

BUILDING BLOCKS TO



BIGGER MEMBERSHIPS

Club presidents and owners feel it in the pinch of diminishing revenues and rising costs; managers note it in decreasing clubhouse traffic; professionals see it in the unsold merchandise in the pro shop and superintendents encounter it in tightening budgets—the malady that is spreading to many clubs throughout the country—unfilled membership quotas.

In its annual formal survey of the three administrative employees and club presidents and owners, lack of new members ranked high on each group's list of current problems. As noted in *GOLFDOM*'s April issue ("What's Plaguing the Pros?" p. 35), professionals particularly point out the effects this has had on their merchandise sales and lesson business. And the problem of deficient membership may become a bigger monster as time passes, because some professionals say they feel threatened by their clubs and courses. The hard-pressed facilities, some professionals note, are beginning to look more closely at the arrangements between club and professional in certain income areas traditionally held by the professional. One does not have to be clairvoyant, therefore, to predict what might occur at a club if the malady goes unchecked for an extended period of time. The initial and direct impact is financial, but as pressure builds, it can break down relations among key people and create hostility. And at that point, any rational, concerted attempt to deal with the problem of deficient membership becomes impossible.

It is not our intent here to sound like the voice of doom. In contacting numerous clubs on the matter of membership, many indicated that they have not experienced a problem, and others reported that they had already instituted programs to remedy the situation. Many did admit that the membership problem had worsened and that they didn't quite know how to deal with it. And this is not surprising.

It is an unfamiliar situation, because most clubs in the past have had the luxury of being able to fill any openings from a long waiting list of qualified people. Now, only 30 per cent of the clubs have such a list to fall back on, according to a *GOLFDOM* survey of club presidents and owners. The same survey revealed that 60 per cent of the respondents' clubs have programs under way to bring in new members. The techniques noted, in order of frequency, were: 1) offering associate or other types of limited membership, 2) offering incentives to present members to bring in new members, 3) waiving for a period of time certain initial costs, 4) offering memberships only for specific activities and 5) offering house memberships.

In putting together our special section for this issue, we were not so presumptuous to think we could offer an absolute solution to such a complex problem. Rather, it was our hope to call attention to the extent of the problem and stimulate some action by using, as examples, clubs that have had success with various membership programs. *GOLFDOM*

does not hold out these examples as the route every club should take. Any program must be adapted and tailored to the precise needs of a particular club. But the cases cited in this section should, at least, plant the seeds for ideas.

The section is designed for all clubs. For those that have not experienced the problem of decreasing memberships, *GOLFDOM* offers some preventive medicine—suggestions for maintaining their continued health. For the clubs already trying membership build-up programs, there are additional ideas that could be incorporated. For those in the midst of the problem, but without a program to deal with it, the section may be a starting point and clearly points out the necessity to *act now*.

The first step toward a solution is recognition of the problem—it is not something that can be swept under the carpet. Too many club administrators and officials who admitted they were experiencing a membership problem also expressed a belief that "it will pass with time." The likelihood of time curing the malady is extremely improbable, and to count on it is to flirt with disaster. The problem must be met head on with imagination and perseverance.

In future issues, *GOLFDOM* will continue to offer suggestions for solutions. In addition, we ask our readers to write us about any successful membership programs instituted at their clubs, so that we may pass the ideas along to others through our editorial pages.

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