

# Personalities

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"We have got to hold the line on dues. Our expenses are out of hand and we can't keep this up. Chris, you have got to get rid of all the excess. I do not want to see a budget come back with any level of dues increase; we've got to be fiscally responsible. And we ain't gonna raise dues on my watch."

This proclamation by Dave, the club president, is disturbing to Chris, the club general manager. Dave is in his first and only year of presidency, having served as FC in prior years. Chris knows him to be very commanding and just a bit stubborn. Dave had clearly wanted to make a statement that would show his friends that he had control of their club and was going to be an excellent steward. Chris is a very good manager, and the budgets have always been cost-conscious. Moreover, the Club is in very solid financial condition: little historical debt, good member usage, solid membership recruiting. Life is pretty good. Unfortunately, there are storm clouds on the horizon. Chris is facing two new expenses that are going to significantly affect costs: water and health care. To cover these expenses, Chris needs to add \$22 per member per month to dues. Chris must now figure out how to navigate this delicate situation.

Everyone has their own unique personality. Oftentimes, club leaders possess a "strong personality", such as Dave's. There are appropriate ways to approach this type of person. Chris understands that club leaders experience a very high level of peer pressure, and that Dave wants very much to be seen by his friends as a good leader. Additionally, because Chris is the club manager and not a member of Dave's inner social circle, Chris realizes that their relationship is not one of equals. Given these underlying circumstances, Chris's best approach may be not to approach—at least, not head-on! Instead, Chris should define the problem, and take steps to ensure that the final decision about its solution will be kept out of the "group think" muck: once group think takes over, Chris will have no chance to influence the decision. In order to achieve this goal, Chris should enlist the help of someone from Dave's peer group.

Chris calls on Bob, a close friend of Dave's and a regular in their Saturday morning golfing group. Bob is also the current Finance Chair: having served on the committee for several years, he has participated in the budget process and knows that it is very sound. Over the years, Chris has established an excellent working relationship with Bob, whom Chris knows to be level-headed, reasonable, and very financially intelligent. Chris shares a preliminary budget with Bob at a private meeting—a normal courtesy accorded to any finance chairperson—and uses the opportunity to demonstrate the effect of these new, significant fixed costs. Because Chris wants to hammer home the potential for catastrophe if this situation is improperly managed, Chris plays out several plausible scenarios through pro formas, illustrating the impact that stagnant dues will have against rising costs outside the Club's control. To further crystallize the point for Bob, Chris makes corresponding reductions in the only area that can have significant impact - the golf course. In making these reductions, Chris also outlines the practical effects of reduced spending, such as reduced labor, which will, in turn, result in reduced mowings, higher fairways and roughs, and slower green speeds. Chris knows that Bob and Dave are ardent

golfers who take great pride in their course - a lower turf quality will not be acceptable to either them. Enlisting the emotional perspective is often necessary when influencing decision-makers.

Once Bob understands the long term effects of stagnant dues, he is able to talk with Dave, in their own social language, explaining to Dave that the viability of the Club can be maintained through reasonable increases and careful expenditures, but that, as the saying goes, "We can't cut our way to prosperity." Because of Bob's ability to influence Dave into seeking a reasonable solution, they have cut off the potential for the issue to get mired in group-think muck. The issue will be discussed in small social groups prior to the BOD meeting, when it can then be debated on a more general level until a solid resolution is secured.

Chris knows that strong personalities in positions of power need to be met, not head-on, but with creative solutions that can be understood in rational terms. This strategy often requires the assistance of others in order to succeed.

*Calvin Bolling, CCM is the general manager at Greystone Country Club in Alabama and can be reached at [cbolling@greystonecc.com](mailto:cbolling@greystonecc.com).*

*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](mailto:macniven09@gmail.com)*