

THE CLUB PRESIDENT LOOKS AT HIS MANAGER

by

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THE DICTIONARY defines a profession as a calling or vocation which requires education. From my observation, I believe that the title "club manager" fulfills this definition of a profession. In fact, I think that serving for a few years as manager of even a fair-sized club is a liberal education in itself. Such a position requires some study of dietetics, of cost accounting and home economics, of interior decorating and engineering, combined with a certain knowledge of labor relations and, last but not least, an understanding of elementary psychology.

From a background covering nearly thirty years of experience as a member of a board of directors, house committee and officer of three fairly good-sized clubs, I will try to make a few observations which I hope will be helpful.

We hear a man referred to as successful. In certain ways I feel that such a statement is incomplete. Few individuals are successful by their own efforts alone, and in no field with which I am at all familiar is this more true than in club management. No club manager can be successful without the full confidence and cooperation of the officers, the board of directors and the committees, the membership at large and the other employees of the club of which he is the manager.

You may say that that is true of an executive in any line of business, but I believe it is more pronounced in club work than it is in most other lines. To use the organization of which I am currently the president as an example, I will ask you a

question: In what other line of business would the general manager be likely to have personal contact with a large proportion of 3,300 customers? In what other line of business would the personal likes and dislikes, the personal habits and wishes of so many become the problem of one manager and one or two of his top assistants?

Unreasonable Members

A large proportion of club members are amenable to reason. Some necessary rules and regulations may have to have explanations to satisfy the membership at large, but, unfortunately, human nature being what it is, there does crop up from time to time a member who cannot see why he cannot do this or so, why he cannot have this or that, regardless of the effect on other members or the problem that would be imposed upon the staff if his particular wishes were to be granted.

It is these cases that call for real diplomacy on the part of a club manager. He does not want to, nor should he have to, run to an officer or a committee member except in extreme cases, but he can only function well in this regard if he has the full cooperation and backing of his officers and committees, and also a full understanding of the reasoning which lies behind these rules and regulations under which he has to operate.

I have often wondered what guides the thinking of some people when they become members of a club. I am sure that the services that some of them demand in their clubs are not supplied in their homes or in the business institutions they represent, and I am sure could not be expected

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in some of the hotels they may visit. I have always tried (and so has our manager) to meet any reasonable request of any member as long as it does not interfere with the rights of other members and as long as it does not interfere with good economical management and operation.

I have had members tell me that they pay for their food at their club, they pay for their drinks, they pay for this and that, and then follow it up with the question: "So what do I get for my dues?"

Now, that is sometimes a hard question to answer specifically. In the first place, all clubs have departments that do not pay their own way through direct receipts.

It has always interested me to note that many club members will compare the price they pay for a meal in some small wayside inn and then frankly state (and it may be true) that the food they had was just as good as they get in the club. Sometimes it might be a little better, in their opinion.

However, they forget certain facts. They forget that their club probably is in a location of high taxes. They forget that surrounding grounds must be kept up and they are not revenue-producing. They forget that they perhaps have on their table the best quality of linen and things of that kind. They expect service at their clubs, sometimes at hours when they would not expect it in a comparable restaurant.

When Food is a Problem

I have found that one of the hardest things to do in the restaurant end of a club is to reduce the size of food service. Once it has been established, it becomes the privilege of certain people to eat that large portion regardless of whether they want it or not. Just have any of these club officers try to reduce the size of a portion that you serve in your club and then ask him to take the manager's job for the next few days. It would be an

education. You can learn more about human nature that way than any way I know of, and particularly the nature of some of your club members.

Special privilege is the cause of much of the world's unrest and is one of the hardest things that a club manager has to contend with. Many club members feel that their special wishes should be fulfilled without giving any consideration whatsoever to what is involved in that fulfillment. It is time, I think, that we on the boards take time to study our manager's problems.

I have often heard the complaint that charges for certain items around clubs were excessive. In club operation it is pretty hard to get a true distribution of overhead. In a manufacturing plant you can figure the rate for a certain machine tool and make a distribution of overhead to a fraction of a penny.

The life of a club manager is not always an easy one, but it can be a very interesting one. It requires the constant study and appraisal of those with whom he comes in daily contact, both the employees and, even more, the membership. On his judgment of a member may depend the successful handling of some criticism or suggestion which may seem small at first but which may be exaggerated into major proportions if it is not attended to correctly and promptly.

A manager must never play favorites among his members. In his eyes they must all be equal. They pay the same dues and have the same rights, whether they are a newly elected member, a member of the board or even the president.

The officers and the boards of most clubs are constantly changing. The manager must study these changes and adjust his line of approach and presentation of his problems to these changes. In many cases it may be necessary for him to educate those newly elected to a club office as to what has happened in the past and the reasons for certain regulations, and believe me, I am getting educated every day.