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Officials Can Make Club Operation Easier, Better

By LOUIS BERTOLONE

POLITICAL jobs have nothing on the golf jobs for insecurity. Both owe their uncertainty for able workers to lack of knowledge and understanding. Only recently an incident occurred at a country club that had a touch of farce to it and thereby avoided a sorry climax. Fortunately, the general membership of the club saw the facts in time or the club would have lost a first class golf course superintendent, and the course superintendent would have had to undergo a trying period until he was able to situate elsewhere.

During the year the condition of the golf course had not improved as much as the membership had the right to hope, and, of course, the chairman of the green committee was blamed. He, in turn, immediately put the blame on the superintendent, and asked that he be fired, saying that he was unqualified; that he did not understand golf course upkeep, etc.

The members were right. The blame belonged squarely on the committeeman's shoulders. He had fought the superintendent throughout the whole year of his term of office. The chairman had been more interested in showing the members how much money he had saved them than he was in giving them the good golf course which they wanted. If the superintendent asked for something which was desperately needed the chairman always said, "No, we've got to keep expenses down." When he, himself, wanted something done, he would say to the superintendent, "The greens are too hard. Soften them."

The superintendent asked for an aerating device to open the greens, to soften

them up, but the chairman said, "It costs too much. We've got to keep expenses down."

"But an aerifier would do the job," the superintendent pleaded.

"Water them. It's cheaper; but get those greens so that they will hold a pitch."

So the superintendent poured water on the greens and then the members complained about the greens going bad and still not holding approaches.

Similar situations exist at many clubs. All that is necessary for correcting it is a little understanding. In the first place, the chairman should be working with his superintendent not against a man with specialized knowledge.

When the superintendent asks for something, it's not the place of the chairman of the green committee to turn him down right then and there. His job is to determine if the request is justifiable, and then to place that request with his recommendations before the board of directors. It is then up to the board to determine what can be afforded and what cannot be afforded.

And when the members complain the chairman should talk the situation over with the superintendent; find out the cause, the remedy recommended, and all the other pertinent details. Once the chairman has this data he can discuss the problem with the chairmen and superintendents at other clubs; find out what they are doing, what they have done, and what they plan to do.

Armed with this data, he can intelligently discuss the problem with his own

team-mate who likewise should know the situation at other clubs.

If possible the chairman and the superintendent should make these inspections together. Thus working as a team, each man will gain the other's respect and admiration, and the club will profit by having a better golf course.

In this way, the superintendent gets a better close-up on the problems of the club, and the club shares the problems of the superintendent.

The New Pro's Position

But this is only a segment of the club. There is the directorate; there is the management, and there is the pro department. They are the working vitals of any golf club. These departments should work as a close knit unit, above all in harmony with each other. The directorate is responsible for the acts of all the departments, and, it should strive always for betterment. But this is not always the case. Very often the uninitiated directorate in its enthusiasm to show the membership what it can do undermines the club.

As in all mortal things hope lies in understanding. The understanding of the difficulties and personalities that make club jobs difficult. Let us take a look at some behind-the-scene operations so we may better understand what happens to the pro after a month or two of service at a club, unless he has an informed directorate behind him.

A cool attitude toward the person who is to occupy one, or two, or all three key positions in a club exists before he has even thought of applying for the vacancy that he wishes to fill. This coolness may get its start from the person who has been filling the job at the club, and whose leaving creates the vacancy. He has made friends among the membership. Naturally, these friends "hate" to see him go. They "hate" to see him replaced. And they also "hate" to see the new man take over, and, therefore, the new man has some enemies at the club even before he starts on his new undertaking.

Then, as is the case of most good jobs, there are many unsuccessful candidates for the job; people who wanted the job, but did not get it. Each of these disappointed candidates had a friend or two who are members of the club. These members spoke to one or two or more of the directors for their "champion."

Naturally, when they learn that their "champion" did not get the job, they are disappointed. Further, unfortunately, perhaps unconsciously, they set up a resistance toward the new man.

The new man may have two strikes against him before he starts. But the matter does not end there. Two more insidious conditions exist. Some who were unsuccessful in obtaining the job for themselves may be disappointed, envious, and spiteful, and malicious. They start a program to "get" the new man. They drop a derogatory remark here, another one there, and so on. Unfortunately, these "whispering" campaigns have a nasty habit of gathering moss as they roll along.

