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"FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

PART 2



This month we continue our discussion on service levels with Eddie Bullock who has recently joined the Board of Directors of the Golf Club Managers Association:

Following our fair share of years at the 'coalface', we are both now involved

in the business of golf as consultants and working, as I often do, in 'problem' environments.

I recently spent time in discussion with a club 'official' who has been experiencing continuing problems with the fact that the course on his estate continues to bleed cash from the operational budget which is a continual bone of contention between the golfers and non-golfers who live on the estate.

I suggested that the estate could either divide up the annual costs between all the golfers who want 'anytime access' to the course (it would work out at about ZAR 250 000 per year each!), or let reason prevail and hire a marketing / sales company to help to generate increased revenues and create new income streams. I also recommended that the club should invest in training for the three key golf personnel all of whom are very able, but becoming increasingly de-motivated and find, for a change, a GM who was golf-centric as all the previous incumbents had been spectacularly ignorant about the game.

To date they have employed another non golfer manager (who admittedly has good admin and accounting skills), no training has been put in place for the staff and the marketing, promotion and sales needs remain unresolved.

In cases like these I am fond of the saying that a club or golf business is often 'in the sh1t it's in

because of the sh1ts it's had in'! Is this fair or can a negative legacy of poor management and bad decisions be turned around quickly by getting the staff 'mix' right, promoting team work and providing good training, or does any solution require an even broader set of involvements?

EB: It is a very fair comment and I am quick to remind client clubs that management / staff teamwork is their wealth.

Undoubtedly the selection of the 'right' staff and ongoing training are key aspects, but the club's business strategy, board and committees must also recognise and embrace the same commitment.

They must ask themselves whether they are actually investing in their teams to prosper and create a platform for sustainable growth, or whether like too many businesses, they are in denial, paying lip service to staff development, are resistant to change in their strategic approach and or continuing to use the economic situation as an excuse.

As a case in point and while on my travels recently, I was in a conversation with a General Manager who was asked by his Board Chairman about staff training "why do we have to invest in their training, as they then leave?". The GM's response was that "if we don't invest in training and they stay, what do we have on our hands?"

Not every club manager has the knowledge and motivational skills to constantly drive their team forward. Clubs need to recognise such cases, and lend greater urgency to training and development plans.

As a consultant I sometimes find that the working environment can be 'tense'. An older hand once told me that if you consult on any project you will most likely be filling in for missing skill sets, covering for poor management decisions and or strategies, which can be unsettling and threatening for the incumbent management team and unless the owners and management have embraced the need for external inputs the

best you can hope for is to be seen as an interloper.

EB: Yes this is sad and often shows that a club has not motivated the need for training or the positive value of external inputs correctly within its own operation.

In an earlier discussion piece you covered the need for external involvements of any kind to be seen not as threatening and undermining, but rather as a sign of a positive and mature business strategy designed to help the club grow and prosper.

On a recent club visit, an inexperienced General Manager was observed inappropriately criticising a member of staff who had misdirected a guest. The ridiculing of the young lady in the presence of her colleagues and several club members prompted me to reflect on 30 years in the club industry, motivating and communicating with all ages and the dramatically different impact of styles.

A General Manager's job is to mentor, to motivate, and to get them to perform as close to potential as possible. Speaking to groups of managers, I encourage them to be aware that they are also psychologists. They have to evaluate and understand staff psyches, their goals and their fears. As a result, they need to know when to push them and when to put their arm around their shoulder.

The key issue in terms of motivating team members revolves around respect. When a manager and employee are able to communicate clearly, openly and honestly it doesn't matter what method they use, it is the message they are sharing. However, if a manager feels the need to scream and yell at an employee, they are either missing the point of being a quality General Manager or reacting out of frustration.

Does yelling work?.....well yes sometimes, but a professional quality General Manager who is able to communicate their thoughts clearly and calmly will get more out of their team than the one who is unable to remain controlled. ■

