

A MANAGER'S STAYING POWER

Several things can threaten a manager's security and be areas for controversy. There are no hard and fast set of rules for longevity. But there are a few general principles that seem to work. These are just a few.

1. The Job Description and Employment Contract - Having a contract, or at least a letter of agreement in today's world is a must. And with a changing board, it is always wise to have everything in writing. Make sure these documents are updated and signed each time you receive a new benefit or compensation review. (See the General Manager Concept section)

2. You and the Board - The best thing you can do during the hiring process is to let the Board know exactly who you are so the right match is made. After you are in place, take steps to strengthen your position. As Board members change, give them an orientation of the club and its operations. Go over the financial papers, agendas of meetings, membership applications, bylaws, etc. Work together with the Board.

3. Committees - Committees are a resource, so tap into them. Know what's going on, attend their meetings. A manager in the dark can't very well act as a guide to what's right for the club's membership.

4. Education - Continuing education for managers and staff becomes more important every year, so put aside a dollar amount in the budget for professional development. You can pick up many major money-saving techniques and ideas, and network to gather information on other ways to improve the club for your members.

5. Communication - Communication is our lifeline. You must keep in touch with the membership to get the feel of the club. Listen to the vocal minority, of course, but don't forget to communicate with the silent majority either. A great way to do this is by writing a monthly article in the club newsletter. Tell the membership about education in which you, or your staff is involved; what's new with different department heads; what's going on with seasonal cleaning or remodeling. Also, always remember to communicate with the Board on any changes or information about the club. There should never be last minute surprises.

Basic Dos - Do communicate. Do be seen. Do dress the part. Do continue to upgrade conditions for the membership, making sure you know what they really want. Do continue education - keep moving ahead in your career.

Don't - Don't use your club — period.

("Here Today, Here Tomorrow. Improving a Manager's Staying Power," CMAA Magazine, June 1990)

A New Manager Checklist

A managers staying power does not begin after you have completed one year at the club, it begins with your first day on the job. The following information offers a checklist of what to do when whether you're undergoing new club orientation or simply reevaluating your personnel administration skills.

A great deal of anxiety is associated with any changes in life, including a new job. So it is in your first club assignment as assistant, and it is especially heightened when you have made it as a club General Manager.

Whatever the reason that promotes an individual to change jobs, there is always that urge to second guess oneself. Was it wise to leave the security, familiarity and organization of the old club, where the members and employees were a comfortable fit, in exchange for expanded horizons but terra incognita? The reality of having to prove yourself yet again is daunting to even the most secure of us. Developing personal strategies may help ease the transition phase. Having an outside consultants report (done prior to your arrival) aids in problem identification immensely as it saves time in identifying these problem areas. But don't allow the report to supersede your own professional insights; make adjustments as you become familiarized with operations.

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Communication and research are key in any transition. Communication with board members, committees, and department heads should be the top priority of any new manager. Researching as quickly and thoroughly as possible will aid in management decisions. Research employee work history, financial history, policy and procedure, house rules, articles of incorporation and board minutes. There are specific communication processes that are reliably beneficial.

A well organized general meeting with a written agenda and a mission statement that includes all employees is a critical first step in the introduction of the manager to the staff. Keep this meeting brief. It should be announced at this time that each employee will be given the opportunity to meet privately with the manager. In those meetings, individual goals and objectives will be discussed and suggestions for remedying past problems encountered by the employee will be addressed. Prior to the meetings, each employee's work history should have been reviewed.

One of the most valuable sources of information about what is actually going on in the club is to spend time (an hour or more) each day circulating through the club, talking with the employees informally. Include all employees, especially dishwashers, bussers and housekeepers in your rounds to enable you to develop a comprehensive total quality program.

Initiate regular, well-structured and organized staff meetings at a regular time, on a weekly basis. Hand out a written agenda several days before the meeting to allow them to be prepared. Planned meetings assist greatly in conveying information to all your managers thoroughly and consistently. In addition, it is a useful vehicle to gain insight into the communication and organizational abilities of your management staff.

Get to know your members as quickly as possible. Work the floor every day and have the members introduced to you by your staff. Remember to use their names when you see them again. **Be visible.**

Communicate with your board. A weekly written status report to the board is a good idea, especially if you have the capacity to fax it to each board member. Visit with each board member in his office and get his input. Establishing good lines of communication is the first priority and will keep transition problems to a minimum. Don't forget to meet with each committee; they often may be as empowered as the board. Also find out if there are any renegade "unofficial" committees at the club. Difficult situations can be defused if you find their source of discontent.

Establish your credibility. Outlast everyone in your staff for the first three months. Be the first one in and the last one to leave. In talking with successful managers, they will tell you this is very important. It shows your employees that you care as much as they do. There is a smug satisfaction in being at your desk, with your jacket off and your coffee poured when the staff comes in.

Unless the situation is a drastic one, don't rush to implement change. As the new manager, you will see things you want to change immediately, but go slowly at first. Changes made too quickly, or simply for the sake of change, can upset the routine and rhythm of the club. The circumstances of the management change may dictate immediate action. Changes made on impulse will only have short-term benefits; long-term benefits are the result of careful thought and planning.

Do a thorough inspection of the club, the dining setup, the kitchen, golf shop, and grounds — daily.

Current established policy and procedure in all areas of the club should be scrutinized, with special attention to critical areas such as golf, kitchen and dining room. Review of the following documents and processes under each key area will help orientate you in the overall operation and status of your new club:

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Purchasing and Inventory

- Make sure that accounts payable invoices on hand are dated on a daily basis.
- Several key suppliers should be phoned to determine that club accounts are current, with no past due amounts.
- Confirm that there is adequate control of storage areas and security measures. Review periodically.
- Determine that inventory is taken and spot checked. It should be checked for accounting purposes.
- Review the list of current suppliers and any special considerations with current suppliers.

