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## DON'T PANIC...PLAN!

**“***All the fire department ... your building is on fire!*”

A panicked voice and urgent directive was the club manager's first indication that the golf cart storage building was in flames. In less than an hour, the building was gutted and its contents destroyed.

Thankfully, no one was hurt. But that elation soon turned to depression as the arduous job of rebuilding began.

As the young club manager began the job of restarting club operations, one question never left his mind: “Why wasn't I better prepared?”

If a club manager, golf professional or superintendent hasn't faced a similar situation after a crisis brought about by severe weather, natural disaster or impropriety turning his or her world upside down, that person may be living on borrowed time. Regardless of the emergency, the question of preparation and what could have been done differently comes front and center.

Here are seven suggestions to consider to prepare for a crisis.

**CONSIDER THE CLOUD.** In these times, when so many of the club's books and records are stored in electronic formats, clubs have a great advantage in being able to reconstruct critical information. If the club does not use a formal and redundant offsite resource for information and records back-up, this should be your first priority.

A by-product of the Information Age is the expectation that club leaders will maintain and manage information professionally and thoroughly. Assuring members and customers that they can feel confident about private or confidential information in your care is the first step in building trust.

**KNOW WHO TO CALL.** Identify and prioritize your list of notification calls.

First, contact the board of directors, executive committee and ownership group. Make sure they hear from you first – not from the media or another source. Confirm who speaks for the club when responding to inquiries from media, law enforcement and other jurisdictions.

**CONTACT YOUR INSURANCE PROFESSIONAL.** Now is when you discover how remarkable these professionals can be. Bear in mind that this may be your first catastrophe, but crisis is commonplace to them. Be prepared to explain clearly the events that have transpired and what help you need. Ask for their guidance and coaching; use your best judgment in sorting through the potential solutions.

**CONTACT YOUR KEY MANAGERS AND TRUSTED EMPLOYEES.** Many top-performing clubs have organized their personnel into task-force teams in advance of a possible crisis. Then make sure club members and other stakeholders are informed.

**REFER TO YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN.** Hopefully you have one and that it hasn't been on a shelf gathering dust since it was developed. Your plan is where you'll find:

- Key contact information.
- Primary message points and expressions of sympathy and empathy.
- The reference library in which blueprints, facility information and descriptions are stored. (The new Club Solutions program at the Club Managers Association of America offers valuable guidance and resources on this point.)
- Primary vendor and support services to address specific operational needs and shorten facility downtime. Golf cars, support vehicles, temporary storage, new supplies and temporary

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help are just a few of the things you may need quickly.

**BE ACCESSIBLE.** Staff, members, customers and suppliers will all want to contact you. See that everyone receives a composed and consistent answer to the question: “What happened?”

**BE HONEST, TRANSPARENT AND OPTIMISTIC.** Your calm and confident demeanor will translate to others. As soon as practical, begin to share the plan to restore operations. Coordinate with the board and club leaders to make sure they know the process that is now in place.

**STAY ON MESSAGE.** Don't speculate. Don't misrepresent. There's nothing wrong in responding simply, “It's too soon to comment on that.” Or “We don't know the answer to that question yet, but we're working on it.”

**CARE FOR YOUR PEOPLE AND YOURSELF.** Hydrate. Rest when you can. Call your family to assure them you're OK. In times of crisis, one is always humbled and inspired by the generous acts of friends and fellow professionals.

By the way, the young club manager whose life was turned upside down by a fire in the golf car storage facility was me. I learned a hard lesson that day. Never again did I want to be the one asking him, “Why wasn't I better prepared?” **GCI**