There to aid and abet the losers are the disappointed members, the man who sponsored the "champion", the man who "hated" to see the friend leave and the man who has an ax to grind in general—all fall easy prey to these invectives. Sometimes they even start some of their own.

How do these boys operate? They usually pick a weakness, a mistake made, an act of God and turn it to their purposes. As examples: The new pro plays in a tournament. He has a bad day, and shoots a 78. The wrecking crew begins to say, "Your pro isn't much of a player, is he?" Or in the case of the golf course superintendent; they wait for a brisk day with a dry wind. They remember this day. "You need a new course superintendent," they begin. "He doesn't know how to care for greens. Last Thursday they were as hard as rocks." The average member does not know that a dry wind puts a hard surface to any green within a very short time.

Or the member who blames the manager for his spilling his Martini on the beautiful evening gown of his fellow member's wife. "The tables were too close together. There wasn't enough room to move. The manager should have more sense than to make such arrangements."

All these comments have a peculiar way of reaching the directorate of the club. And to please their membership they fire the unlucky man. And the whole rigmarole starts all over again. That is, it starts all over again if the club has an inexperienced directorate. The seasoned board of directors can and does judiciously sift the complaints.

Then again there is "chopping of heads"

when the club has an election and a new directorate takes over the responsibilities of the club. These new directors do not like the way the club department heads have been performing their duties; so they hire a new man. All they know is that they want a change, and they have it.

They fail to consider the fact that these department heads have been carrying out the policies of the outgoing board, and that they are fully capable of carrying out the policies of the incoming board if given a chance.

Usually, however, the incoming board does not know what was wrong if anything, and does not have any concrete policies of its own. All they know is that the eyes of the membership are on them and they must make an impression.

The new board of directors will do well to more than to talk over the problems of each department with its head. They should struggle along with them, actually take a hand in the problems.

The board of directors has two primary functions: to set policies, and to act as a cushion between the membership and the department heads. It must know what the membership wants, and what it can reasonably have. It must tell the membership why this is being done, why this can't be done, and what the plans are for the future. It must share the problems of its department heads. It must be able to set reasonable policies for its department heads to follow, but only after determining that these policies are feasible. It must talk them over with the department heads.

The manager of the club knows that an attorney probably knows nothing about the selection of a choice cut of meat; the pro knows that the insurance man probably knows nothing of running a tournament, or what causes a slice; the course superintendent knows that a president of an oil company probably knows nothing about fungus diseases, soil compaction, etc.

These are details for specialists. Hiring a man to run a job then not letting him run it is the most frequent cause of faulty operation of golf clubs. The board may be inexperienced, so much so that it doesn't know how to hire. Then if it also carries inexperience into interference with operating details past the policy and general supervision point, the standard of operation is bound to be unsatisfactory.

Members' Responsibility

It's no easy job to be a golf club official. The selection of officials often is a function in which personalities and club politics figure rather than good business judgment. But when the members do get men to do the unpaid work of governing the club the members have more of a responsibility toward these men than generally is realized. We all know of cases of members criticizing club officials and directors but cases of the officials and directors, but cases of the officials and ing members for their members' irresponsibility are rare. There's need for balance.

One more point that makes golf club operation difficult sometimes is the fault of the department heads themselves. They don't work together or learn how departmental operations must be coordinated with understanding, confidence and mutual help.

When there's lack of that teamwork the officials had better discover it soon and replace the fellow who won't work in harmony. The fault is a delicate one to place precisely but it's one that can be disastrous in club operation.

The responsibilities of hiring and firing are among the heaviest tasks of getting a club on sound operating basis and after the right men are hired the job becomes that of encouraging them and protecting them in doing their best for the club.

Seymour Dunn Edits Golf Joke Book

The Complete Golf Joke Book. \$2. Published by Stravon Publishers, 113 W. 57th st. New York 19. Edited by Seymour Dunn. Illustrated by Al Ross. 128 pages. The veteran pro, Seymour Dunn, has collected most of the ancient and honorable jests of the game in this book and errors in proof-reading have added new amusement. Jock Hutchinson is referred to as "the late Jock Hutchinson," which will be funny to Jock now one of the sprightliest 69-year-old men you ever will see. Oakmont, in the Hutchinson gag, is spelled Oakmount. Kirkaldy, the famous old player and caddy at St. Andrews, is mentioned as Kirkaldi, maybe as an accidental tip that old Andra might have been of stock that strayed from Caesar's legionsaires.

There are some interesting incidents from Dunn's golf career and golf quotations from Shakespeare in the book.