

## Competence

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“Chris,” says Jan, the assistant manager, to Chris, the general manager, “I know how to do that, I do it all the time.”

“Well, Jan, but...”

“I always do this the same way and the Members love it, everybody loves it.”

“Jan, I know you’ve been doing this a certain way, but... Oh, hello George, come on in. Jan, we can talk about this later.”

George, chair of the Green and Grounds Committee, has his own suggestion for Chris. “Chris, why don’t we use Weed-B-Gone on the fairways. It works great on my yard, all my neighbors use it. Maybe it can make a difference for us.”

Competence is defined as the ability to do something well. Here, Chris has some issues with an assistant manager and a director who both have high opinions of their competence in particular areas. While addressing the issue of staff competence is perhaps easier overall than addressing director competence, both have their challenges.

A significant challenge in helping someone to become competent is that—according to Peter Brown, Henry Roediger, and Mark McDaniel in their book *Make it Stick*—incompetent people tend to overestimate their competence and, in so doing, see little reason to change their behavior or manner of thinking. We tend to create life stories that explain our worlds and how we fit into it. Incompetent people may lack the skills to improve because their self-perception prevents them from realizing that they are not competent.

According to David Dunning and Justin Kruger in their paper “Unskilled and Unaware of It,” incompetent people can be taught to raise their competence by learning to judge their own performance more accurately. This can be accomplished by providing training for staff, feedback about performance, and social comparison feedback. Chris will be able to train Jan and provide formative feedback, but the director may require other tactics. For George, social comparison may be helpful. Chris could gently provide some information about how other green and grounds directors before him, or at other clubs, perform their duties. Chris can emphasize the fact that previous directors didn’t worry about the details, but stayed above the small stuff and concerned themselves with the bigger issues.

However, addressing the issues of staff and director competence can be further complicated by the presence of a powerful trap: sometimes, the GM is also incompetent and unaware of it!

According to a survey we conducted, the number one reason given by responding presidents for the termination of a manager was incompetence. We’ve all heard of managers who have been terminated, and their response was “I never saw it coming.” We need to be aware of our weaknesses. We should always be aware of possibility that we have fallen under the delusion that we are better than we are. It is very natural for all of us to think that we’re above average, so the key is to have a control mechanism. Data and facts are very handy, and having a confidant

whom you trust to give you the unvarnished truth is helpful. Feedback is the best form of reality check. Unfortunately, the GM might not be getting appropriate feedback from those who know it best – subordinates. Being open and honest with those who report to you will be very helpful in discovering your own areas of incompetence. Ask for feedback, and then be open and positive when it's given.

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