

# Board Material



**The People Who Run Our Country Clubs Should First Get Experience Through Committee Service**

By **GENE O'BRIEN**

Professional, Rolling Hills Country Club, Wichita, Kans.

**L**AST YEAR at a state tournament held at our club, a sportswriter expressed amazement at finding 50 members working on the tourney committee. This was the first time he ever had looked into the committee end of the thing and until that moment it had been his impression that you are lucky to get more than eight or ten people interested in work of this kind. Where many clubs are involved, this impression probably would have been correct.

Why does our club have 50 people working on a golf committee? It goes back to a simple theory of mine that I discovered some 30 years ago when I was breaking into this business: Every member of a club feels pride in his club. It's a little like the old school spirit. This pride swells when he or she is asked to serve on a committee. Neglect a member by never asking him to serve on a committee and you help to kill this pride.

## Develop Board Material

But in getting people to serve on committees, there is something even more important involved than playing up to their pride or vanity. In doing so, you are developing potential board or officer material — and anyone who has been around

a country club very long, knows how important this is. Too many clubs are poorly managed because they have directors and officers who never have worked on committees and, when they take office, have absolutely no idea of how a club should be operated.

Many persons are elected to boards or put in office because of their popularity in the bar room or at the club dances. Some of them you wouldn't hire to work for you. Chances are they never have given a single thought to all the work that presiding over a club entails. Their indifference or lack of knowhow is a very definite factor in the increasing cost of belonging to a country club.

## The Second Type

On the other hand, we have the board member who is completely uninitiated as to the operation of a club simply because he never has had any committee experience. Yet, he has his finger in every pie in the place. You wish he would practice a little restraint by occasionally delegating authority, by not constantly going over people's heads, and generally by not making an out and out nuisance of himself. Previous country club education would have tempered this board member where-

as his counterpart, the do-nothing type, would have developed some ingenuity and initiative as the result of it.

The biggest need in country club operation today is not so much sound management as it is skillful direction by officers and board members. I won't be an alarmist and say that it is lacking completely, because it isn't. Probably half of our clubs are soundly organized and directed on something like a businesslike basis. In such cases it probably is because the members who serve on the board or are officers have had some solid committee experience or, if not, realize that a country club isn't all luxury but has to be operated on a break-even, if not a profit-making basis.

#### Victims of Inexperience

The other half, the sub-marginal group, are the ones I am concerned with. They are the ones who are being victimized by inexperienced direction that goes back to the grass root requirements of country club operation — well rounded service on various committees by officers and directors. They are the clubs where the dues often keep going up year after year or where the special assessments discourage the members. If financial thin ice is avoided, then the golf or social programs, or both, are quite sadly neglected.

Let's take a look at how organization is tied in with the work of the committees:

The basic purpose of the golf club is to provide pleasure for members or customers. This means that if you have 400 members, each of these memberships should be provided for. Not half the members, not two-thirds, but every member should be made to feel that his club is functioning for his pleasure and comfort. Thus the powers that be, whether they are a board of governors or owners, are responsible for the job of carrying out such a program of complete satisfaction.

I have found that the success of any club in any of its many phases depends upon the leadership and direction of the board. These men will only be successful by carefully appointing fellow members to the 101 jobs that have to be done. These men and women not only are provided with a policy to follow, but are delegated the responsibility of carrying out a particular job or function.

#### Over Their Heads

The chain of command must be adhered to at all times. About 90 per cent of all club problems and touchy situations are caused by either a board that is inactive in supervision, or takes away authority and responsibility by trying to



J. P. Tonetti (left), manager of New Haven CC, has been elected pres. of the Connecticut branch of Executive Stewards & Caterers' Assn., succeeding Earl T. Trotter.

run committees itself.

Once a committee chairman is approved for a job the board has only to have the committee report on its progress. I have seen board members go over the heads of the green chmn. and the supt. down to the boy who waters the greens to give orders. You can lose both a chmn. and supt. very quickly with this disregard of diplomacy.