Financial Reporting Review

- Budgets and financial statements
- Required reports — frequency and distribution
- Bank account reconciliations
- Banking and depositing procedures
- Account signatures transferred
- Most recent A/P and payroll check register
- Any bad debts or collection problems
- Expenditures to see that they are made within established guidelines with proper documentation
- Accounts receivable

Payroll and Personnel

Determine that:

- All employees have complete time records
- State or local labor requirements
- Any pending promotions or wage increases are in writing from the former club manager
- Job descriptions are on file and being used
- Employee appraisals are in use
- Overtime is paid; minimum is paid where applicable
- Labor posters are displayed and OSHA log is up-to-date
- Schedules and job descriptions reviewed
- Insurance and pension program in effect, reviewed
- Vacation, sick leave and personal leave time practices are reviewed and records are current
- All minors have proper age and work certificates on file and working with both federal and state labor laws

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Administrative Control

- Membership file and register reviewed for accuracy
- Membership reports are current
- Club assets are in writing and documented
- China levels maintained — identified
- Record retention is reviewed

General

- Review status of all licenses and permits
- Review board minutes
- Review comment/complain file
- Entertainment contracts on file and current
- Review upcoming club events
- Schedules in effect for reports; by department head
- Hours of operations
- Review current catering policy, menus, last menu printing, wine and banquet menus
- Review subordinate management files
- All contracts, leases and formal agreements reviewed
- Strength and weakness assessment
- Office work flow and cycle — who does what when. Salary structure
- Key control
- Standards of performance
- Benefits, policy and administration
- Manager's daily reports
- Banquet, special party bookings
- Annual events — Christmas party, board dinners, etc
- Special events for community

This checklist above is not an all encompassing plan, but is intended as an aid that should assist any manager facing the challenge of reevaluation or managing a new club.

("Checklist for a New Manager" *Club Management* magazine, March/April 1994)

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RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS ASSOCIATED WITH CLUB MANAGER JOB CHANGES

1. Management Philosophy Considerations:

- When the club switches from COO Concept to “clubhouse manager mode.”
- The manager lacks the necessary skills to successfully function/operate the club.
 - Any management philosophy change is a clear warning sign the board is not satisfied in some way of the managers performance.

2. Information Dissemination Considerations:

- You no longer hear complaints — essentially you find yourself “outside the loop.” This may be an indication of the board, perhaps staff or the membership has a lack of confidence in the manager. Have you experienced “ information exclusion?”
- Other possible scenarios are when the Board of Directors **purposely** excludes the general manager/COO from the “inside information loop,” i.e., not including the general manager/COO in meetings (previously expected to attend); bypassing the general manager/COO to get needed information, i.e., going to department heads and/or staff. Have you experienced a noticeable increase in the board managing day-to-day activities, perhaps a few responsibilities withdrawn?
- Have you found yourself excluded from the employee grapevines where you used to be included?
- Information needed to successfully run the club is not disseminated to you — you are purposely excluded, leading to isolation and ultimately the Board forces your resignation.
- This lack of board, member or employee support through regular two-way exchange of information is a clear indication that the manager’s tenure is threatened.

3. Salary and Benefit Considerations:

- Local economic conditions may cause the board/club to “tighten the belt.”
- Has your salary grown disproportionately with the gross dollar volume of the club?
- After a few years managing the club, you find that the club can no longer and afford an annual salary increase.

4. Power Struggle Considerations:

- Disagreements arise on the board pitting board members against board members and one faction of the membership against another. This may lead to the manager having to take a firm position on the issue — often putting the manager on the “losing end.”
- What is the perceived value of the manager by that vocal minority of the membership, i.e., do some view the managers performance as first rate, others not?
- Is there a debate over the extent of the managers responsibilities and authority? Differing opinions will accordingly generate differing expectations about, and evaluations of, the manager’s performance.

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5. External Considerations: (The manager, board and members have no control over these.)

- Government and legislative issues/changes having an economic impact on the club.
- Membership demographics: Declining membership numbers, the ability to attract new, younger members, aging members, etc.
- Location change - Where the club used to be considered "in the country," over time has become surrounded by inner city blight.
- Outside expertise -management companies, management consultants, law firms, marketing specialists, executive recruiters. These organizations put additional pressure on the **independent** private club manager to perform **all** duties at least to the level of the specialized experts. With these "specialized experts," the Board may begin to question the managers ability and/or authority, leaving him/her outside the "planning loop."
- Additional factors include the local economy, the weather and population shifts.

6. Personal Considerations:

- Are you continuing to derive personal satisfaction, regardless of money?
- Do you feel too comfortable and/or not sufficiently challenged?
- Have you crossed the definite line of being an employee to being a member?
- What are the desires of your family? Are they in-line with your goals?
- Are you experiencing a high level of stress? How is this affecting your attitude?

7. Club Environment Considerations:

- Current financial position based on the club's historical trend. Is the club in a negative cash flow? Is the median income of the current membership sufficient in the years to come to provide the services and facilities historically expected and delivered?
- Do your strengths and weaknesses match the needs of the club?
- Have you been placed on formal probationary status by boards? This is a clear signal of job dissatisfaction by the Board of Directors.
- Transition of ownership, i.e, an investor-owned club sold the membership or a corporate-owned club sold to another corporation or private owner.
- A change in the degree of the club manager's responsibility and authority.