways and greens. In St. Louis, the former Riverview/North Shore golf course simply closed after years of repeated flooding and disrepair.

The most destructive change is when it occurs simply because club leadership changes.

Women and minorities simply don't participate in numbers commensurate with their share of population. Most golf courses, and especially, private clubs are still inhabited largely by white men.

The issue of sexual harassment has taken center stage in our society. Just ask Matt Lauer, Al Franken, Charlie Rose, Roy Moore, Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey and yes, Donald J. Trump, just to name a few. There is a dearth of the "3-M's" in the golf landscape. But until recently, the issue of sexual harassment in the work environment has been suppressed. Unfortunately, there are now instances of sexual harassment in what has traditionally been (as fellow golf consultant Jim Keegan describes) "an industry, largely of men, by men and for men."

This is where golf's culture is its own worst enemy. Who among us that plays golf regularly hasn't observed the attractive, often flirtatious cart girl, often being harassed by the overzealous and sometimes over-served traveling golfer? How many of us have noticed the attractive female attendant in the pro shop or bar that invariably seems to exist? There are even comments about how the guy in charge of hiring "did a good job." Guys will always notice attractive women. No harm there, but if it goes beyond a certain (sometimes undefined) line, problems arise. Hiring attractive women in these positions because they can be "good for business," can put those women at a disadvantage in the workplace, especially, when there might be implied expectations. In golf's decidedly white, male dominated environment, when club members, resort guests, co-workers or managers take liberties, sometimes it goes unnoticed and other times is simply ignored. This has created an ugly side to golf culture and represents one more reason why change—socially and economically is in golf's future.

The Washington Post recently raised some interesting questions. While most of these referred to the political atmosphere, it stands to reason that the Me-Too movement, which clearly influenced the December 2018, United States Senate special election in Alabama, where Doug Jones defeated accused sexual predator (and former Alabama Supreme Court Judge) Roy Moore, along with the ultimate resolutions of numerous high profile sexual harassment cases could shape our culture in this area and be part of the golf culture for years to come.

On a most encouraging note, in April 2021 Pine Valley Golf Club, widely regarded as the No. 1 ranked course in the world, voted to invite women members for the first time in its 108-year history.

This is no small step. Not only were there no women members, but Pine Valley only permitted women onsite as guests after 3:00 PM on Sundays. In an email to members, club president Jim Davis wrote: "This evening at our Annual Meeting of the Members we made a historic change to Pine Valley's bylaws. The

future of golf must move toward inclusion, and I am pleased to report that the Trustees and members of the Pine Valley Golf Club voted unanimously and with enthusiasm to remove all gender-specific language from our bylaws. The club's policies will now allow all guests to enjoy our club without restrictions and we will begin immediately identifying women candidates for membership with the expectation of having our first women members in the club by the end of this year." Davis also recalled what a late member and friend said to him several years ago: "Remember, we don't want to be on the wrong side of history."

Pine Valley was preceded in this change by Augusta National Golf Club in 2012, Scotland's Muirfield (The Royal Company of Edinburgh Golfers) in 2018 and just recently succeeded by Ireland's Portmarnock Golf Club.

In the year preceding this decision, several events, such as the murder of George Floyd and the resulting changes made by many institutions (NASCAR, the US Military, the Mississippi state flag, etc.) signaled a fundamental change in our society. The election of an African American woman as Vice President and our culture's focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) has shined the light of scrutiny on golf and some change resulting in a progressive (albeit slow) evolution of its culture. Many clubs have reviewed their names, images and symbols with some resulting in modifications to logos or creation of alternatives and the removal of the use of potentially offensive terms (like Plantation). Others are reviewing their membership policies, especially with respect to gender equity and seeking to further diversify membership to include a broader representation of society. It's hard for the many corporate executives who populate the most exclusive clubs to preach equity and inclusion and then frequent a club that doesn't practice same.

It is now abundantly clear that the culture of golf is evolving—whether one likes it or not—in a progressive, and more importantly inclusive direction. This is (as the USGA likes to say) *for the good of the game*. Whether it be equity based on race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation or any other category, golf has a clouded history when it comes to inclusion. There are still clubs that (mostly quietly) do not include African Americans, Jews, Asians and other groups among their membership. It may not be public anymore, but it's fact. There are still some clubs prohibiting women, although not many, about a dozen nationally according to Golf Digest. Not only does society demand change on a moral basis but the economics of golf require a broader reach for long-term financial success.

In 2012, Augusta National, at least partly from public pressure, included women among its members. Pine Valley, not hosting a major, internationally televised event each year had no such pressure (that we know of) and this decision was unexpected.



Whatever the reason, KUDOS to Pine Valley and their leadership for moving the baton forward—for the good of the game.

Golf's economic fortunes depend on growth. The decline in golf participation over recent (pre-COVID-19) years, combined with the closure of numerous golf courses is due at least in part to women being discouraged by the golf culture and millennials choosing activities that are perceived as more inclusive.

While not in a position to “change the world” the golf culture sometimes eschews the idea of being “politically correct” in favor of tradition, especially, at some private clubs. Golf could achieve the economic goals of participation growth while becoming a societal leader in resolving a cultural problem that extends well past the boundary stakes of our beloved ancient game. Golf has some wonderful traditions that should be preserved, however “for the good of the game” (as the USGA likes to say) a move forward, much in the same way as it has embraced most of the technological revolution in balls and equipment, could be the recipe for economic success.

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During the period since their “Caucasians Only” rule, the PGA has sought to continue cultural diversification in its membership, but with limited success. They still only have 165 African Americans among roughly 29,000 members. With golf professionals often playing a significant role in golfers’ development the dearth of golfers of color is at least partially the result of the difficulty young golfers of color might have in finding a golfing role model or gaining access.

Our grand old game most definitely has an image and culture problem. In April 2019, Augusta National Golf Club made great progress in establishing the Augusta National Women’s Amateur, signaling progress in golf’s “culture war” by recognizing women in a positive way. Unfortunately, in York (as described earlier) two segments of the “3 M’s”¹ (Minorities and “Moms”) weren’t so fortunate.

If, as the women in York claim, racial (and/or gender) discrimination occurred, it is reprehensible and should be prosecuted. There’s no place for that in our society (or our game), and even though we all know it occurs, those in the golf industry need to be extra sensitive and promote inclusion, to change the game’s image as a bastion of white, male dominance. This is not only a social statement, but one of economics. The “3 M’s” are significant and growing segments of our society. If golf declines to embrace them, it’s not only socially irresponsible, but bad business.

As stated at the time by Pennsylvania Golf Course Owners (PGO) Executive Director, Gregg Acri, “This (the York situation) is a situation that none of us, on any side of the golf industry, would want to be a part. However, the incident presents an opportunity to provide insight to all of us on customer service and customer loyalty.” Golf’s culture can be its own worst enemy. Recognizing this incident as an opportunity is a must for golf to ensure a healthy future in an increasingly diverse society.

While golf has made some progress in diversifying its culture, there is much left to bring financial profit to a sometimes-struggling golf industry, including clubs, courses, equipment, apparel and any ancillary segments of the industry. Young people, including those normally considered part of the golf demographic are choosing other activities because of golf’s lack of diversity which isn’t “cool” with the younger generation. This needs to be reversed.

NGF reported a drop of 1.12% in rounds played from 2015 through 2019, as shown. While 2020 rounds grew approximately 14%, largely due to the COVID-19 impact (which may or may not be sustainable), there are still courses seeking players. Let’s hope that the unfortunate occurrence in York and the national and international publicity it received becomes a catalyst for positive change and golf facilities everywhere recognize

¹ <https://golfprop.com/blog/is-golfs-culture-the-games-worst-enemy/>

both the social and economic benefits of encouraging diversity in golf in particular, and society in general.

In most cases, the leadership of golf's governing organizations come from the most prestigious private golf and country clubs. Accordingly, since many of those clubs have only recently diversified their memberships, leadership in golf's establishment has been similarly limited in diversity.

