

## Publisher's Perspective

### Why must the General Manager be seen and heard at the club to be relevant?

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Often private club general managers feel they need to be seen to be relevant. They need to be around the club for that late-night dinner party...around the club for the holiday season celebrations...for the summer golf tournament.

Relevant to whom, and why? How do you get your board and members to realize and appreciate the work (and the intangibles) you do?

That's often the sentiment expressed that's our topic for our next Publisher's Perspective.

As a private club general manager, we'd really appreciate your comments and opinions.

#### Questions:

- 1) What's your take, as a general manager, on the assumption that the general manager must be seen and heard to be relevant? Why is it necessary to be visible as a general manager ( also considering that it's also likely the same for a golf course superintendent etc.)?

I believe that you need to be relevant *in order to be* seen and heard. We should be seen because we are seeing what the membership is up to. We should be hearing what the membership is saying in order to understand their perspectives, which then allows us to have relevant discussions. It's very hard to tell what is and is not relevant to members. Just the other day a member sent me a series of three emails and responses, copied to our president, about the Hole-in-One (HIO) program that has been a staple for decades. The member's concern was that it had lost its intent because it was *too* successful! Who'd a thunk that a CEO of a billion-dollar business would not only take the time to write and answer three emails, but set up a call with me to discuss the philosophy of the HIO program, which costs him \$2 each time a member gets a HIO. Not only that, he scheduled the call for some time between 1 and 2 PM, and I picked up the phone at 1:04 - seriously! Some things are relevant to members, and we, as managers, should not presuppose what those things might be. A joke to one may be a serious matter to another.

Visibility is a function of relevance, as is seeing what the members are doing. You can't really understand the culture of the membership unless you are

among them, at least from time - to - time, looking and listening, so if you're looking, then they are seeing - you.

2) As a general manager are you often queried about how, why and what you do?

If someone asks the "how" question, it's normally in reference to some technical aspect, most often pertaining to agronomy, like "Hey, I need to grow grass without water because we're in a drought. How do you do that?"

Why comes up a great deal prior to projects or other significant issues. For example, we were in search of water and created a plan to cover our irrigation needs. We held many meetings explaining the decision making process and our conclusions; the "why" always came up during the conversation. Luckily, the why was baited so that we could say something like "I'm glad you asked, next slide..." I enjoy the why question because it gives us all a chance to explain ourselves at a time when the Member is interested and that's a great time to take advantage of relevancy.

Members rarely query me on what I'm doing, although it's a daily question in my own mind, but more like "What the h... am I doin'?"

3) What should your club's board of directors know that they don't know about how and why a general manager functions?

"How" should be irrelevant to the board of directors, and why we do things should be self-evident in the results. I'm reluctant to try to educate directors on things that they have no interest in; however, if the occasion arises when a director is engaged and the topic comes up, it's a great time to explain how and why we do things in an effort to increase the credibility of the staff, not just the GM. The staff is surely acknowledged as an extension of the GM.

4) What do you wish your board of directors knew about how you operate as the club's GM? Is there a way to get your board to understand these 'wishes'? Do you find ways to better educate your board?

There's nothing that I wish the Board knew about how we operate the club. Education, however, is an ongoing and tricky business. Most directors are still active; some are active with the club. Direct education tends to be off putting to most directors, so we need to be somewhat indirect about it. We try to educate when the window is open, sometimes we need to open the window, but timing, just like in the golf swing, is important. Our major area of education is to influence the directors to think generatively and strategically, we try to work the conversation away from the minutia and towards the big picture issues, and

there are many. As staff, we need to help them focus on things that minor issues may cloud. A big deal is unearthing the *real issue* that is hidden beneath the immediate issue.

5) What are some of the things you do as a general manager that you feel are really unappreciated by the board and members? A pet peeve?

Things we do as managers are a bit like the cell phone, it is (we are) just expected to "work." There's very little appreciation for the cell phone working. That we work is expected and not much is said or done when we are working; and by "work" I mean that the club is humming along nicely, not the number of hours that we show up. And, like the cell phone, when we don't work (even when the number is misdialled!), well, that's when all kinds of things are called into question. Looking for appreciation as a measure of success might be a difficult gauge. We all hear "Hey, great party last night, you guys are great. Everything's really great around here." That's a pretty superficial statement, but a bunch of those add up to letting you know that the work is getting done. When someone walks up to you, looks you in the eye and says, "You and your team did an excellent job with that project. You were under pressure, kept it within budget and gave us more than you told us you would." Well, that's appreciation, and those sentiments are few and far between, but, when they do occur, can really last a long time.

A few years ago I was the new GM at a large, premier club. We had a superintendent who had, as was customary, club privileges. His daily routine was to go into the 19<sup>th</sup> Hole late in the afternoon, have a beer and talk with members. I went with him only once and observed what happened. He traversed the many members, shaking hands and smiling, collecting his acorns of appreciation, listening to "Greens were great today, course looks great" over and over. He thrived on that appreciation, he beamed, he glowed, he grew taller. And then he would get one "Man those bunkers sucked..." He deflated immediately, emotionally crushed, eight great comments and it took only one negative comment to completely destroy his confidence, the whole sack of acorns spilled out. I thought that was very interesting until the next day when he allocated three quarters of the staff to hand raking the bunkers at the expense of the rest of the course. We bought him a membership at a club near his home and that solved the problem. Appreciation evokes interesting emotions, with the average club having 500 members it's the law of large numbers that somebody won't be happy. Members, including board members, are at the club to have fun, not bolster the GM's confidence.

If our personal worth is measured by others' appreciation, it will be a tough club life. I believe appreciation is best served from one's own perspective of the job well done.

