

Good Man-agement Prime Club Salvation Factor

— but too many clubs learn necessity for sound business management only when time to remedy the situation has almost passed

“COUNTRY clubs are guessing wrong when they believe that their present problems are mainly financial. The basic problem is men.”

The speaker was a man whose success in country club management is outstanding. When he took his present job as general manager his club was run down. The city it's in was deep in the depression. There was virtually no club interest. Only the enthusiastic golf “nuts” were patronizing the place. Under his energetic management the club recovered faster than almost any other business in the city.

Now the club is solidly in the black. It has a waiting list. It is the No. 2 spot in the community's moderate and upper income social life. Home is the No. 1 spot. This is one of those cities where families still believe in their homes.

Gets What He Wants

The transition is definitely the result of this man's management. He insists on managing the club he was hired to manage. He gets a good salary. Any time the club wants to fire him because he stays firm on a policy of business management rather than yessing some official or member who wants exceptions made to the club's business platform, it'll be the club's

tough luck, not the manager's. He has frequent invitations to join business organizations in an executive capacity.

This man believes that numerous private clubs are doomed. But the quicker the decision comes, the better it'll be for the clubs that are compelled to reorganize and for golf in general, so this authority is convinced.

Get his views on the private club situation. They are judgments that have been converted into profitable action. Going back to his opening remark about the main trouble of clubs being men, he added:

Too Little Knowledge of Task

“The reason private golf clubs may be in bad shape is they've been too much an amateur business. Some of them were over-built with expensive plants. Some of them were ruined by high taxes brought about by growth of high grade communities that grew up around the club. But even those destructive factors have been apparent all along. Any businessman fully competent to handle the club's general management and given the authority to act must have seen what was coming and would have made drastic changes in club policy as the conditions dictated.

“But where would you find such qualifi-

Mrs. Thomas Langford, Chicago, while playing at the Mid-City course in the Chicago district in a recent mixed two-ball tournament with her son, William B. Langford, scored a 78—and this feat occurred on Mrs. Langford's 78th birthday! Bill Langford, identified with golf as a player and architect since playing on the Yale golf squad in 1910, is a member of the firm of Langford & Moreau, Chicago.

cation and authority in the country club business. It's rare enough to get thoroughly qualified country club general managers and, even rarer to see them given authority to do the job they know must be done. The country club habit is simply to elect another ticket of amateurs when the going gets rough. The new bunch cuts pay, messes up things with additional experiments, and dismally decides the situation is hopeless.

"The very cheering point about the country club picture is that so many clubs have survived despite the absolutely ridiculous amateur management which usually hinders instead of helps a competent man who's trying to get the club operating as a going business.

New Field Developing

"Prophets of gloom who forecast a permanent fold-up of the private country club don't seem to realize that the growing accent on adult physical condition is making a tremendously larger field for members. Golf is the ideal all-age physical recreation for both sexes. It's as foolish to think that the public courses will displace private golf clubs as it is to think that we all should ride and abandon our private automobiles.

"But, do you see any pronounced recognition of this promotion opportunity at private golf clubs? Seldom, and then only in a casual group lesson manner!

"A main point in resultful general management of country clubs is that of promotion. Elected officials can't do that job. They've got their own business and professions to attend to, and in these times demands of their jobs precludes their work in golf promotion.

"As a matter of fact they seldom play enough golf to care for their physical conditioning needs. Yet, for some curious reason these men are expected to devote considerable time to onerous details of club management for which they are not suited, instead of making their club their recreation.

"Rarely are there 10% of a community's

residents financially qualified for private clubs who play golf. Opportunities for membership promotion among these people is almost entirely neglected. They are asked to join the club for the 'social prestige' involved. That 'social prestige' usually is highlighted by the privilege of being served by the club bars. These days that privilege seldom appeals to people as being worth much money—if any.