Not long ago (progressive) rule changes by the USGA and R&A were enacted to make the game simpler and more enjoyable, especially, for the casual or new golfer. Many golf clubs and courses still need to welcome (not reject) high school and college teams and to encourage the "3 M's" into the game. Far too late, it was announced in 2019 that The Honorable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (Muirfield) club in Scotland had voted (after a failed vote in 2018) to admit women as members of the club.

This is great news! Players have been leaving golf in favor of other (often more inclusive) activities and golf courses have disappeared at an alarming rate. How do we, as an industry and stewards of the game, use these encouraging signs to build on their progress and make the game strong? Many say there are programs, like The First Tee (which is terrific) and that organizations like

the USGA, PGA, NGCOA and Augusta National all have initiatives to promote golf. These programs are positive, but they're simply not growing the game as had been hoped. The efforts to expand diversity in the game by some organizations is one positive step.

According to a 2018 survey by the Golf Channel, the median cost of an 18-hole round at a public golf course is \$36 including cart, but excluding clubs. Cost shouldn't be a deterrent to most people and open tee times can become free golf to encourage new golfers.

Private golf clubs are particularly expensive. According to a study of private clubs carried out by Longitudes Group for *Golf Digest*, the most elite clubs demand an initiation fee of \$250,000 or more.

Only 30% of responding private clubs had a list price of \$7,500 or less. That is without annual "dues" (membership fees) which, according to the survey, cost an average of \$6,245 (approximately \$520 per month). Some clubs also require a minimum amount to be spent in the club restaurant and bar every month.

These economics also contribute to a lack of cultural diversity at private clubs and to the perception of exclusivity even at public facilities.

Women have been second class citizens at many clubs. In some cases, they have limited privileges and there are clubs where women

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aren't still permitted onsite either at all or only during certain, limited times. Often, where welcome, their play is restricted as well.

One of the unfortunate elements of the golf culture is the treatment young, often attractive beverage cart attendants receive from sometimes over-served golfers on course. The predominantly male environment lends itself to such behavior, which is the target of the "Me Too" movement. This and other examples of gender biased behavior are most definitely a reason why there are fewer women golfers than men.

Golf has resisted progress in many ways. The game shouldn't be "aspirational" (as suggested by Trump) it should be inclusive and diverse and needs to be to thrive economically. Sure, we now have advanced equipment which allows us to hit the ball farther, make mishits not so bad and putt better. We have courses that are in better condition than ever before, and golf has values that are unique and special that truly make it the greatest game in the world. But, golf has not advanced *socially*, nearly far enough. And it's hindered our game's economic progress at the grass roots level.

Historically, golf organizations have worked to overcome the objections that golf was too expensive, took too much time and

was too difficult. The "3 M's" (especially millennials) are willing to spend the money to play, because of our mobile and connected society have the time to play and that they are willing to invest the time to learn how to play. Unfortunately, many clubs have discouraged them with rules that impact the "fun" factor. Go check out a TopGolf facility. I doubt anyone would object to a little music there. Remember the "Best Damn Clubs?"

When considering social progress in golf, among the questions raised are those of whether golf has a social conscience, and whether the game has a social obligation.

Social progress is likely convertible to economic progress. Accordingly, the top clubs should lead the charge to making golf fun and socially responsible, to encourage the next generation. Not because it will make more money, but because it's the right thing to do. If the USGA and R & A can turn 34 rules into 24², clubs can review and streamline their rules. Golf's hierarchy has taken some small steps forward. **CD**

Lawrence A. Hirsh, CRE, MAI, SGA, is president of Golf Property Analysts.

² <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/rules-modernization/text/major-proposed-changes.html>



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FUN — IN THE — Sun

By Cindy Hurrie

Mount Vernon Country Club Summer Youth Programming Benefits the Entire Family and the Club

Like many clubs around the country, Mount Vernon Country Club (MVCC) in Alexandria, Va., has seen a surge of members with school-age children. Just five years ago, MVCC had 400 children under the age of 18 within the membership. In 2022, the club is delighted to have nearly 700 and that number will likely increase again this year. This rapid growth presents opportunities for the club to expand its offerings for our members' children that not only provide a great experience for them, but also enhance their parents' experience at the club.

MVCC is a member-owned club situated on 135 acres of what used to be part of George Washington's Mount Vernon estate. The rolling topography and Dogue Creek, a tidal tributary to the Potomac River, provide a welcome respite from the business and politics happening at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., just 18 miles away. The club was founded in 1961 as a nine-hole course that was later expanded to 18 holes and a competition pool was added. Today, golf and swimming are the primary activities offered to members along with many social events for both parents and children.





Golf

There are a lot of ways people are introduced to the game of golf. Usually, it's from a friend or coworker, but with Mount Vernon's Summer Youth program, it's not unusual for children to introduce their parents to club life.

The Summer Youth Program at MVCC was originally developed to give children within the community whose parents don't play golf an opportunity to gain the knowledge and etiquette required to promote enjoyment of the game. MVCC created the program to grow the game of golf for promising junior golfers who wanted to have a competitive experience in a safe and private environment. Giving students the knowledge of the rules and etiquette of golf while providing exposure to private club course conditions is aimed at increasing their chances to make or improve their game into high school and beyond.

For a student to be considered for the program, there is a formal application and interview process with the director of membership, PGA director of golf and head golf professional. The student must have a recommendation from a golf coach and a demonstrated dedication to development. The summer fee includes unlimited use of the practice facilities and maintenance of a USGA handicap. The junior is eligible to participate in all junior golf programs, including the InterClub team and Junior Club Championships. The junior is provided with a membership number and is able to order food and drinks just as a regular member of the club would. For members and the management team, it is gratifying to see the junior member invite their parents to dine at the club after a great round on the course or practice session on the driving range. Parents are responsible for all charges incurred at the club, but it's still fun for the student. To

ensure the experience is a positive one for all involved, an orientation is provided by the golf professional or membership director upon acceptance and prior to use of the facilities.

MVCC Head Golf Professional John Oberly has also started a player development program for members' children, offering events and instruction to have fun through learning in group lessons, spring and summer camps as well as tournament play throughout the season. In an effort to make the group lessons and camps a valuable experience for the juniors, they are grouped based on age and, to some degree, experience. Kids are eligible for golf camps and group lessons once they reach the age of five.

Spring youth clinics begin in April and are divided into groups aged five through seven, and eight and older. The primary focus of the spring clinics is to begin work on the fundamentals of the game along with etiquette and safety. Typically, four golf professionals will conduct the clinics on Saturdays and to make the experience as fun as possible, skills are taught using targets and games. It also presents a goal to work toward as the skills are learned.

After school has broken for summer, four-day youth golf camps begin in late June. Again, players are grouped according to age. MVCC uses the Operation 36 program, which is a fun and engaging way for kids to learn about the game, hone skills and play. The Operation 36 method sets a goal of shooting a score of 36 beginning from 25 yards away for nine holes and progressing to longer distances once the goal is achieved. There are six levels in the program; within those levels are 12 subject areas to learn. Once a student masters the skills and knowledge within the rank, they can move to the next level. MVCC provides each student a profile so they can track their progress in the program by reviewing statistics and tracking objectives and goals. Students can also make playing and training logs. The

program covers the primary categories needed to become a proficient player: putting, around the green, full swing, bunker play, fairway woods and driving. Emphasis is placed on the rules of golf, proper etiquette and how to conduct oneself in a country club environment.

Juniors love having tournaments like they see their parents participating in, so MVCC provides opportunities to compete in a number of tournaments geared toward kids. Each year, there is a Junior Club Championship for both girls and boys, bracketed by age group. In addition to the championship, there is an Adult-Junior Twilight during the season that runs from March through late August. The league culminates with the Adult-Junior Twilight Championship trophy event at the end of the season. These golf programs have been very popular among the juniors and lets them know they are a vital part of MVCC. There is also an important social connection juniors make with each other that makes spending time at the club a real joy. At the end of the season, the club holds a Season Finale with a barbeque and awards program.

