

# Club or general manager?

*While the general manager concept offers the advantage of central control, many still prefer a triumvirate solution.*

By KEN EMERSON

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Most golf club members can describe their club's services in considerable detail. They do less well when asked to outline the means by which this service is provided. In fact, unless they have served on a committee, the board of directors, or are regular patrons of the dining room or bar, many may not even recognize the man responsible for providing this service—the club manager.

The club manager has long been aware that, to his members, a pleasing personality is often more important than technical knowledge. They realize his presence is necessary to maintain order and continuity in the club's daily activities, but have little if any idea of what is actually involved. This lack of knowledge results in situations that are always confusing, frequently embarrassing, and sometimes destructive, both to the club and to its manager.

Perhaps the most confusing area in a club's member-manager relationship revolves around the degree and extent of the manager's authority. Just how much authority he should have—and how often he should use it—is a source of recurring discussion among club officers and is a sore spot even among managers themselves. Whether he is running the show, or is just another character in the cast, is a debate that has divided its participants into two camps: Those favoring a general manager and those supporting a triumvirate structure with authority placed equally in the hands of clubhouse manager, professional, and superintendent.

GOLFDOM welcomes contributions from any point of view on this controversial subject. These can be letters or articles up to 1,500 words in length. Writers' names can be held anonymous, if so desired. Send to Editor, GOLFDOM, 800 Second Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10017.

While there is some evidence of a growing trend towards the general manager style of operation, it is not our intention to support either. Rather, it would seem wise at this time to point out the advantages of both systems—and their shortcomings.

The success of either usually depends on the character of the club involved, the role it expects its manager to assume, and his ability to recognize and play that role and still manage effectively.

As defined by the late Col. Richard Dailey, who was general manager at The Army & Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., a manager's prerogatives must, among other things, include the right to hire and fire his employees. By logical extension he therefore assumed that a "general manager" had the right to hire or fire *any* employee in the club.

Please note the term "right". It is not reasonable to assume that he will often, if ever, use the right when dealing with the executive staff, but it is *having* the right that makes the difference.

Obviously, before a club gives serious consideration to installing a general manager it must be sure in its own mind that

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it is prepared to give him this authority and its wholehearted support when the need to exert that authority is required. It must be ready to uphold his decisions in the face of member complaints and committee opposition, for he will be subjected to both.

Once a club has made a decision to delegate this authority it must then find a man with the necessary knowledge, dedication, and ability to assume it.

As with any other diversified business, this knowledge must include a working acquaintance with all the club's departments and his ability to manage people must extend beyond staff, members and committees to include two people who are sensitive experts in their own right—the professional and superintendent.

Such skills do not come cheaply either to the club, or to the general manager. The price he has paid in time and experience is high and his salary will be commensurate. But if a club has made the decision, and can pay the bill, it can reap a harvest of benefits: improved services, better communications and a closer coordination between more efficiently operated departments. All the economies and advantages of a centralized management, in fact.

However, it is this very centralization that alienates the system's detractors. All too often, they say, the members are left out of important decisions, business becomes an end rather than a means, and instead of the club imprinting its image on the manager, the reverse becomes true. The result, say the critics, is that the membership loses interest in the club, which then becomes simply another golf course with restaurant attached.

Those opposed to the idea of placing the entire club operation under the direction of one man promote the "triumvirate" concept of club management. The proponents of this system maintain that the most efficient way to operate a club is to divide it into three logical divisions

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and put each under the direction of its own specialist: the club manager, the professional, and the superintendent.

The club manager, they say, (and many managers will agree) has quite enough to do inside the clubhouse without having to worry about grounds, greens, and golf activities. In support of their theory they point out that 90% of the golf clubs in the country are operated in this manner.

While this is true, it must be noted that the success of the system still depends on at least some degree of centralization. There must be a final coordinating authority if the three departments are not to conflict. In the normal course of events, this authority is usually held by the club manager. Because of his supervision over budgets and programs he is generally in a better position to provide leadership. In fact it is quite probable that many club

managers can, if they wish, exercise most of the authority of a general manager, though they neither have nor want the title.

When the triumvirate can establish a close working relationship, resulting in coordination with a minimum of control from the clubhouse, the system represents club management at its best. When it is subjected to the strains of a clash or personality within the triumvirate—as when a new manager attempts to overrule an old entrenched professional or greens superintendent—or when it permits itself to be influenced by a strong club officer or committee, total confusion can result.

When a manager, willingly or unwillingly, relinquishes his authority to manage he very quickly discovers that there is a third way to operate the club: management by committee. Confusion is a normal end product.

While a strong chairman or officer may be able to hold off the trouble for a time,

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the normal attrition of elections and retirement from office, or even loss of interest, eventually reduce management to a government by self serving cliques or short sighted individuals.

The cure for a club that finds itself without effective management can be expensive in terms of disgruntled staff and disenchanted members, as well as in actual financial loss. It is far less expensive to adhere to the system of management best suited to your particular club, whether it be by a general manager or triumvirate, and stick to two simple rules: 1. Know your manager. 2. Respect your manager's authority. ●

## Johnny Revolta Retires


John Revolta, professional for 31 years at Evanston Golf Club, Skokie, Ill., retired as active professional Nov. 1, 1966, and became Golf Professional Emeritus, devoting most of his time to teaching and playing golf.

The veteran professional is a member of the PGA Hall of Fame and in 1935 won the PGA Championship, beating both Walter Hagen and Tommy Armour in the process. He is also a past Western Open and Los Angeles Open champion plus others too numerous to mention and starred on two U. S. Ryder Cup teams.



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