

# Construction

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"Chris, this will be no problem for you. John will be our construction manager, and we're looking at Ted to take care of the architecture. Your role will be limited so that you can concentrate on the daily operation."

This statement by the club president was intended to reassure Chris, the GM, that the club's design project could be handled "in-house" by fellow members. Chris was very familiar with John and Ted: both were wonderful, long-tenured, active club members. John had retired from a very successful residential housing business, and Ted was a good friend of John's, having designed many homes over the course of their relationship. They would be a great team, or so the president expected.

Chris had done an excellent job of guiding the Board of Directors to the realization that the club needed an update. All of the local clubs had performed significant remodels after the downturn and were reaping the benefits of improved member usage; Chris's club, by contrast, was lagging behind. Fortunately, Chris had convinced the Board to enlist the help of a professional firm to create, monitor, and analyze a member survey, whose results clearly showed member enthusiasm for a much-needed remodeling. The table had been set, and now this - the most important phases being delegated to members unfamiliar with clubs - great with their residential homes, but confused or ignorant about the inherent intricacies of a multi-million-dollar club design project. Chris was in a bind!

These kinds of dilemmas are not uncommon. Robert Carr of Vestavia Country Club in Alabama relates a similar situation that he faced as a new GM at Vestavia. Carr was vigorously recruited from another local club because of his reputation for success. Nevertheless, as Carr relates, "At the very first Board meeting, I finished my report and was asked to leave! I was astonished." As it turned out, it had been common practice at Vestavia for the GM to be excluded from the Board meeting. Carr's response was simple: "I met with the president and conversationally reminded him that he hired me for my expertise, yet was excluding me from a meeting where that expertise was most valuable." The president thought for a moment and saw Carr's logic. Carr has been an integral part of the meetings ever since.

In Chris's case, having been shut out from this key hiring decision created special difficulties because of the inherent complexity of a club remodeling process. A critical mistake that clubs

make is to underestimate the value of club-specific expertise. Winning member approval for an innovative concept is a difficult endeavor that requires a solid foundation. Remodeling a Club is very different from remodeling a home, and the club leaders needed to understand just how different. Brent Krause, PGA Master Golf Professional and GM at Wynlakes Golf and Country Club in Alabama, tells of his club's learning curve: "Our original architect was Mr. Wilson's (Club owner) personal friend who had done a great deal of work on the family homes. The club design was beautiful and the slate floors magnificent. But, the first day of opening we nearly killed a couple Members when they skated on those slate floors with their golf shoes, they were like ice!" The practical expertise of a club-specific design firm and GM could have identified the problem up-front and saved the club thousands of dollars. Krause goes on to say that a decade later, "We brought Ferry Hayes & Allen and Chapman Coyle & Chapman in for the Ballroom, Tack room, etc. renovation.... Mr. Wilson sat back after looking at their schematics and listening to their pitch and as he laughed, he said: 'Hey pro, where were these guys when we started; I did everything wrong!'"

Chris knew that simply letting the Board's plan run its course would be deeply impractical, and used a page from Carr's book to talk logically with the president about Chris's own expertise and the value it brought to the project. Now the challenge was to persuade club leaders to engage an expert firm rather than a local residential architect. Chris decided the best approach was a direct one, and met with Ted over lunch to talk about the process. As the discussion progressed, Chris was able to walk Ted down some unfamiliar paths. In a non-confrontational, inquiring manner, Chris asked Ted many questions about what he thought about the number of covers and the scaling of the new dining room, what kind of traffic patterns Ted envisioned from the front entrance to the various rooms, and how to best organize a kitchen to accommodate the expected increase in volume. Chris could sense that Ted was beginning to re-think his role. Chris then mentioned several examples, from clubs managed by Chris's peers, of great members taking on high-profile tasks, only to be criticized incessantly by their fellow members - ultimately leading them to resign from the club. Chris then asked Ted if he thought it worthwhile to look into a club-specific design firm, and suggested that Ted might be the right person to head up the committee to search for the firm.

Fortunately, Ted saw the big picture that Chris was attempting to draw, and agreed that helping the process would be more enjoyable (and productive) than personally masterminding the actual redesign. Ted agreed to head up the search committee and advocate for the retention of club-specific professional help.

Prior to the emergence of this issue, Chris had laid some useful groundwork that allowed Chris to effectively redirect the club's leaders, establishing credibility in advance by influencing the BOD to enlist professional help for the initial survey. Chris's previous success at the Club, followed by the recent success of the survey, then gave Chris credibility with Ted. By swaying Ted to advocate for professionals, Chris's next step was an easy one - getting Ted to talk with John and the president about the new committee, which Ted would chair. Chris's suggestion to

retain John as project manager was a good choice, firstly because John had tremendous knowledge about the local politics and was expert in the field of construction management, and secondly, because it meant that Chris need not suggest a whole new program under new leadership.

With strong support and advocacy, Chris aligned the right folks for the job, and the long remodeling process began from the strongest possible position.

*MacDonald Niven, CCM, CCE is the general manager at La Rinconada Country Club in California and can be reached at (510) 439-8522 or via email: macniven09@gmail.com*

*Dirk Zander, CCM is the general manager at Palo Alto Hills Country Club in California and can be reached at dzander@pahgcc.net.*