Swimming

Like the golf program, the Mount Vernon Barracuda swim team has grown in size and popularity with juniors. For decades, MVCC has

Juniors love having tournaments like they see their parents participating in, so MVCC provides opportunities to compete in a number of tournaments geared toward kids.



participated in inter-club swim competitions with other private clubs in Northern Virginia. The Barracudas swim team is an important part of the club and as such, has a permanent spot on the club's standing House Committee to ensure their needs are accounted for and, if needed, reported directly to the board of directors.

More than 100 juniors participated with the Barracudas in 2021, competing in six Saturday meets leading up to an all-star meet at the end of the season. The team is open to all ages that can

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demonstrate the skills needed to compete, but generally, they are divided into groups eight years old and under and nine years old and older. In addition to practices and Saturday meets, the team has a vibrant social component to foster bonds among the juniors and build lifelong relationships and connection to the club. In fact, former club vice president Ann Ebberts swam on the Barracuda team when she was growing up.

The team holds several pep rallies on Friday evenings at the pool to prepare for Saturday meets. These rallies feature fun aquatic activities, buffet, face painting and games for the juniors to show their pride in the club. Outside of practices, swim meets and

pep rallies, the team also participates in field trips and other off-campus activities to grow and learn.

Social Programs

With a growing number of juniors at the club participating in sporting activities, MVCC also had the opportunity to create more engaging social events for children during the summer months. For example, in conjunction with summer golf lessons and camps, the clubhouse staff works with the golf professional to coordinate and organize indoor activity camps for the juniors. The indoor activities begin immediately after the camps with 30 minutes for lunch. After lunch, participants dive right into something fun to do for the rest of the afternoon.

Past activities have included things like learning how to make pizza with the chef, tie-dying t-shirts with summer college interns who are studying hospitality, or they may head over to the pool to play water games. Golf camps and daily activities are something working families at the club really look forward to because the children are in a safe environment, creating lifelong memories with other fellow Junior members.

MVCC also holds social events geared toward juniors such as teen trivia night, pool parties, movie nights at the pool, “drive-in” movie night on the 18th fairway and other events juniors look forward to attending.

Mount Vernon Country Club has embraced a family-centered approach that has been good for member engagement at all age levels and made our juniors feel like they are an important part of the club. 

Cindy Hurrle is MVCC’s Membership & Marketing Director. She can be reached at churrle@mountvernoncc.org. NCA VP of Government Relations and MVCC Past President **Joe Trauger** contributed to this feature.

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Picture yourself standing on the bank of a river you must cross and have never crossed before. What are you feeling? Maybe anxiety because you don't know how deep the river is, the strength of the current, or if there are snakes or other unknown challenges awaiting you. Most likely, you'll wonder what it will be like on the other side—will it be worth it? The journey is full of unknowns and for most people, that's uncomfortable.



NAVIGATING CLUB



TRANSITIONS

By Dale Kreienkamp

I've just described a *transition* for you. Transitions are more than changes; they are changes that affect people *emotionally* and *psychologically*. Every transition has three stages. They begin with an ending, a loss of what was known, followed by a journey through the unknown until finally arriving at something new, which may not be what you pictured in your mind. Transitions happen all the time in clubs just like yours across the country, impacting everyone. Leadership transitions are the most common, e.g., the hiring of a new club general manager begins a transition for that person and the club, a new board president, etc. Your club might be in transition because of a major remodeling, an expansion program or a course re-design. A membership drive that significantly changes the makeup of club membership might also be a transition. Don't forget about the effect of the personal transitions going on in the lives of staff and members.

The good news about transitions is while they are often uncomfortable and stressful, they are also rewarding because they provide a tremendous growth opportunity. When a transition has been successfully navigated, those affected will have learned more about themselves and developed new skills and resiliency for the future.

The most common mistake I've witnessed in my career navigating and leading countless transitions is not recognizing their significance and taking steps to address the challenges and concerns of the people involved. Too often people are forgotten or an afterthought, yet they are the ones who will make a transition successful or cause it to fail. I believe it's one of the reasons why there is a 30 to 40% failure rate of new leaders within 18 months of their hire¹ and why 83% of all mergers and acquisitions fail² or fail to live up to expectations. It's all about people. Whatever you face in the future, you need to be prepared to lead and navigate through transitions.

¹ "Hire Senior Executives That Last," Ron Ashkenas, *Harvard Business Review*, August 3, 2010.

² "83% Of Mergers Fail," George Bradt, *Forbes*, January 2015.

Emotions

Since transitions impact us emotionally, you will be more successful when you recognize and accept them on the journey. Denying or ignoring emotions will only cause an iceberg-like effect, pushing them below the surface and causing damage later when least expected. Many people are uncomfortable talking about emotions, and people may have concerns about being considered emotional. While this negative attitude toward emotions is beginning to change, emotions are sometimes seen as a sign of weakness or being out of control.

There is a preference for being considered thoughtful, rational or logical. Yet logic doesn't move people to action—it just makes them think. For example, people know they should stop smoking or lose weight, but having knowledge doesn't move them to do it. What drives us to act are emotions. Research has found that almost 95% of our decisions to purchase are based on emotions.³

Understanding Emotions

When facing physical danger, our brain instantly makes a threat assessment and directs us to protect ourselves, i.e., fight or flight. We've known this for some time, but we haven't understood until recently that our brain has the same instantaneous assessment and reaction when we experience an *emotional threat*. We've all witnessed someone's instant reaction to something said to them, wondering to ourselves, "What's gotten into them?" We didn't realize the reaction was their response to an emotional threat.

Dr. David Rock's foundational research about emotional safety, identified five elements that trigger our emotions, using an easy to remember acronym: SCARF. When the brain senses a threat to one or more of those elements, it instantly generates a fight or flight response. The five elements are:

STATUS. How important we feel compared to others. Things like a job title, skills and identity play major roles in how we see our status.

CERTAINTY. We love predictability, a sense of knowing what is coming next. For some, an uncertain future is exciting, but for most it brings on anxiety, fear and worry.

Denying or ignoring emotions will only cause an iceberg-like effect, pushing them below the surface and causing damage later when least expected.

AUTONOMY. Having control over the decisions that impact our work and life.

RELATEDNESS. Connectedness with others, relationships, our community where we feel safe and understood.

FAIRNESS. A perception that transactions are impartial, fair and just.

Remember we are all created uniquely. While we each have those five elements, what generates a strong reaction in you may have little effect on another person.

A Tool for Recognition

You can use SCARF as a tool to recognize emotional responses in yourself and others. When you recognize them, you are better equipped to hold back responding and instead, take a deep breath and determine what to do next.

Imagine Dennis is an experienced general manager, dealing with Jim, the new board president. Jim is enthusiastic and wants to do everything he can in his year to help the club. In his zeal, he constantly makes suggestions for improvements or offers new ideas to Dennis. How does Dennis view them? He might view them as criticism of himself and his team, which his brain might perceive as a threat to his status (an experienced and competent GM), or if he believes Jim wants to be the decision maker, a threat to his autonomy (those are his decisions to make). Recognizing these emotions may help him hold back from reacting, which could damage his relationship with Jim, and instead seek a conversation to better understand Jim's intent.

A Tool for Communication

You can use SCARF to tailor your communication with others. Great communication answers questions on the minds of those you are communicating with. If you can anticipate responses to changes that will affect staff and/or members, you can craft a more targeted message. As an example, if a major renovation will be coupled with procedural changes, you might anticipate it will trigger threats to *certainty* and *fairness*. To address those, in your communication you should provide more details on how things will work and what will change to reduce the uncertainty, and information on why the changes are being made to reduce concerns about fairness.

