
PCA *Plus*

A Letter Written Exclusively for Executives and Administrators of Private Clubs

September-October 2016

PLANNING AHEAD... The 100 days of summer have come to an end and for those of you who are yelling “Yay! The pool is closed!” it is now time to shift your focus to the fall and winter months. Seasonal clubs tend to program heavily in season and slow things down in the off-season but club industry experts warn there should never be an off-season.

“Club members pay dues 12 months a year,” said Frank Vain of The McMahon Group. “They expect programming and events year-round, not just in the busy season.” Providing family and kids’ activities all 12 months of the year can engage members and add value to your membership.

Even though your team may be ready to slow things down, get started on planning for the fall and winter so you can promote activities now while the club is still at the forefront of your members’ minds. (After a couple of much needed days off!)

A COMMUNITY FOR KIDS... Speaking of year-round programming for kids, Skip Avery, Executive VP of Chambers, has some great insight for clubs. “A vast majority of clubs are providing some sort of amenity for kids. The question is to what degree and finding the right balance for your membership,” he said in a recent Chambers blog.

According to Avery, clubs should take demographic shifts, such as older parents, into consideration and remember that grandparents may have grandchildren staying with them regularly. By focusing on the youth in your club community, you are not only creating legacy members, you are providing value to parents and grandparents, he explained.

It’s not about having a full-blown childcare center or full-time kids’ camp, Avery said. “It’s about choosing programs wisely and incorporating kids’ activities that make sense. Fund the kind of facilities to which your members will respond.”

Avery, a former club general manager, has some recommendations:

It’s not just about the holidays. Don’t only focus on the Easter egg hunts and the Halloween costume contests. Those are important but variety and consistency are more important. Consider a drive-in movie on golf carts or a dive-in movie in the pool.

Look beyond recreational activities. Every event doesn’t have to be about sports or outdoor activities. Try incorporating crafts, games or field trips to the local zoo or other attractions.

Don’t think in absolute terms. If simplicity in children’s activities is all you can achieve at this moment, that’s okay! Avoid the “all or nothing trap” as Avery calls it. If you can’t afford to go all out on activities with a fully staffed childcare program, consider less financially stressful options until you are in a better position to develop this aspect of your club experience. “Doing something is always better than doing nothing.”

Search for inspiration everywhere. If you need ideas for youth activities, look at what other clubs are doing. Don’t hesitate to call a fellow GM and pick his or her brain. See what other facilities in your area are doing to entertain kids and apply what you can. Or when all else fails, ask the kids themselves for ideas!

TRAITS OF HIGH PERFORMERS... Kurt Kuebler of Kopplin, Kuebler and Wallace, visits hundreds of clubs every year. In a recent seminar for club executives, he shared that “healthy clubs” tend to have a strong member component and a strong staff component. Both are equally important to the overall success of the club.

Here are a few things Kuebler noted that are significant factors in high-performing clubs:

- There are minimal politics and conflicts among members and staff.
- There is minimal confusion and a strong clarity in the mission, vision and core values. There is also a strong execution of those standards. “This means they’re all on the same page,” Kuebler explained.
- A high morale or satisfaction among both members and staff is evident and measured. “It’s not just an assumption or based on limited information,” he noted, “It’s actually measured regularly.”
- Efficiency is high. These clubs are no longer doing things because “that’s the way they’ve always done it.”
- Difficult decisions are made when they need to be made, even when they aren’t popular with some portion of the membership.
- They are conscious about succession planning for volunteers (boards and committees) as well as the staff. “This includes internship programs,” Kuebler added.
- A strong and thoughtful process of communication and education has been incorporated into the organization for both members and staff. “Education as opposed to reacting with defensiveness,” he said.

WHEN PROSPECTS CALL... Are staff members answering phone calls for the club expected to respond to questions from people inquiring about membership? If so, are they trained on what to say? In addition to explaining the member admission process at your club (which would seem a must), what are employees supposed to say?

When Karen Woodward, a training and development consultant, decided to call six country clubs at random to inquire about membership, she found all responses much the same. “I don’t know whether that is a good thing,” Woodward said. Club staff asked only two questions: did she play golf and did she play tennis?

These calls are an opportunity for staff to ask if the callers have questions about the club and its members

and to find out more about the callers. In addition to each caller’s contact information (address, phone number, email address), where does the caller work, is he or she single or married with a family, what are his or her interests, and the interests of the family? If inquiries are not directed to a club membership or marketing specialist, you may never know what kind of impression callers get about the club unless staffers answering the phones work from a script.

SYRINGE SAFETY... Do you have special containers for disposing of needles, razors and other sharp objects? While the idea may seem a bit extreme in the private club setting, the ease with which diabetics and others with health problems can now use syringes and needles, and the worry about contaminated blood, validate concerns about safe disposal. While custodial employees are obviously at risk, any employee or member could have a problem if he or she inadvertently reached into a trash can where sharp objects have been carelessly discarded.

