

We need to talk

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Chris was looking forward to a meeting with Jim, the club president. It had been a while since their last lunch, and Jim had seemed a bit distant recently, so it would be good to talk. Chris stepped into the room and suddenly saw that Jim, Vice President Pat, Bill, the third member of the Executive Committee, and Cheryl, head of HR, were all gathered. A bolt of electricity shot through Chris' body. The buzzing in Chris' ears drowned out Jim's next few statements: "Chris ... change...we hope... about an hour." New car payments, Chris's daughter just starting high school, what about the house? How will the family react? Soon Chris was back in the office, where two fresh cardboard boxes were on the desk, to be filled within the hour with eight years of personal belongings; keys to be left with Cheryl.

A recent survey was sent to 4,423 CMAA Members, with 575 CMAA managers and 62 club presidents responding. According to the presidents, the top reason for termination of managers is incompetence. According to the managers, the top reason for termination is failure to get along with the president. Fifty-four percent of the managers became aware of their departure at the time of departure, compared to fifty-one percent of presidents who reported knowing six months in advance that the manager would be terminated. On the issue of management definition: 16 percent of the presidents reported having a staff member defined as manager, while 8 percent of the managers reported their title as manager; 84 percent of the presidents reported having a GM/COO or CEO while 92 percent of the managers titled themselves as GM/COO or CEO.

To quote Captain played by Strother Martin from the 1964 film *Cool Hand Luke*: "What we've got here is... failure to communicate." (Things aren't going well for main character Lucas Jackson when the Captain utters that phrase in the film; Luke is in the process of being beaten. In the closing scene of the movie, Luke uses the same phrase shortly before he's shot.) "Failure to communicate" does not end well for the folks in lesser positions of power. The statistics from the survey mentioned above appear to highlight a disconnect between the way presidents and managers perceive their relationships with each other. Even when these perceptual differences are small, they can still have large cumulative effects. It is incumbent on the manager to clarify the roles of the professional staff and the volunteer board of directors. When there is misunderstanding, which may be misconstrued as incompetence, there will be trouble, and it appears that the trouble comes to those managers who are unaware of the disconnect, as evidenced by the lack of warning that these managers received prior to their departure.

In his annual seminar Board Dynamics held during CMAA World Conference, Dick Kopplin once said, "Don't come to me with board problems if you haven't had a board orientation." The orientation is a time when the directors tour the club, meet the senior staff, and get an inside look

at the club. It's a great opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities within the club. However, there also needs to be a time set aside specifically to communicate and establish consensus on the roles and expectations of both the manager and club officials. Often, a retreat is the best vehicle for this deliberation. There is no question that getting a group of volunteers to attend their own retreat can be challenging in itself. As the manager with the most to gain, you should take the lead. Finding an ally within the directors is often necessary. Work with this person to convince the others that it is logical, reasonable, and painless for them to participate in at least a half day seminar. Most local clubs will allow you and your board for a half a day, and playing golf upon completion is a great bonding experience. Having a professional moderator expert in discussing governance is the best plan, but if your directors are reluctant to fund the professional, you can find helpful material at your CMAA site. At the very least, you can use the template on Roles and Responsibilities to go one-by-one down the list and agree on who does what.

A board retreat is ideal and an orientation is a fundamental requirement, but whatever methods you use, make sure to get a clear understanding of who does what. You will find that having the same rules of the game will help you play much better. And, if you need help – use the CMAA network and consult a fellow manager.

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