Tips to Help Navigate Transitions

Following are four tips to help you in navigating transitions:

1. **RECOGNIZE EMOTIONS.** The better you get at recognition, the less surprised you will be. Still, at times you will be surprised

³ "Harvard Professor Says 95% of Purchasing Decisions Are Subconscious," Logan Chierotti, Inc., March 2018.

or confronted by someone. Use these questions to gain insight and determine your next step:

What did you mean by that?

Don't assume intent. Seek more information and gain a better understanding.

Can you give me an example?

An example will provide more clarity.

Why do you think I did that?

If you may have been misunderstood, this question can provide insight to their perception and provide you a chance to explain yourself.

- 2. **ASK OPEN QUESTIONS.** How you ask questions determines the response. Most use direct questions, causing the other person to defend themselves. This rarely gets the true answer and doesn't help your relationship with them. Using an open approach asks the same thing, differently and more effectively. Notice the difference in approaches. Which would you prefer to answer?

Direct approach

"Why did you do it that way?"

"Tell me why you didn't you do it ..."

Open approach

"How did you come to the decision to do it that way?"

"Have you ever considered . . . ?"

- 3. **SHARE OBSERVATIONS, NOT OPINIONS.** A good friend taught me the value of sharing observations instead of opinions. When someone shares an opinion, it is often more about letting others know how smart, educated or experienced they are. And once an opinion is shared, it's hard to take it back or change it.

Sharing your observations is less threatening and accepted better by others. Imagine you are new to a club and eight months into your tenure, a past board president asks your opinion about how the membership is reacting to changes being implemented.

You could share your opinion, "I think they are resisting change, more than I've seen in other clubs. They like what they have had for years and don't want to see anything different." If the past board president believes the membership is open to change, your opinion may not be received well, and the conversation will end quickly.

If you chose to share your observations, you might say, "I've observed in my short time here that there is a level of comfort with

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the way things have been for some time now, and our attempts to make changes haven't been fully embraced by everyone." Using this approach, the past board president may ask you for some examples, which would give you an opportunity to continue the conversation, informing them and possibly gaining their support.

4. INCLUDE THE WORD "EVEN" IN YOUR VOCABULARY. In building relationships, it's natural to want to impress others. The downside of pumping ourselves up is we may use words and tell stories that unintentionally make others feel less valuable or threatened. By inserting the word "even" into your vocabulary, you'll affirm others and be less threatening.


If someone asks why a change was made, a response could be, "we had to change things to fix what wasn't working for our members."

If the person asking the question had been a member who helped create the process being changed, how might they feel? Now add the word "even" into the response and notice the difference.

"We made the change to make it even better for our members."

Notice the member's past work has been affirmed, not criticized.

Emotions can't easily be controlled or directed. In his book "The Happiness Hypothesis," Jonathan Haidt describes the emotional side of the brain as an elephant. Consider my nephew Steve, a zookeeper who works with elephants, as the logical side of the brain. I've watched Steve be successful getting the elephants to do tricks for visitors, using logical directions and targeted incentives. On other days, and sometimes even the same day, the elephants ignore him and refuse to do what he wants. As good as Steve is, when they don't want to do something, he can't command or make them. You don't control your emotions or others' either.

His best chance for success is persuading them, not commanding them, using the relationship he has with them. It's the same for you. Your ability to build and maintain relationships will be helpful in navigating transitions. 

Dale Kreienkamp is a speaker and President of Thriving Through Transitions, a consultancy focused on helping organizations and individuals successfully navigate difficult transitions. Dale can be reached at dale@dalekreienkamp.com or at dalekreienkamp.com.



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Leading *by* Example



Chrissie Bennett
Becomes Executive Chef
at Winged Foot Golf Club

By Kim Fernandez, CAE



Chrissie Bennett grew up cooking with her Jamaican-American family but never went to culinary school or considered a job in the kitchen until her mom lit a bit of a flame under her.

“The sous chef at Winged Foot Golf Club had a friend who had a friend who knew my mom,” Bennett said of a conversation 10 years ago. “It was late spring or early summer and they were looking for someone to help them out—they needed an extra set of hands. My mom called me and said she heard about this cooking job and I should take it.” To which she replied with a quick “no,” and thought the subject was dead.

Her mom had other ideas.

“My mom doesn’t like to tell people no,” Bennett said with a laugh. She brought up the club kitchen job again and insisted Bennett at least consider it.

“I finally said fine, I’d give it a go,” Bennett said. She visited with the chef and agreed to start working in the kitchen, doing whatever needed to be done—a chef garde manger (pantry chef) position. And her resistance quickly dissolved. “I fell in love,” she said.

This past fall, Bennett was named executive chef at the storied club, becoming the first female executive chef in Winged Foot’s long history—and she’s found her passion on a number of levels.

“I love this,” she said. “This is what I want for me and I always wanted it to be at Winged Foot. I feel a connection to it—Winged Foot is a home away from home and has that family feel. I’m drawn to it and I’ve learned so much.”

Colin Burns, Winged Foot’s general manager, said he might have had some reservations when an untrained Chrissie first joined staff, but making her executive chef a decade later wasn’t a tough decision—at all.

“Her connection with the club and the membership is very strong,” he said, “When I tell you she is beloved by the membership, it’s truly everyone who knows her. I went to the board and told them our previous chef had left, and the decision to promote Chrissie wasn’t even a five-minute discussion. She has a wonderful personality, she’s charming, and she’s an extraordinary chef.”

The Beginning

While it wasn’t an obvious career path, cooking and creating with food was a foundational part of Bennett’s life from a very early age.

“Growing up, I had a close group of friends who’d get together all the time, and I was always the one who was cooking,” she said, remembering standing at the stove for the first time at the age of 12.

“My parents were at work, my sister and I were at home, it was a cold rainy day,” she said. “I called my mom and said

I wanted to cook something, and she said, ‘Don’t turn on the stove!’” Young Chrissie promised she wouldn’t, and then poked around the kitchen.

“I was bored,” she remembered. “We had chicken and I made curried chicken and white rice.” The defiant move could have landed her in trouble, but when she opened the pot and showed her mother the dish, the reaction was the exact opposite.

“Older Jamaicans have a saying,” she said. “They’ll say the rice is shelly, which means it isn’t too wet. When my parents came home and opened the pot and saw the rice I’d made, my mom started calling all her sisters and telling them the rice was shelly. ‘Oh my gosh, you made the perfect pot of rice,’ she said to me. And I’ve been cooking ever since.”

Bennett learned a lot about cooking at home, mastering Caribbean dishes and learning how different foods worked together. But during her first days with Winged Foot, the experts there weren’t so sure of her abilities.

“When Chrissie first arrived, I was doubtful about her future cooking ability,” said Burns. “I remember asking if she really

“This is what I want for me and I always wanted it to be at Winged Foot. I feel a connection to it—Winged Foot is a home away from home and has that family feel. I’m drawn to it and I’ve learned so much.”

knew how to cook. This glamorous young lady comes into the kitchen without a culinary background and she’s very nice, but are we sure?”

“She was very nice and very charming and developed friendships right away with key staff members,” he remembered. “People I rely on really liked her. I think the day I knew she was destined for great things was when I walked into the snack bar and saw Chrissie disciplining a group of employees. I was a bit startled and just stood there. She looked at me and said, ‘Mr. Burns, I think it’s better if you leave,’ and I skedaddled. That was the first time I saw her level of discipline and her desire to work really hard and her expectation that others would, too. And I started thinking she really had a future here.”

The Food

Chrissie continued learning from the other chefs at Winged Foot and developing her own leadership skills, and she rose through the ranks. At the same time, she became a favorite among club members, who loved bumping into her and talking—and she was popular among the children at the club, too.



Winged Foot General Manager Colin Burns shares a laugh with Executive Chef Chrissie Bennett.

“They’re like bumblebees around here, all wanting to talk to Chrissie,” Burns said. And when they’re finished talking, they can’t wait to get more of her food.