Alan Achatz, a workplace safety consultant, suggests clubs have special receptacles called Sharps Containers in restrooms, locker rooms and any other areas where members and employees have privacy. Uline, the originating company (www.uline.com or 800-295-5510), offers Sharps Containers in one-quart to five-quart sizes.

INTERNAL CONTROLS... When it comes to financial management in a private club, or any business for that matter, Ned McCrory will tell you the cornerstone of good internal control is adequate segregation of duties.

While it may be a challenge in a club with limited staff, some simple safeguards are essential, McCrory said. “Restricting access to cash and member payments to those who do not post accounting records” is one example he gave. He also recommended dual signatures on checks and timely preparation of bank statements. “Periodic review of bank statements by someone other than the person performing the reconciliation—the general manager, for example—is a good practice,” he said. *(continued on page 4)*

Idea Bank

Say Cheese! This fall consider holding a Cheese 101 class. Rumson Country Club, Rumson, NJ, had a wine and cheese tasting event for members. The club partnered with a local cheese shop whose proprietor presented an educational lecture coupled with tastings of cheeses from around the world. Wine was paired to match. Members had a delightful evening of education and eating.

Employee Emergencies. Oakland Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, MI, created a Golden Rake Emergency Fund Program to provide financial assistance to eligible employees who were experiencing an emergency-related financial hardship (tornado, fire, flood, death in the family, etc.). The program is funded through donations from an employee run/walk event, a sponsored golf outing and other similar activities. Any full or part time employee who has worked at the club for a minimum of one year is eligible to apply for funding.

Princess Party. Princess Belle (from Beauty and the Beast) hosted a magical evening at Congressional Country Club, Bethesda, MD, and 39 princesses and one prince attended. An enchanted dinner was served followed by bingo, a jewel hunt, friendship stories and twirling etiquette. The attendees, fully dressed in costume, had a ball! (Pun intended!)

Elf on the Shelf. A holiday tradition in many homes is hosting an Elf on the Shelf for the days leading up to Christmas. The elf is a scout for Santa who reports back whether children should be on the naughty or nice list. Each morning the elf may be found in a different location and often gets into trouble. Both Druid Hills Golf Club, Atlanta, GA, and Ridglea Country Club, Fort Worth, TX, had great success engaging members of all ages with their club elves. Daily posts on the club's social media sites let members know where the elves were found each morning. It gen-

erated an excitement and holiday buzz among both members and staff.

Ice Ice Baby. If your club hosts a holiday party, this year change things up and try an interactive ice sculpture station. Sailfish Point, Stuart, FL, strategically placed two carved ice stations as the focal points of a newly renovated facility during its grand opening. The two freestanding manned stations were carved by expert ice carvers and really impressed members. One station was a sushi bar and the other was a 24 foot caviar station and vodka luge.

Caring Consideration. One of the four staff principles at Cherokee Town and Country Club, Atlanta, GA, is "We have heartfelt caring and respect for all." Intended to establish a genuine connection between management and line level staff, each manager is required to have a 30 minute meeting with every employee. A series of questions are asked to diagnose elements of job satisfaction such as fit, trust, communication and ownership. Questions include "What would you like to see changed at the club?" "What do you look forward to each day when you come to work?" and "Is there any job in particular you would like to learn?"

Is It Real? Last year Oklahoma City Golf & CC, Oklahoma City, OK, placed a decorated 34 foot evergreen tree inside the clubhouse for the holiday season! The most asked question was "Is it real?" The answer was "Yes!"

Send us your ideas and we'll feature them in the Idea Bank in an upcoming issue!

Email successful ideas, events, policies or programs implemented at your club to
pca@privateclubadvisor.com
or call 972-756-9037.

“Contracts for functions (member and nonmember) should be dual signed to ensure accuracy of pricing and terms consistent with policies,” he continued.

Another safeguard on what may seem to be innocent procedures: “Don’t have the same person accepting member payments and extending member credits,” McCrory advised. He described several cases where club employees obtained free goods and services from members in exchange for issuing credits to the members’ accounts.

SACRED COWS... We all have at least one at our clubs: the long tenured staff person that members love but causes numerous headaches for managers. If you go about the removal of one of these “sacred cows” at your club, here are a few things Luke O’Boyle, COO of Chevy Chase Club in Chevy Chase, MD, recommends you keep in mind:

Consistency. While it might seem important to give this person extra warnings, be sure your employee discipline process is consistent. Playing favorites could present additional challenges.

Advice. Seek legal counsel to ensure you are handling the process correctly.

Create Buy In. Engage the club president or executive committee and give them advance warning of the situation.

Communication. Assume any communication in writing (or verbally) will be shared with members. Make the person aware that sharing information could jeopardize the agreement. Confidentiality is key to minimizing collateral damage.

Celebrate. If you can celebrate the person’s years of service and allow him or her to leave on a high note, it’s worth it. This shows your appreciation of the employee’s dedication and gives members some closure.

Happy fall!



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