

Golf club politics

Are you frustrated with constant political bickering at your club? Here's David Bancroft-Turner with a realistic and hard-hitting view on how to manage it all



Golf Club politics - surely there aren't any? Members come together to enjoy and share the game that they all love, hosting old and new friends, eating and drinking at the 19th hole, generally getting along and telling tales of the various shots that were great or not so great...sounds idyllic doesn't it?

But let's go behind the scenes... Committees populated with the same people year after year, groups formed around various personalities, the member from hell that complains about everything, greenkeeping staff that seem to delight in making it as difficult for members as possible... oh the joys of working at a Golf Club. The frustration, angst, time wasting...argh!

Golf Clubs are like any other formalised groups of human

beings – where there are three or more gathered together, thou shalt have politics. But actually it's worse than that, as Clubs have an added dimension that companies and the like don't have – people who have time on their hands. A group, generally retired, with agendas only known to themselves interacting with the paid service providers within the club who don't have this time luxury, in fact the opposite.

So let's take a step back and get some clarity on what we are talking about here – Club politics. Note the small 'p'. So we are talking about the behaviour of all people associated with the Club, but what actually is 'politics'?

One definition would be the informal way of getting things done, as opposed to the formal. An example - when I was a Committee member and was keen to propose

a new way of doing things I chose to approach all of the other Committee members for their views and ask for their support. When I had that support I attended the Committee meeting to put forward my idea – but I already knew the outcome! The question to you is this – in your opinion was I skilful or manipulative?

View One: You're skilful.

Get others people's views first, tweak your idea as a result of their input and get clarity of direction before you get the official rubber stamp of approval at the meeting.

View Two: You're manipulative.

Why didn't you present your ideas in the open at the meeting where we could all discuss the relative merits, all have a say and then vote on it?

I don't subscribe to the idea that one is good and two is bad (or vice versa) they are just different ways

about the author



David Bancroft - Turner

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David will be writing another article soon covering information on the four different personality types. If you would like further information and/or support on this article then contact David at dbt@tafpi.com

of getting to the same end point. I don't find it helpful to argue which is right and which is wrong. We will just end up arguing. The key question is:

DO YOU KNOW WHICH ONE IS HAPPENING AT YOUR CLUB?

In fact - are you aware of how your Club really works? Not how it says it works, but how it REALLY works. This is the art, science and process of managing Club politics. And you know what? If you don't manage the Club politics, they will manage you. And do you know what that means? You will be sidelined, left out of decisions, ignored, your ability to influence reduced, your power to bring about change deflated, and your voice a quiet whisper in the vocal morass that is your Club.

What this means in practice is; depending on how other people go about their business you will need to use different skills and behaviours to make sure you are not a victim of however they go about their decision making.

So - are you convinced yet that you need to be on top of your Club politics?

I wasn't, until something happened to me working in my first job - in a bank (yes, I know, I know, I used to be proud of this until some idiots in pinstripe suits started ruining the whole industry. Anyway, back to the story). My good friend Neil and I had joined the bank on the same day, on the same grade, on the same employment scheme. After a promising start I thought I was doing quite well and seven months into my new job Neil was promoted, walk-

ing into the office with his letter, proudly showing it to anybody who would listen and talking about what he was going to do with his pay rise. "Congratulations, well done, fantastic news" I said. Inside I was in turmoil. How did he manage that? I'm better than him, aren't I? Where's my letter?

Two days later I found myself at the coffee machine with the Admin Manager and raised the subject. In that very British apologetic way (!) he said "Well, if you had spoken up about the good work you have been doing, like Neil, perhaps the big boss would have recommended you as well for that promotion".

"What do you mean" I thought, "doesn't my work speak for itself?" Obviously not! The next day I accidentally bumped into the big boss (actually I had waited outside

do you do next? Here are some ideas for you to think about:

- Find out from colleagues, members and trusted friends which people have power in your Club and develop excuses to connect with them (connect is trainer speak for talk to them, listen to them, have a chat, find out what is on their mind etc)
- Ask your boss about his or her agenda and what they really want out of working at the Club
- Network (meet, talk, bump into, have a chat, whatever you want to call it) with people that you don't know. Introduce yourself and be interested in what they think about the Club
- Learn the four different personality preferences that exist and practice saying the same thing in four different ways

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the staff restaurant for 55 minutes waiting for him to turn up and then accidentally bumped into him), he asked me to join him for lunch which gave me the opportunity to tell him how brilliant I was (in that British way again of course!). Skilful or manipulative? - Your choice!

The point being I was relying on the formal processes in the organisation to look after me when actually it was the informal processes that I needed to learn and to make sure I am tapped into as much as possible.

That was my first lesson about politics - do not rely on what they tell you are the processes for making decisions - the real way your organisation works is via the informal processes.

So, less of banking and me, let's get back to you and your Club. Take a look at the questions inset left.

Any answer which is 'No' to any question gives you a plan of action. An answer of 'No' to question 10 means you have no hope. If you don't believe that politics needs to be managed, there is nothing I can do for you. Apart from giving you my respect for making a decision that is going to be really tough for you and your career in the future. But hey, good luck!

If you've decided that you need to become more involved in Club politics then the question is what

- Think back on times that have gone well and not so well - what can you learn from them?
- Ask people that you trust at the Club about how decisions really get made
- Take time with the 'little people' at the Club (bar staff, receptionist, secretaries - with a small s) and develop a relationship with them so you can obtain information and knowledge when you need it (forewarned is forearmed)
- Practice managing the key political skill of 'Time and Place'. Know when to raise an issue and learn when to keep quiet
- Focus on outcomes, possibilities, solutions and not problems, difficulties and worries. Develop a reputation for positivity and action
- Stop avoiding people you don't like - the best politicians interact with everybody, otherwise they are not going to have the vital information that they need
- Start to use the informal processes that exist - identify them, where do they happen, when, who and what is covered?
- Accept that it is not only 'What' you do that is being watched by others but also 'How' you do it
- Learn to talk about yourself and your colleagues in the positive. If you don't, then no one will
- And if all else fails, go back and start again. Or go home. Back to the most political human group of all - The family!

You and your Club...

1. Are you clear on how decisions really get made in your Club?
2. Do you know how information flows in and out of the Club?
3. Are you connected with the people who have access to the power in the Club?
4. Are you aware of the key people in your Club and what their REAL agendas are?
5. Are you able to flex your approach depending on who you are dealing with?
6. Do you know when to shut up?
7. Are you able to make a bad situation look as if it can be improved, or do you see the downside in everything?
8. Do you take time out to be really interested in what is important for other people?
9. Do you make the agenda of your boss, your agenda?
10. Do you really believe that the politics need to be managed?