“I completely learned about food at the club,” Bennett said, “The only culinary training I ever had was at home before that.” She watched other chefs and spent a lot of time both at the club and at home trying to replicate what they did.

“My cooking style varies based on what I’m doing that day and what a certain event is,” she explained. “I’m good at taking something and turning it into a dish that’s more than the ingredients. I can go and see what we have, think about the ingredients on hand, and create something. I’ve learned to master that.”

She calls her style homey and classic—“classic Americana food”—but said some of her own cultural influences may start to creep in. “I’m thinking about it,” she said of adding some of her Jamaican culture to the club’s menu. “Jerk is a thing I might try more of—last year we had a very mild jerk pork sandwich that did well. Curry is something I’ve been thinking about. There are so many great curry flavors. We’re used to an Indian curry but why not try a Caribbean one? I’ll probably do that—why not?”

Burns credits the club’s long-time commitment to outstanding food with giving Bennett and other chefs the freedom to try new things

Burns credits the club’s long-time commitment to outstanding food with giving Bennett and other chefs the freedom to try new things.

“We once had a culinary program that was not up to standards,” he said. “We hired a chef who was a *New York Times* reviewed chef, who’d never worked in the club industry, who now owns several restaurants, and we let him just do his job. We decided to treat it like a restaurant and stop making really plain, blue-plate kind of food and get adventurous. I remember walking out of a meeting one night and seeing a group of guys in the Grille Room eating udon with pork belly and feeling like I’d fallen onto a different planet. And then younger members see something like sole piccata or beef Wellington on the menu and they love it—there’s a lot of nostalgia there.”

Bennett, he said, has mastered that combination of tradition and innovation.

“I pour everything I have into the food here,” she said, “I really enjoy feeding people, I love creating food, I just love it—I can’t

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explain how much I love it. I want it to show on the menus I write. I want you to see it and taste it when you read it. I want you to feel that we put something into it.”

The Credits

Bennett credits the Winged Foot staff and the chefs who came before her with much of her success. “The people here taught me about food. They were doing things I didn’t know about and doing things I didn’t see before. I learned how to cook by watching the chefs at Winged Foot, and now I can take something, break it down, and build it back into something else. I wouldn’t have had the knowledge of these dishes and influences without those people mentoring me and teaching me. It’s very important that now that I’ve had that opportunity, I give something back.”

And she does, intentionally teaching and mentoring interns and younger staff members. “I’ve always tried to make connections and mentor others. I like to feel as if I’m touching someone in some way. When we get a younger person coming in, I like to teach them, I like to help them, and I want to make them comfortable. I want to leave a mark on those people.”

Burns said the club couldn’t be prouder. “This was a male-dominated industry for so many years,” he said. “Look now how much has changed. There are so many critical positions in the club where we’ve engaged women. And Chrissie isn’t just another executive chef. She’s part of our family, part of our team, she’s our first female executive chef, and hers is a story of persistence and dedication.”

Bennett said that’s something she hopes to convey to others. “If I were giving someone advice, I would tell a woman—or a man—that sometimes the job might seem great. And some days, you’ll show up to work and be unsure if all your hard work is paying off. I’d tell them to stick it out and continue to do their best. Put your best foot forward all the time and lead by example. Do the right thing no matter what you see others do.”

“This club is so inclusive,” she said. “The club has taken on women in different roles and it’s great, it’s supportive. I’m happy to see that a place like Winged Foot is putting women at the forefront.” **CD**

Kim Fernandez is NCA’s vice president of communications. She can be reached at fernandez@nationalclub.org.



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4 HOURS That Can Change the World

By Mary Kay Willson

WOMEN'S

Spring and summer days bring golfers flocking to club courses to enjoy the game, time with friends and a few hours outdoors. But for years, there's been a challenge: Those golfers are overwhelmingly male. Bringing women to the game and keeping them playing continues to challenge general managers and pros—along with the men who'd like to play with their wives, daughters, colleagues and female friends. Countless ideas have been floated and programs launched but most results have been mediocre at best.

For clubs, getting more women on the golf course is especially important. More women mean more memberships, more lessons, more pro shop sales and more rounds. Women are usually the key decision-makers in families, leading to even more participation, use and spending.

One easy—and effective—way for clubs to promote women's golf is by participating in Women's Golf Day (WGD) (womensgolfdays.com), an annual, global event that “engages, empowers and supports” women and girls who want to play golf—or who might not know they want to play yet but are willing to give it a try—with events at golf facilities around the world.

The Event

The idea is simple: On the first Tuesday in June—this year it's June 7—golf courses around the world devote four hours to introducing new female participants to the game and offering targeted programming celebrating those who already play. The first WGD was held in 2016. Since then, WGD events have been held at more than 1,000 locations in 80 countries.

“Women's Golf Day gives women all over the world a chance to connect with other women and feel welcome in the sport,” explained Founder Elisa Gaudet. “We started by creating an event

“Women's Golf Day gives women all over the world a chance to connect with other women and feel welcome in the sport.”

geared toward what women wanted and since then, have created a community of women supporting each other no matter their golf skill level. Women's Golf Day has evolved into a year-round movement centered on golf and unity.”

In the typical WGD event, the first two hours give participants the option of taking lessons (one hour on the range, one hour chipping and putting) or playing nine holes in either a scramble or own-ball format. The second two hours are devoted to socializing, networking and distributing information that will help participants stay involved. Socializing also can mean bringing in speakers, introducing new players to experienced players such as



GOLF DAY



local college and high school golf teams, and involving community and corporate groups.

The idea is to show that golf is as much about the people you meet and the doors it opens as it is about time on the course.

WGD is also about inclusion, welcoming all comers, regardless of sex, race, color, religion, disability/medical condition, marital status or sexual orientation.

The Hosts

The focus on diversity extends to the facilities that host a WGD event. In past years, programs have been held at public, semi-private, and private courses; golf resorts; driving ranges; mini-golf and putt-putt; even golf retailers. Wherever golf is all or part of the business, Women's Golf Day can have an effect.

"It's a fun-filled day, there's no excuse not to have it," said Gabby Steiner, head golf professional at Pinehurst Country Club in North Carolina. "Women are nervous to go out and play, wondering if they have the game. But with Women's Golf Day, it's easy. They have fun, it's a scramble so everyone is on a team, and they realize they have mutual connections with the other women.

"There are women at every club just waiting for that invitation to go out and play," she continued "Without this platform, it's not going to happen."

Women's Golf Day also has the support of dozens of sponsors, from organizations that include the National Golf Foundation, National Golf Course Owners Association, and many international federa-



tions, as well as companies such as PGA TOUR Superstore, Callaway, Titleist, FootJoy, Troon, ClubCorp, TopGolf and PGA professionals.

At last year's event at Pinehurst Country Club, representatives from sponsor Titleist/FootJoy were onsite all day, talking to the women about shoes and equipment, handing out samples and answering questions.

"Having that interactive component, that education piece, was so valuable," Steiner said. "I still get feedback from women about that." [CD](#)

Mary Kay Willson serves as COO of Women's Golf Day and comes from a legacy golf family and extensive golf background. For more information on Women's Golf Day, contact info@womensgolfday.com.

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How do club boards balance transparency and confidentiality?

Today, we all cry out for transparency because we believe we have a right to know.

EVERYONE SEEMS to be searching for the holy grail of best practices for a particular club issue or process, but how many times is there just one best practice? Most of these issues are situational—driven by that club’s culture, membership, economics, demographics, leadership skills, crises, etc. There is rarely one right answer, but getting to a better practice generally involves considering what other highly functional clubs do and debating and distilling down the options to what the club’s current leadership feels is most appropriate for their club.

