

# Confessions of a manager

*Having seen 'confessions' of a pro and a superintendent in GOLFDOM, a club manager asked for equal time to air his side of the country club story.*

**Anonymous**

It is probably fitting that since we are "last" in many areas of the club, that we should be the last to spill our gripes.

A club officer once told a manager, "You have the toughest, most demanding, least appreciated, and under paid job in the club, but I do not feel a bit sorry for you, because you chose it as your life's work."

Let me continue by saying that I do not feel that any golf pro, superintendent or club manager has it as bad, individually, as we like to talk about it collectively. Sure, all jobs are tough and especially the club manager's, but I would not change places with Dean Rusk, Mayor Lindsay of New York, or any coach in the National Football League. All too often I feel we add personal magnification to our job demands. From my own observations, the last twenty years have revealed that very few pros, superintendents, or managers have left on a "voluntary basis."

So just what are the things which truly make a manager's job the task that it is? And, what could be done to make our jobs better?

I must note here, that I do realize that if it were not for the members and the employees, you would not need the manager and I do not malign these two most important groups.

Now, let me begin with that most important facet of club operations, the COMMITTEE. I have a plaque behind my desk which shows a picture of General Stonewall Jackson and below it is printed: "You may search all of the parks in all of the cities, but you'll find no statues for committees." While I am sure that Paul Revere, the Wright Brothers, and others' works are not the result of committees, I am just as certain that committees must have played some part in our Vietnam policy, most of the school boards around our country, etc. There is no doubt in my mind that committees are necessary.

I really feel that if each committee would look

into the definition of the committeeman and his responsibilities, it could make the manager's job a lot more enjoyable.

Traditions are another fascinating area of club management which seem vital and necessary for the successful operation of a facility. However, I am sure that if we did away with all "traditions" in all clubs, tomorrow, that not one club would go bankrupt, close its doors, or cease to exist. Too bad no one has the courage or time to challenge this concept.

To illustrate this point, "Why do we open club dining rooms at 6:00 p.m. to empty patronage, and close them at 8:30 p.m. when the cocktail lounge is full of people?" Or let me ask you about this one: "Who decreed that clubs should close on Monday after the 'day of rest?' " The reason I ask this is, someone said, "Monday is the most logical day to close, after the long weekend." From the amount of people who want to play our club on a Monday, the number of persons in the swimming pool on Monday, the "necessary" phone calls our switchboard handles and the number of people who require "emergency" entrance of the club through our watchman on that day, just makes me wonder if Monday is the best day to close. From a truly marketing approach and in that tradition of the "club being an extension of the member's home" it just seems lacking in logic to close the club on the same day your competing restaurants and cocktail lounges are also closed and to remain open on a night when you serve eight people.

It also seems to me that a practice tee should be open on Monday, after you know your shortcomings from the week-end play and be closed on Saturdays and Sundays when you put your practice to use. It also seems logical that the putting clock and driving range should be open on Mondays when everything else is closed.

The club breakfast is another tradition I enjoy

commenting on. Most clubs have a waitress, a bus-boy, a breakfast cook, and a dishwasher on hand at 7:00 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays to prepare that great American tradition of a hot breakfast! An analysis of my breakfast checks reveals that grapefruit, orange juice, sweet rolls, and sugar-flavored cereals lead the list, along with coffee, of the most popular breakfasts. However, it is the four or five persons who want an occasional order of three minute eggs, some pre-cooked bacon, or oatmeal which has been sitting in a steam table who we really open up for.

I am thoroughly convinced, and have proven, that you can give away sweet rolls and coffee in the lockerrooms from 7 until 9 a.m. and it *will not cost as much as those employees necessary to open for breakfast!* But we started serving breakfast back in 1929 when no Howard Johnsons dotted the route to the club; when most restaurants were closed at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday and prior to instant coffee, so breakfast became a "tradition" at the club.

To close the segment on traditions I would like to comment on the great tradition of the husband and wife, mixed two-ball foursome. It came into prominence in the late 30's or early 40's. We also saw the emergence of the divorce lawyer during the same era. Why, oh why, is it necessary for a male golfer to re-affirm his love for his mate annually on the fairways of country clubs when he could renew his vows in any church on any day he wished? It is too bad that the new wage and hours law will do more to eliminate many great traditions than any house committee or board of directors.

Another problem area in the managerial concept of clubs is democracy. Democracy? Certainly. For it has been pointed out that a club is truly democratic in action. Here each individual has a voice, right to freedom of expression of his thoughts, and the capability of demanding *action* on the part of his elected representative to carry out his desires. Yes, all

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of this is true, but if it get out of hand, your democracy can easily turn into anarchy.

What I am trying to convey is that each individual does *not really have a voice* in the operation of a club. It is the officers you elect, the committees they appoint, and the golf pros, grounds superintendents and managers they hire who run the club. It is they who must weigh the individual wishes of the membership, in light of the physical facilities of the club, the personnel and the financial situation. From all these factors emerge what is best for the club and its members as a group.

I have a personal credo as far as my members are concerned: I will do anything within the framework of the rules of our club for any individual at any time which I could do for any other member at the same time.

The club manager, while often wanting to do more and more to accommodate the individual member must realize that no one individual member holds a monopoly on either him or his staffs' time and talents.

Many of you, I am sure, have members in your club who demand extra service, special treatment, or exceptions to the rules. If you look at the dues, you will find that all members pay the same. Consequently they should be treated the same. It is becoming increasingly difficult to explain to the member who states, "I am willing to pay for extra service . . ." that with the help problems and facilities of the club's physical plant, we cannot give him more than we would any other member, even if he were willing to "pay" for it.

As a matter of fact, in my travels to view the operations of some fine clubs, successful golf courses, and the shops of well known pros, I find one thing which stands out: Where you find a truly well-run club you find a demigod in some degree!

At the truly great golf course you hear people say, "that old bastard, Mr. So and So, who has

been grounds and greens chairman for 27 years . . ." At the fine, reputable, long waiting-list club you will hear, "that cantankerous Mr. Always Right had the audacity to tell me, a member, that turtle necks were not allowed in the dining room. Why, if he hadn't been on the house committee for 14 years I would write the committee a letter and I would tell them." Or, I hear my members telling in the grill and lockerrooms of the pro at such and such a country club who "will not take a lesson on Saturday or Sunday, preferring to spend his time on the first tee and in his shop those days."

Research usually reveals that this particular pro has been at that particular club for 37 years and the club paid his expenses to Scotland last year.

Well, it hardly seems that committees, traditions, and democracy would be the "Confessions of a Club Manager," but I think they do give you an insight into our inner conflicts.

I could ramble on about the 80 hour plus week I work; the fact that I have never spent a single holiday with my family in over twenty years; the number of times I have been called from my lunch by needless telephone calls; or the committees and chairmen and officers who have made life difficult. I could expound on my own financial problems of coping with inflation in my club budget and of putting children through college in my personal budget. I could tell you of the deep, "gut" level disap-

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pointments I have had when a party did not go off as planned or the budget would not permit a new dishwashing machine or of a P.A. system which would not work during the president's speech at the annual meeting.

However, I look at club management from this point of view. I am able to start with a raw product; hire my own production staff; see the product manufactured; do my own advertising and marketing, deliver it to the customer; and actually meet my customer "face to face" and see and hear his satisfaction or criticism. What other captain of industry has this great opportunity in his product or service? □