

The MD of the Golf Club

Keith Lloyd, Chief Executive of the GCMA, outlines the ever changing role of the modern Club Manager and the benefits of the three pronged Alliance with BIGGA and the PGA. He talks with Scott MacCallum

Golf is full of clichés and caricatures. There are those arcane club rules, for starters - “No Ladies or Dogs”; golfers all wear garish, checked trousers; greenkeepers are grass cutters; professionals sell Mars Bar, and secretaries are retired military men who enjoy the odd glass of gin.

Now greenkeepers do cut grass, pros do sell confectionary and some secretaries, like everyone else, perhaps do occasionally partake of a tippie at the end of a long day, there is a great deal more which defines their roles within a golf club than those clichés and caricatures would suggest.

Greenkeepers cope with all aspects of course conditioning and preparation; the role of the pro is primarily to teach the game of golf, while the Secretary/Manager is, to all intents and purposes, the Managing Director of the Club.

The roles encompass the three main areas of responsibility within the golf club and a recently introduced Alliance of BIGGA, the PGA, and the GCMA is aimed at ensuring the collective skills are brought together for the greater good of the golf club and, indeed, golf itself.

“It is the all round responsibility of the Secretary/Manager, much more than ever before, to keep the others in a job wherever possible,” explained Keith Lloyd, Chief Executive of the Golf Club Managers Association.

“The pressure is on to keep an adequate supply of new members coming into a golf club and then, importantly, keeping them, and the demands of today are very different from years ago.

“The introduction of the Sunday trading laws have counted against golf over the years, as has the increased pressure on family life,” said Keith, who spent a number of years at the sharp end himself as a Golf Club Secretary in Wales.

One element of the GCMA - which was formed as the Golf Club Secretaries’ Association in 1933 before becoming the GCMA in 2007 - that has pleased Keith is the age profile of those seeking to enter the profession, which is dropping significantly.

“It’s never going to be a job for a school leaver, as becoming a

greenkeeper or an assistant pro, it is nearly always a second, or even third, career, but it is no longer seen as an opportunity for an ex-military man to see out his last few years before retirement.

“In the last six years, the average age of those attending the four residential training courses we hold each year, has seen those over the age of 60 drop from 16% to around 1%-2%; and those under 40 has gone from 10% to 22%. It’s quite a dramatic change,” explained Keith, whose 2200 members include 300 ladies.

Keith sees real benefits from the coming together of the three bodies.

“Each of us has our own identity but I do think that it is the case that we didn’t necessarily have a clear understanding of what each of our members did.

“Very often a Club Manager may have a daily meeting or a coffee with the Course Manager to catch up, but how often does he talk with the rest of the greens staff or the staff in the Pro Shop? Often the only time he ventures into the Sheds or the Pro Shop is if there is a problem,” he said.

It is a key part because each element has a vital role to play in the success of the management of the golf club,” said Keith who feels that golf clubs have a lot to learn when it comes to orientation programmes for new members and looking after the visitor market.

“How often do you see a ‘Welcome to...’ sign at a club?”

The management structure of golf clubs has long been a thorny issue with some operating with committees up to and over 20 people.

Keith is an advocate of a well honed two tier structure.

“There should be the Captain’s Committee, which organises all the social events for the year and a Management Team numbering no more than six or seven including the Club Manager with elected members representing Membership, Finance and the Course, along with the Chairman, someone who serves ideally for three to five years to give continuity. the Pro and the Course Manager.

“The Club Pro and the Course Manager should be closely linked to



this regime, if not actually serving on this board.

“For many Club Managers the biggest problem is having a different boss, in the shape of the Captain, every year. Indeed clubs are finding it increasingly difficult to get people to take on the role of Club Captain, as there is much demanded of Captains nowadays. They are put in the position of being responsible for club liabilities, and it is all much more than they bargained for.

“Captains should be there to kiss babies and present prizes, full stop!” added Keith.

Another problem that can, and does, exist is whether the Course Manager is answerable to the Chairman of Green and not the Club Manager.

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Keith Lloyd

“Such a situation can undermine the Club Manager and keep him out of the loop and ultimately prevents him from being able support the Course Manager.”

Keith has a cautiously optimistic view of the future but does think there are some rocky times ahead.

“Looking to the future in the current climate I think we will continue to struggle to attract new people to the game as people will be reluctant to face a £1000 bill to pay for (what many perceive as) a luxury when they have food to put on the table.

“However, golf will always survive because those people who do play golf are, by definition, the people who have a genuine affection for playing the game and, unless there is a dramatic change in their circumstances, will choose to continue their memberships.

“Over the next 18 months we all need to concentrate of providing our core services and keep members feeling that they are getting value for money. A recession can be an opportunity to make yourself the best in the High Street.”