Many club boards have become increasingly concerned about board confidentiality. Has anything changed or is this just an age-old problem that resurfaces time and again depending upon critical issues that boards must address? I suggest this is a growing problem exacerbated by society’s growing sense of entitlement, more than just a cyclical problem. Today, we all cry out for transparency because we believe we have a right to know. As Jack Nicholson proclaimed in a “Few Good Men,” “You want the truth? You can’t handle the truth!” Or consider, you want the detail? You can’t handle all the detail!

DAN: Or are members crying out for transparency because they don’t trust those who lead them? Is that rooted in lack of transparency of the board, too much confidentiality, lack of accountability or are these three legs of the same stool? We’re familiar with the expression, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely,” coined by English nobleman Lord Acton in 1857. The remainder of the sentence was, “Great men are almost always bad

men.” That would be a sorry state of affairs, but relating it to private clubs, I’ve met hundreds of club presidents in my 20-plus years in the search and consulting business and I don’t think I ever met one I or others believed to be a bad person—misguided sometimes, but not bad people. Regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, they are not immune to making bad decisions. But should club presidents be making any decisions at all? Isn’t it their role to be representing the board’s view?

BOB: To that end, we can reflect on the movement afoot to change the title of president to chair as the highest elected position in a not for profit. The thinking is that the title “chair” more aptly reflects that their role is to represent and manage the board, rather than exercising any kind of executive authority—that the role of the top elected volunteer in a club should be to run the board meetings to ensure that the work of the board is done. That person has no autonomous power, but does hold the responsibility of building consensus. They are accountable to the membership, through the stipulations in the bylaws and by the election process. They must earn the board’s trust to accomplish anything and retain their place on the board by earning the trust of the membership—or at least that is the thinking.

Personally, I think that makes sense for charitable and association boards, but not for organizations with an extensive volunteer corps. For most private clubs, there are two chains of command: the paid staff and member volunteer organizational charts. They are often overlaid to denote the advisory relationships of the volunteer

organization to the paid staff, but they are separate and distinct. The role in organizing and managing the volunteer corps is not unlike that of the GM/COO managing the staff, assessing the club's needs, recruiting talent, selecting, onboarding, developing and motivating. It is all well and good to formalize the roles and responsibilities of each level, from officers down to committee members in policies and charters, however, someone must be accountable for managing and making the system work. This cannot be done bureaucratically or by committee.

If you want another example of the complex role of the board leader, consider complaints from presidents about the amount of time they spend handling member disciplinary issues. Yes, we write into our president's charter that the president shall have no autonomous authority that is not specifically delegated to them in the club's bylaws or by the board of directors, but the president must exercise some autonomy in these and their other responsibilities.

DAN: Bob, I think you are throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Conceptually and perceptually, it is best for the industry that the board, members and staff understand that the primary roles of the board are:

1. Strategic direction.
2. Policy.
3. Fiduciary oversight.
4. Partnering with the club's GM/COO.

These roles represent the interests of the members as a group while directing the business and affairs of the club and that the president or chairperson is the agent of the board, regardless the title.

When a board's role expands beyond this fundamental construct, the decline of the business accelerates. Enough said?

BOB: Dan, we started this article off suggesting that confidentiality, transparency and accountability are each supporting pillars of a platform

on which the club's governance is built, which I believe we agree is trust. In one way or another, you and I agree that someone must be personally accountable to the membership for the business and affairs of the club and that the GM/COO must be responsible for the operations. However, how is this transparency and confidentiality dichotomy reconcilable in reference to accountability?

DAN: We have to approach this mostly as a matter of degree, and it might best be compared in the context of a scale. There needs to be a balance between confidentiality and transparency, with accountability as the stabilizing fulcrum of the scale. It may be a fine balancing act; the expectations today are that members are entitled to know, but realistically, they're not entitled to know everything. I think it is safe to say that any reasonable member would accept that personal information about fellow members and candidates for membership must be held confidentially. I think we can also agree that the same applies for employees' personal information, active litigation against the club and disciplinary procedures against a member. After these, clubs would be well advised to reveal as much about the club's operations as reasonable and do it on a timely basis. And when the details to be shared are important but sparse, it's better to communicate the bits and pieces often. In society today, most would agree there is too much information flow to a point where it's mostly just noise. A club is a microcosm of society. Noisy!

BOB: Sounds reasonable, but once again, when you dig deeper into the concept, there are many more reasons and areas to keep confidential or at least hold confidential until the case is closed or decisions are made. I feel for board members who must sign a confidentiality pledge not to reveal the discussions of the board until decisions are finalized and made public, but these pledges are necessary.

Too often, good ideas and decisions are derailed because directors leak too much information, and the board receives backlash of peer or political pressure from not fully informed, non-board members before the issue receives a full unbiased review. If considering a hot-potato issue the membership is somewhat aware of, boards would be well advised to handle the issue expeditiously and reveal as much as possible to the membership along the way, in the interest of transparency and building trust.

DAN: Far be it from me to assume the role of the devil's advocate, but confidentiality is the antithesis of transparency, and the scale should be significantly skewed towards the latter. While it may be a burden on a director to keep one's lips sealed on certain issues, most board meeting content should be open for discussion outside of the board. After all, the directors are the members' agents. Clubs should not make broad-brush policies, such as everything discussed in a board meeting is confidential until declared otherwise. The rule should be that everything in the boardroom should be transparent, except when specifically declared otherwise. It does put significant burden on the directors to be fully versed on what the issues are and prepared to explain them in a full and objective way when asked, but that is part of their fiduciary responsibilities as directors.

The question is, as Ray Dalio frequently says, "What is above the line and what is below the line?"

Even the best boards and GMs struggle these days to find this moving target, because it's situational. **CD**



Dan Denehy, CCM, CHA, is president and **Robert C. James**, CCM, CCE, CHE, is vice president at DENEHY Club

Thinking Partners. They can be reached at dan@denehyctp.com or bob@denehyctp.com.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Succession Planning for Board and Officers at Private Clubs



David Duval



Joe Abely

CLUB BENCHMARKING has conducted a Club Governance Survey annually since 2017. In every survey, succession planning for board members and officers has ranked high on the “room for improvement” list. The trend continued with the 2021 survey, in which less than 50% of board members said succession planning at their clubs was adequate.

Getting the best people involved is an important foundational element of private club board governance. Board members and officers must maintain long-term perspective despite relatively short service

terms. Done well, succession planning ensures continuity of thought and action across multiple administrations, which is critical to implementing long-term plans and achieving strategic goals.

Unfortunately, succession planning in private clubs is often guided by historical practices or outdated bylaws rather than industry best practices. Board members responding to the 2021 Governance Survey noted numerous deficiencies in the nominating process at their clubs:

- Lack of transparency with process or criteria not well known to the membership.
- Decisions are controlled by a few, aka the “old boys club” syndrome.
- The process is not independent.
- Necessary skill sets have not been identified.
- Committee experience is not (but should be) a prerequisite.
- Future leadership needs are not considered.
- Nominating committee and candidates are not representative of membership.
- Candidates are chosen due to popularity.
- Nominating process is too short.

Club boards should evaluate the adequacy of their current process for selecting both board and officer candidates. They should consider:

- Representation of a broad demographic of the club.
- Skills needed now and in the future.
- Where board members chair committees, the nominating committee should fill vacancies as board members cycle off the board or assume officer roles.

- Prioritizing candidates with active leadership roles on committees.
- Identifying potential future officers, and committee members who may be viable future board candidates.
- Election of officers being determined by the full board or by the members versus a subset.
- Engagement of the nominating committee throughout the year.
- Transparency of communication to the membership.

Extensive experience serving as members of and advisors to club boards has eliminated any doubt that contested elections are a deterrent to effective succession planning. Elections based on popularity instead of thoughtful succession planning open the door for personal agendas to interfere with the execution of long-term plans.

Boards should review their bylaws and amend them where necessary to ensure the provisions for nominating and electing board members and officers support the club's ability to effect good succession planning. The process for nominating board members and officers is not just about this year's slate. Long-term planning for a private club should address future leadership needs.