"With that promotion field wide open it is plain that the country club general manager must have promotion ability. And in numerous other phases the promotion work is a part of the general manager's job that means salvation for the club. The general manager who is a talented and industrious promoter is the best help the pro could have. The pro's income is limited because the average American adult is fundamentally physically lazy. It's going to take energetic and skilled promotion to overcome that handicap to golf play, and such promotion has to come out of the club office. The pro hasn't facilities, and rarely has the advertising training to do the long range, steady promotion job required.

"Eventually, the foresighted, correctly managed country club is going to have free group lessons and physical conditioning classes most of the winter; classes open to elected and invited non-members as well as to members. The pro will be paid for that work and it will eliminate the necessity of the spring membership drives.

Year Around Pro Salary

"When I speak of paying the pro the year around for doing an important part of his job that he can't do when weather is good and members want to play instead of being taught, I know that many club officials will say this is wild theory; that the money isn't in the club. That brings up a strange thing about many golf clubs. They are grossly extravagant in making every experiment except that of paying good wages to department heads.

"Another one to whom competent general management with authority to act will be good news, is the greenkeeper. One reason for the troubles of numerous golf clubs is that the club has been founded on the bar more than on the golf course.

"They tell me that golf clubs have been having more turf trouble this season than at any other time in the past 10 years.

(Continued on Page 30)

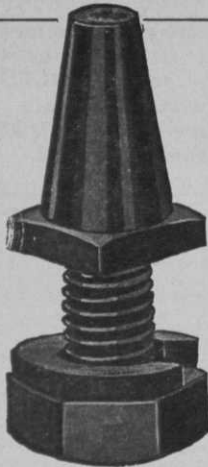
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(Continued from
Page 8)

Management

It's plain to me that the alleged economies in course maintenance budgets during the past decade have begun to catch up with the courses. I don't recall hearing that such-and-such a club has the best bar in its district, but I have heard boasting about superior condition of a golf course. It is that sort of warranted pride that can be made to get more members and more play. We can't kid ourselves about bar profits being the mainstay of clubhouse net income, but the course has to be attractive or you don't get bar volume regardless of your ability in promoting parties.

"Committee management has been a flop at most country clubs. The idea of running a club by committees is as unsound as running a business with a committee of club managers giving the business a few hours of their time each month.

"I can only explain the committee plan of club management as something that held over while the clubs were growing from small neighborhood enterprises into businesses often having investments in excess of \$250,000. Possibly the reason for this is that very few individuals have much invested in country clubs. On the other hand, the individual with a comparatively small investment in the club will demand more from his club than from some corporation in which he has several thousand dollars invested. He insists that his pet ideas be applied in club management, even though his ideas may not be workable. With his corporation investment he demands only that competent

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management be hired and allowed to do the job.

"Although general management has demonstrated that it has great possibilities in bringing country clubs through the storm, it takes far more than a title to make a general manager. A man can't jump out of the kitchen or grill room, out of the pro-shop, or off the golf course into handling a club general manager's work properly unless he's had considerable broad business training and is temperamentally qualified for executive work. He should have some business background and be able to talk the language and act the part of a business man responsible for a large enterprise.

"He must have the knack of being able to end the habit of making the manager the target of ill-tempered petty abuse, and be made immune to the knifing of a few members who are disgruntled because the club isn't run to please them above all other members. In the handling of these problems he must have the support of his officials or the club will fall into actual management by the loudest kickers.

"If he's properly qualified he ought to be given standing by being paid what the job is worth. Say the club has a plant worth \$300,000 and has 300 members. That gives each member a \$1,000 piece of the plant whether such entry is made on the books or not. Now a 3% charge for efficient general management of that \$1,000 isn't unreasonable or unbusinesslike. That makes the general manager's salary \$9,000 annually in such a club. If he's not worth that in such a case the right man hasn't been hired. Or it may be that the right man isn't being allowed to give his full value to the club.

"The problem of applying the general management policy and of getting a fully qualified general manager is the toughest one the private golf clubs have today. When they get that solved much of their worry about their future will be banished."