

Memories

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John and Martha were excellent Club members and had just returned to the Club from a visit with their doctor; Martha was concerned about John's seeming to misremember things from time to time. Overlooking the beautiful 18th Hole on the Club veranda, it was later in the afternoon and no wait staff were on duty. John got up and asked Martha "I'd like a drink, may I bring you something?"

"Yes, I'd like an iced tea, Dr. Winston suggested that you write it down."

"I've got it, iced tea."

"But, I'd like lemon."

"O.K., iced tea with lemon."

"And three sugars."

"Iced tea with lemon and three sugars, I've got it." And off John went to the Grill for iced tea with lemon and three sugars. After quite a while John returned and handed Martha a Martini in a frosty glass. Martha lowered her head with a slight shake from side to side, then looked into her husband's eyes "I wanted an olive."

John and Martha have been excellent members of the Club for decades. John is the Club President and served faithfully on and off the Board for decades. Everyone respects John for his past successes, his current diligent work and love for the Club. But, Chris has a problem. As GM Chris needs to rely on the President as both a sounding board and strategic partner. Chris has noticed, along with the other board members, that John is no longer the quick witted thinker, he has lost a step.

For John, his doctor's suggestion of writing things down was one of three key elements in keeping active and maintaining one's self efficacy (beliefs in one's capabilities) during the aging process. Albert Bandura, noted Stanford psychologist, highlights three optimizing strategies through a story about how famous pianist Arthur Rubinstein performed professionally through his 90th year of life: First, he reduces his repertoire and plays a smaller number of pieces (selection); second, he practices these more often (optimization); and third, he slows down his speed of playing prior to fast movements, thereby producing a contrast that enhances the impression of speed in the fast movements (compensation). Chris might help John by being aware of these three strategies and proactively providing John with notes from meetings (compensation); asking him to focus on certain high-priority issues and not get bogged down in the minutiae of details that are below the level afforded a president (selection); and by meeting with John on a regular basis and sending him continual updates on issues (optimization).

similar to Chris' plight Rotary International deals with a great number of volunteers, many of whom have participated in this great cause for decades. One issue brought up on the first day of the new president's retreat is that of the venerable volunteer who has, well, lost touch with the direction of the organization, but fails to recognize the loss and is very reluctant to consider retiring, even though the suggestion has been made. "Mug 'em and plaque 'em" is the phrase used by the moderator. In this case, and sometimes without prior forewarning of the volunteer retiree, the person is brought forward during a meeting, graciously spoken about and given a plaque as a memento of all the hard work that was accomplished. This award is followed immediately by the replacement who receives a nice mug, who offers a few words of gratitude to the predecessor in accepting the new position.

Chris' situation is similar, but far more difficult, handling it with diplomacy and grace will only enhance his image with the other board members, who will notice with great interest how the situation is resolved. Most peers are reluctant to intercede when a friend is clearly declining in capacity. However, a strong, thoughtful manager recognizes that the primary role of leadership is continued club improvement and must take corrective steps.

Chris needs to make sure that John understands how important he is, and has been, to the Club and its success. Self efficacy is important to a positive aging process. Dan Shapiro, Director of Harvard's Program On Negotiation relates a story about his dear friend and colleague Roger Fisher as age began to catch up with Fisher, "Do you realize how much you have changed the world? Do you realize the incredible impact of your ideas on the world?" Fisher's reply was curious and innocent "No." Sometimes people who are forward thinkers don't realize their impact, but regardless, everyone needs to know that they are appreciated. Heartfelt appreciation will move the needle into solid positive areas and help John to maintain self efficacy, an important element of maintaining a good aging process. Chris may feel uncomfortable in praising a venerable club icon, but must realize its importance; everyone appreciates heartfelt praise.

Mugging and plaquing may work for the committee member who has been in place since the 70s, but Chris will be better served in taking care to help John bolster his self efficacy and utilize selection, optimization and compensation techniques to create an environment that fosters John's mental acuity and helps the club to continue on a path for improvement.

MacDonald Niven, CCM is the general manager at Richmond Country Club in California and can be reached at (510) 231-2250 or via email: macniven@aol.com