Visit clubbenchmarking.com/resource-center to download a copy of the 2021 Governance Survey report. [CD](#)

Joe Abely and **Dave Duval** are executive consultants at Club Benchmarking. They can be reached at jabely@clubbenchmarking.com and dduval@clubbenchmarking.com.



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BRANDING



Henry DeLozier

What are the best ways to leverage my club's brand?

a part of each amenity, program and service offering of the club. Club leaders in a family club must consider:

- The provisions made for the club's children.
- The systems and activities are safe, sanitary and carefully managed.
- Enabling parents and grandparents to participate in the children's programs.

Clubs with effective brands are purposeful in their planning, which makes them purposeful in executing their programs and services. There is little slippage in program implementation.

Perhaps your club identifies as a special-purpose club—such a golf, yacht or racquet club. Just as a family club must review considerations, so, too must you execute the aspects of the club's brand and purpose through programs and communications to ensure your club's approach to its special purpose is not clouded and lost in trying to be all things to all people. Brand focus is the touchstone.

2. **Be inclusive.** Women and millennials consistently watch to see whether everyone has a seat at the table and is being considered.

In a 2020 attitudinal survey executed by GGA Partners, millennials consistently signaled a preference for inclusivity recognizing that they have friendships that cross racial, ethnic and partisan lines. They do not want to be a part of their grandfathers' club that limited its membership. This expectation requires that the club expand its brand reach to include demographic profiles that are new or different while

A strong brand establishes a position to own in the marketplace and reiterates who you are, why you exist and how you will deliver on your promise.

remaining consistent on core values, such as mutual respect, family-first and civility in actions.

3. **Be consistent.** Influential brands foster trust and respect through consistent and repetitive communications that stand the test of time.

Using your brand effectively begins with a strong brand position statement to serve as the guidepost against which all written and visual communications are weighed. Every communication, training program, service and amenity should reinforce who you are, why you exist and how you deliver on your promise.

Clubs currently enjoy a bull run but the current economic cycle will eventually change. To ensure your club's brand will be respected and influential through every economic cycle, you must accept the responsibility to manage your brand effectively. [CD](#)

MANY CLUB LEADERS underestimate the importance of brand management with the belief that a logo, website and email constitute a brand. The fact is your brand is everything you do—and fail to do.

A strong brand establishes a position to own in the marketplace and reiterates who you are, why you exist and how you will deliver on your promise.

Effective brand management requires consistency in everything you do, from the look and feel of your internal and external communications and the condition of your club facilities to the level of service provided by your staff.

Linda Dillenbeck, the brand guru at GGA Partners, identifies three keys for using your club's brand effectively:

1. **Be deliberate.** To be a trusted brand, you must deliver on your promise. Leading private clubs develop an intentional brand position that is sustained by intentional brand management.

For example, if your club describes itself as a "family club," then it must make family-friendly considerations

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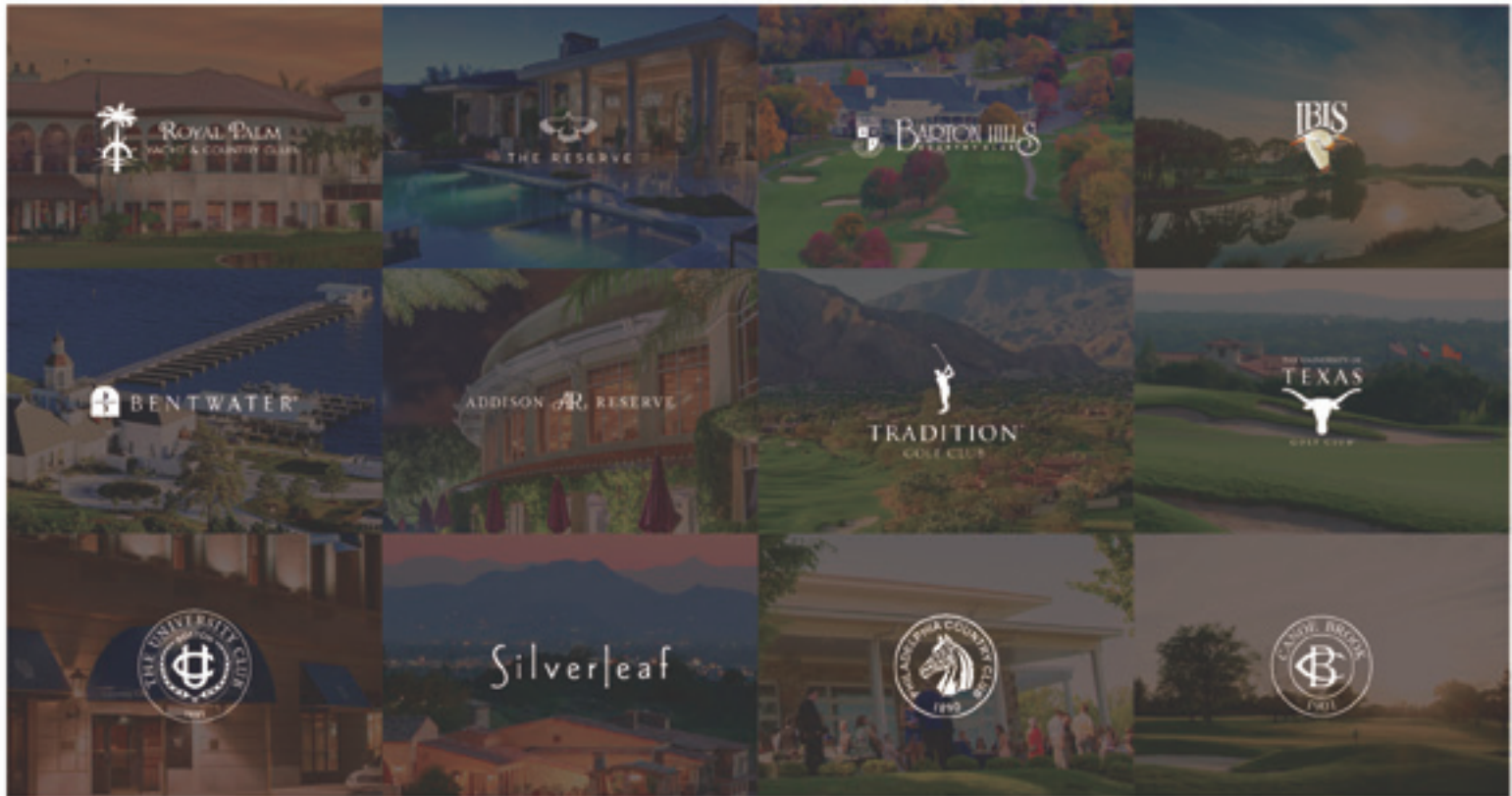
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TECHNOLOGY



Trevor Coughlan

Food and beverage, member communication, fitness and labor management are all early focal points, and the thread connecting each is that clubs are using data in unique ways within each of these areas.

How can my club use technology more to improve its primary operations?

WORKING FOR A club technology company brings with it the benefit of crowdsourcing industry trends as they begin to emerge. As we attend events, have conversations with clients and field sales inquiries, a picture begins to emerge that highlights the direction many clubs will take with their technology this year. Food and beverage, member communication, fitness and labor management are all early focal points, and the thread connecting each is that clubs are using data in unique ways within each of these areas.

Food & Beverage Operations

Mobility is the hot topic in F&B operations this year. The pandemic influenced the way many clubs operated by forcing more space between guests and prompting clubs to invest in new outdoor dining venues. Couple this with the daily sight of restaurant servers pulling a cell phone or tablet from their apron to take orders from a table full of guests, and there is no doubt that F&B service is extending from table-side to poolside and beyond.

The Data Thread: Clubs are collecting more data points on members than ever before, all in an effort to enrich the member service experience. Allergies, favorite drinks and recent orders are all available at the touch of a button for staff to access.