#### Who Is Final Authority?

I have found that if a member and his committee take the time to successfully carry out their program they have no time to stick their nose into another committee's problems. Everything is relative to a golf club, yet everything must be broken down into little cells of authority. My job as pro is relative to every other department in the club, yet I take my final orders from the greens committee. At some clubs, the professional is not so fortunate. He takes what are called "final" orders from just about every committee in existence.

I have seen ladies on committees who had rather simple but important little jobs to take care of. They have the initiative to make the job look like the most important one in the club. The next thing you know one of these ladies is president of the women's golf association.

The member who knows that his or her work is important to the club is the most important member you can have. The most dangerous worker is the one who feels that he is doing a job for only himself and a few close friends.

#### 100 Committee Members

Our club roster lists over 100 members working on committees. Each of these 100 members directly or indirectly comes in contact with remaining members of the club. We don't have a member in the club who doesn't have a friend on some

committee. Thus, we have no select groups that want to make radical changes. Each of our club workers are 100 per cent behind the board. Sure, changes are good, progress is all important, but all these things should be handled in a businesslike manner through the chain of command.

Doing club consultant work, I have had the real tough job of helping several large clubs overcome membership splits. This can break any club. It often happens when a well liked employee is fired or released. Half of the members wanted the guy fired and the other half wanted to keep him. If your club is organized to start with, things like this don't usually happen. Why? Simply because if your committees are functioning as they should be the problem can be headed off before it becomes too serious.

A pro, manager or supt. would stay at a job if only 10 per cent of the members didn't approve of him. But 10 per cent can rise to 50 per cent by word of mouth. If 10 per cent of the members want a fellow fired all they have to do is spread the word around. If a committee is doing its job this can be avoided simply by getting to the root of the trouble when a whispering campaign is started.

#### Organization Can Reclaim It

I have helped 40 or 50 small and large clubs a year with their problems. Some have good ideas but don't know how to put them to work. Some can't keep a manager and want to know why. Whatever the problems have been, I have always tried to solve them with a plan of organization, added a little deputizing and topped it off by suggesting proper supervision.

It would take twenty volumes to bring out the complete picture of the value of organization. No club problem, building program or activity can be solved without it. If you can make 75 per cent of your members proud of their club you can do most of the things you want to do. If a member is made to feel that he has an obligation to perform some job for his club he usually will go along with you. The club member who is working on some committee is the last member to fight club progress.

#### Cost of Belonging

Another real danger arising in many clubs is the cost of belonging. Directors and officers are going to have to face club responsibilities with the same ideas that they use in their own business. Again I have found that with good committees

working under the supervision of a board the cost of all operations can be kept down.

Board members are going to have to learn to say no on occasions to committee friends. Boards are going to have to appreciate the ability of members to pay the freight. Boards are going to have to appreciate the fact that you have to select your own members on any program or function the same as any commercial venture. Boards are going to have to keep the members informed of all club progress and problems involving financing. The more you charge your members the more you are going to have to account to them. You can only tax people so much and then the bottom falls out.

### 1952-58 Golf Day Fund Distribution Listed

Since 1952, National Golf Day has netted \$666,000, all of which has been turned over to golf charities and other worthwhile projects. The biggest beneficiary, according to the PGA, which sponsors the Day, has been various caddie scholarship funds. Altogether, they have received \$173,930. Figures for 1959 are not included in the Golf Day distribution.

Other organizations which have received substantial contributions are:

USGA Turf Research . . . . .	\$ 62,700
Jaycee War Memorial Fund . . . . .	46,400
PGA Educational Fund ..	45,000
PGA Relief Fund . . . . .	23,300
PGA Benevolent Fund ..	16,400
National Amputee Golf Assn. . . . .	26,500
Am. Women's Voluntary Services . . . . .	13,000
U.S. Blind Golfers Assn.	3,000
United Voluntary Services	9,500
GCSA Research & Scholarship Fund . . . . .	1,000

Other organizations which have received Golf Day contributions, but not in the last two years, are: USO, American National Red Cross, Babe Didrikson Zaharias Fund and Institute for Crippled & Disabled.

Last year the U. S. Olympic Committee was given \$1,000 in Golf Day receipts.

Until 1958, funds allotted the USGA for research and education were given directly to colleges and universities designated by the USGA.