

What is the Superintendent's Role in Private Club Management

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Bob Williams, the distinguished retired superintendent from Bob-O-Link, discussed this subject a decade ago and many of his ideas are incorporated in this paper. Since we have so many young superintendents in our profession, I believe it is appropriate to examine the superintendent's function in golf club operations once again.

First of all the primary source of income for most private clubs is the golf course. Either directly or indirectly, golf satisfaction and income are in direct relation to course architecture and course condition. We can substantiate that statement by observing that golf clubs are pretty lonely places on a rainy day. When there is no golf, there is little action at the club. Check your income figures for January, February, and March.

The successful superintendents are those who can fulfill the club's objectives with the least amount of effort or concern by the club officials. This superintendent is usually the "take charge" type of person with executive ability who can steer course operations and development toward the goals of the long range plans for the course. He knows the game of golf. He develops a selling program to implement his ideas and suggestions. One of the superintendent's major efforts must be the constant interpretation of the standard of maintenance his golfers desire and are willing to pay for. Assuming the superintendents technical abilities, his ability to program meaningful, accurate budgets and sell them to the club is perhaps the crux of his success. In order to be responsive to a membership, the superintendent must be in close contact with them. He must attend committee meetings and board meetings. He must converse with the members in the grill room and out on the course. He cannot be isolated in any way from the membership. A superintendent has a need to know the membership to whom he is responsible.

Superintendents must accept the responsibility for the long term continuity of golf course operations. The frequent changing of club officials, changes in committees and the changeover in membership tends to upset the continuity of club management. Thus, all management people must influence a steady progressive program for total club operation.

Most private clubs operate under the committee system. Members are elected to a Board of Directors and serve as chairman of various committees to oversee the services the membership desires. The main committees, House, Golf and Greens, employ respectively the Club Manager, the Course Superintendent and the Golf Professional to run the club. These three managers comprise a triumvirate whose job it is to see that the club runs as directed. While the three each have overlapping areas of responsibility, they report to their committee head and thus to the Board of Directors.

Recently, attention has again been focused upon the concept of club operations through a general manager. In the pure sense, this means the employment of one individual who oversees the entire club operation. He employs the golf pro, clubhouse manager, and course superintendent, all three reporting to him. This general manager becomes the link between the committees and the three department heads removing the three managers from direct contact with the Board of Directors. The general

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manager alone communicates with the Board. Unless we as superintendents recognize the problems of the general manager concept, and do something about it, we all could become foreman of golf course maintenance.

I believe it is important to point out that golf professionals, club managers and golf course superintendents should all be equally concerned for the welfare of their club, the welfare of each other and the welfare of their respective professions. For them to work equally for the common good of the club seems appropriate and beneficial to everyone. Generally speaking, pros and superintendents support the triumvirate organization, while clubhouse managers favor the general manager concept.

The term General Manager, has become abrasive to superintendents and we oppose general managers for a number of reasons. Most importantly, general managership tends to threaten the identity, the stability, the welfare and the professionalism of golf course superintendents. It makes the superintendent subservient to the general manager. It decreases the superintendent's potential salary level by demoting his management level. Most harmful of all, it isolates the superintendent from official contact with the Board of Directors. It is frequently the end of the superintendent's appearance at committee and board meetings. It is essential that we have the opportunity for liaison with the membership, the Greens Committee members and the Board of Directors. It is to these people that we sell our plans, our programs, our budgets and ourselves.

I feel that country club board's are quick to accept the presumed virtues of general managership. Many of them work in the corporate world and are accustomed to the idea. A Board believes that a general manager would reduce the demand for personal time and effort. Actually, much time is wasted and misinformation is dispersed when the technical experts, the golf professional and superintendent, are not in attendance. If the proper committee has met with the appropriate expert, the information can be accurately conveyed and acted upon.

Club Board's have not come to the realization that running a club is quite different from running a corporation. A club is an extension of the member's home and the members main concern is with the pleasant rewards of social and recreational activity. Efficiency and economy become equal with pleasure, service, comfort and the member's ability to afford various levels of luxury at their club.

My 29 years experience around country clubs has shown me the weaknesses of the general manager arrangement. General managers usually hire weak people as their department heads because they are easy to control and stay in line. I've observed that high calibre golf pros and superintendents rebel against a club that attempts this arrangement. I have noticed country clubs where management difficulties resulted in the firing of the club manager prior to the golf season. The club went through the entire season without a club manager. The club ran very well with a competent staff working together.

To conclude, I would like to stress that it is important for us to be cognizant of the problems generated when a general manager is installed. We superintendents, along with the golf professionals, must continue to sell and support the triumvirate plan for club management. If golf professionals and superintendents acquiesce or silently accept the general manager concept, friction and resentment will build and the professionalism of our job will be diminished.