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# Getting governance right **AT YOUR CLUB**

Kevin Fish has seen **the good, the bad and the highly dysfunctional**. The authority on **governance best practice** shares his insights on **how clubs can do better**

**T**he GCMA partnered with England Golf last month to deliver a series of workshops to help managers and committees create solid platforms at their clubs, through effective collaborative governance.

Kevin Fish - industry expert, and GCMA Manager of the Year 2004 - delivered to around 140 managers and committee members, with satisfaction feedback running at 95% throughout the sessions.

Kevin has earned a reputation as an authority on governance best practice, and here he shares some insights developed during his career so far. . . .

In 20 years in this industry, I have seen the good the bad and the highly dysfunctional. I can make a strong case for saying that every aspect of golf club operations have evolved with the times over the last century with one exception, and that is club governance. Governance is often misunderstood, but to better understand it, we can learn from the Greek origin of the word, which is "to steer".

There are some choppy waters in our industry right now, and that is why it is crucial that you have the right people at the wheel steering your club.

I can also make a case for saying that there was a time when the main role of the golf club committee seemed to be to keep people out, but in the last 20 years that role has truly turned 180 degrees, and strangely many committees I have met have still not alerted to that fact.

As we fellow club managers know, club committees are messy. That is because they involve people, and people are messy!



Human nature dictates that as soon as someone is in charge, someone else will decide they are doing it wrong, and you, the club manager, are left walking a delicate path.

While I admit there are occasionally volunteer committee members who choose to use their powers for evil, these are few and far between. When challenged in a reasonable manner, most committee members will admit that when they first joined the club, it wasn't with the intention of managing it. They do, however, get carried away with the intensity of their role on the committee and that is because a member at a club is far more engaged than a guest at a hotel or restaurant.

This is in part down to the fact that they are part-owners, but also down to the understandable emotions towards the club including pride, prestige and community.

In fact, we know that in our industry, a dissatisfied club member is more likely to try and change the executive decision makers than just change the club

at which they play.

However, in my experience, committees will generally embrace the recommendations of good governance I offer, particularly when someone can turn the spotlight on the real issues.

If your club still selects its management committee members the same way that we select people for jury service then there is a good chance that your meetings will be chaotic. The mix of characters on a management committee will include some

#### **The key questions**

- Is recruiting new people for committee difficult?
- Do your committee meetings drag on for hours?
- Do you find you spend too much time covering old ground during meetings?
- Does it seem like one or two people always end up doing the work?
- Do new committee members struggle to get up to speed?
- Do you feel that your club muddles by from one year to the next?
- Do the members criticise regardless?

**Who is Kevin Fish?**

While managing the Glen GC in North Berwick, Kevin was named the inaugural GCMA UK Manager of the Year and went on to be the first European to secure the Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation. He was then selected by Scottish Golf to recruit, train and lead a team to help Scottish clubs take a more business like approach to securing their futures.

He has dedicated years of voluntary time to further club manager education around the globe, and is a regular speaker at GCMA education events.

He now runs his own training, recruitment and consultancy business, Contemporary Club Leadership, where his aim is to help clubs do the right things, right. This includes effective governance and strategic planning, training front line staff, including customer experience training and benchmarking KPIs.

Kevin can be contacted by email on [kevin@ccl.services](mailto:kevin@ccl.services), visit [ccl.services](http://ccl.services) or telephone 07398 155908.



CAVE dwellers, those who are Consistently Against Virtually Everything ! You may also find that you spend considerably less time debating the merits of a £300,000 fleet machinery renewal than you do the increase of a pound on the price of a sandwich for team meals.

The reason for this is that committees are experience rich but theory poor. I like to remind people that while they may use the toilet every day, that doesn't turn them into plumbers.

As you all know, this array of familiar governance challenges can result in lengthy inefficient and ineffective committee meetings. A meeting of three hours is not such a business

meeting, but more of a hostage situation, and, believe me, the committee members are feeling the same way as you.

From the club manager's perspective, your goal is to create business-like practices in the boardroom that convince your management committee that they are in safe hands, and truly only need to see you for that 90 minute update every month.

I like to remind everyone involved that nobody turns up at a committee meeting to make bad decisions.

It could be said that due to the regular turnover of board members in clubland, the general manager is always nursing an

infant democracy.

Infants become toddlers, and we all know that they are prone to the occasional tantrum. This makes effective induction essential at clubs, if you are to build momentum for "how we do things around here."

If you can create robust business practices these will act as a magnet, which not only attracts the right people, but it also repels the wrong people.

To be fair to our willing volunteers there is no Swiss finishing school for club presidents to prepare them for their term of office and it is important to remind ourselves that these "amateurs" are doing it, as the Greeks would also



tell us – “(Amator) for the love of it.” They should be applauded for doing that, and simply encouraged to adopt the business practices of exceptional collaborative governance, to best serve the club and its members.

There are some relatively obvious solutions and my job is to turn that common sense in to common practice. This begins with a session analysing a questionnaire designed to shine a spotlight those common challenges, and then gradually applying the solutions that apply in your club.

There is clearly a reason that none of the FTSE 100 companies are run by committees.

Governance is too important

to the club’s success to be done haphazardly and it is time to bring the etiquette of the golf course in to the boardroom.

Improvements at your club do not come from a knee jerk pull on an emergency governance lever, but sustainable benefits are achieved with frequent gradual turns of a dial taking your club towards contemporary business practices in and around the board room. By following some simple practices you can achieve the ultimate goal where Directors Direct, Managers Manage, and the Members Enjoy.

Kevin Fish will be speaking at this year’s GCMA Conference, held

at De Vere Cotswold Water Park from November 10-12, 2019. Visit [gcma.org.uk/conference](http://gcma.org.uk/conference) for more information. 📞

**Is your club one that...**

- ...Makes things happen?....
- ... Watches things happen?....
- ...Or wonders what happened?....

**In a well-run modern club – the mantra of DD/MM/ME should be followed**

- Directors direct
- Managers manage
- Members enjoy

Dick Kopplin. – Kopplin, Kuebler & Wallace