Member Communications

From push notifications delivered via mobile app to text messages sent directly to members' phones, clubs are branching out to communicate with members on their own terms more than ever. Maximizing the utilization of email marketing (EMM)

platforms also seems to be on the rise, with more clubs interested in connecting their customer relationship management system with their EMM platform to automate many of their member and prospect outreach initiatives.

The Data Thread: Membership marketers are more tech savvy than ever and are implementing new strategies to automate member communications. Everything from regular communications with a prospective member to onboarding messages from the general manager, chef, golf pro and more can be automated using data triggers within most capable EMM systems.

Health & Fitness

The focus on health and fitness began years ago in private clubs, with operators at clubs such as the Wentworth Club in England, Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla., and John's Island Club in Vero Beach, Fla., recognizing the coming need for greater attention to health and wellness. Now, a first-rate fitness center is becoming just as ubiquitous as a pro shop with a view of the course, and with it comes demands not just for technology within fitness equipment, but the ability for members to book personal training sessions, register for classes and even order a post-workout smoothie from the change room.

The Data Thread: Just like every other area of the business, fitness directors are interested in learning more from the data they can collect within their own facilities. Last year, Stephen Sefchick, MS, M.S., fitness director at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., had self-check-in terminals installed in the fitness facility.

These terminals are used to track overall facility use as well as utilization by fitness categories such as solo, personal training or group exercise. The data captured from members has allowed the club to fine tune its fitness initiatives and focus on driving more value through their programs.

Labor Management

The labor crisis is still top of mind throughout the hospitality industry and it shows no immediate signs of correction. As expected, this is encouraging many club operators to look for new and innovative ways to streamline staff scheduling and manage the ever-changing availability of staff. A growing trend is the move away from pen and paper scheduling to more sophisticated online platforms that connect managers and staff directly to the virtual schedule. These systems largely eliminate the need for

managers to draft and redraft team schedules and reduces the need for continual back and forth communication when dealing with changes and requests.

The Data Thread: It is often complex for managers to get an accurate and timely picture of labor costs. Many clubs make an educated estimate since accurate reports are only available once the pay period has been reconciled, while others painstakingly create complex forecasts in Microsoft Excel. Online scheduling systems often provide a unique view of a club's labor budget, allowing departmental budgets to be set and monitored in real time as schedules are created and modified.

The trends club managers are facing this year vary, but the common thread seems to be that the industry is waking up to the power of data. Making the most of your club's data requires both intent and

The trends club managers are facing this year vary, but the common thread seems to be that the industry is waking up to the power of data.

process, but with the right tools in place, managers are able to lay the foundation of better decision making and enhanced member service. [CD](#)

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FACILITIES



Frank Vain

My club is embarking on a long-range plan. What are the top capital improvements we should consider?

CLUBS ARE HEAVILY investing in capital improvements these days. Projects are larger and more comprehensive than ever, so in many cases, many of them seem to be taking a one-and-done approach. That isn't feasible for most clubs, however, and there seems to be a hierarchy to investments. First, clubs continue to reinvent their dining and social spaces. This is being driven from two directions. All member categories and all age and user groups can use their club's dining spaces, so it is the program that affects the most people. When allocating your capital dollars, it makes sense to start where you get the most bang for your buck. On the other side of the coin, the right dining facilities remain the best way to create community among your membership.

There are many ways to upgrade the dining facilities, but the threefold combination of a large bar space with a

central, conversational bar adjacent to an informal grill room capable of serving a mix of adults and families, all spilling out onto a large patio, is the current preferred approach. Patios have taken on an indoor-outdoor feel, with a mix of covered and uncovered parts and different seating areas: some for cocktails and conversations and others for dining. We are also seeing more fast-casual style spaces come online—something that might best be described as a combination Starbucks/Panera space but at the private club level.

Next on the list is aquatics. Pool upgrades have played a central role in most club improvement programs, especially those looking to grow membership from their investments. The pool area is a big part of this because it is in the sweet spot for joiners—that young family that has reached the point in life where club membership makes sense. In addition to what the adults in the household might get from membership, the modern pool complex with expanded deck and seating areas, upgraded locker rooms and a resort-like food and beverage outlet makes it a central gathering spot for the young family. There are all sorts of other uses too, including water exercise and a great place to throw a casual club party.

Finally, the third most popular investment area is fitness and wellness. This remains a growth area, and one where many clubs remain behind the times. The trends in fitness have moved beyond the heavy-equipment style layout that was in

When allocating your capital dollars, it makes sense to start where you get the most bang for your buck.

vogue when clubs got into fitness a decade or so ago. The new standard is to have more open space for stretching and studios for classes and other forms of body-weight exercises. While the role of fitness is still debated in many club circles, it is a great way for clubs to make themselves relevant to societal values. While it may have been an option for the baby boomers who were the driving force in membership for so many years, it is an expected club amenity package for millennials.

In addition to these major areas, clubs are spending their capital dollars on a variety of innovative improvements. It is an excellent environment for raising capital, either from the members or the bank, and improved facilities remain one of the key areas for attracting new members. With rising rates and, hopefully, the end of the pandemic truly in sight, clubs that miss this window in time to put their houses for the next decade could soon regret it. **CD**

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OPERATIONS



Ryan Whitney

What is the winning formula to achieve operational success in the current environment?

WHILE THE GOALS of financial sustainability, engaged staff and increasingly satisfied members remain the targets of every private club, the formula to achieve such a trifecta has changed in recent years. Because so little remains the same, how can a general manager best ensure their club remains competitive, yet be prudent in the ever-changing labor landscape—especially as member expectations increase exponentially with initiation fee and dues increases? What is the right way to maintain a motivated and cohesively driven staff while adjusting to an enhanced volume of socially starved members now afforded the freedom of hybrid work schedules? As a result of these competing complexities, a private club GM must eagerly entertain fresh and creative approaches. We simply cannot pull from the file of yesteryear, institute the same pre-pandemic game plan and expect applauded outcomes. Rather, we must work to identify the elements of a new formula that will deliver on the stewardship we have been entrusted with to lead our clubs. How do we begin?

First, recognize the task and challenge at hand. To help solve this new

puzzle we have been given, the GM must get department heads excited about the opportunity to redefine the process and approach to prosperity. This is the time for the management team to shine by demonstrating not just a plan but also the worthy destination.

Second, paint the picture and promote the path. This means clearly identifying and defining the desired outcomes and experiences that will create a common purpose. Assembling a 1,000-piece puzzle is much more efficient and enjoyable when you can reference the picture on the box. Without a clear reference point to rely upon, it's likely that the process slows, confusion reigns, interest fades and the puzzle is eventually left unfinished. The management team should know what puzzle they're putting together and that each piece—assignment, process, protocols, duty and experience—has its place. The new formula will be different for every club and may include a different labor or management structure, revised hours of operation or a more labor-efficient model to streamline resources; an edited approach to outside catering that allows for enhanced attention to member dining and events; or reimagined menus, programming and amenities. Common purpose creates collective passion, and collective passion begets a culture of accomplishment and pride for the members and the team.

Third, define *how* these formula changes will be accomplished, *who* will

We simply cannot pull from the file of yesteryear, institute the same pre-pandemic game plan and expect applauded outcomes.

champion the required actions, and *when* they will be completed or instituted. Establish a plan to train and sustain these newly adopted ideas and ground the vision with energy and accountability. Begin with the initiatives that will have the biggest effect and then, once those are adopted, add the next piece or two. Before long, the vision described at the outset will begin to reveal itself in real time, and motivation to participate and complete the puzzle will be contagious.

In this new world of private club operations, the need for a fresh look and creative plan simply cannot be overstated. To keep the member-to-club relationship alive, we must shake off the blinders that might be clouding our vision and don the glasses that will provide a renewed perspective. Only then can we truly be innovators within this new environment. **CD**

Ryan Whitney is vice president of operations at Troon. He can be reached at rwhitney@troon.com.

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