

NOTES ON FUNCTION OF HOUSE COMMITTEE

By

The Club Managers
Association of
America

"I'm certainly going to take this up with the house committee!"

This cry, anguished or plaintive, is frequently heard in virtually every club in the land. The chairman of the house committee walks a tightrope. He must, on the one hand, listen to and attempt to satisfy the members, and on the other hand support the club manager and his staff. To maintain proper balance is not easy.

Let us examine in depth the duties of this important and long-suffering club officer. Consider his position in relation to the membership, to the directorate, and to the management; the method of his election or selection; and the scope of his duties. The situation will vary from club to club of course, but the broad aspects remain essentially the same.

The Club Managers Association recently made a nationwide analysis of the by-laws and house rules of several hundred clubs, both large and small, city and country. Without exception these club regulations provided for the formation and functioning of a house committee; some in broad terms, others in more detail.

The chairman is almost invariably a member of the board of directors, normally appointed by the club president, but sometimes elected by the directors from among their body. Only rarely is the house committee chairman not a member of the board, and even then some board member serves on the committee. Sixty per cent of the time, the club president also designates who the committeemen shall be; in the remaining cases this decision is reached by the committee chairman. The number of members ranges between three and seven, and the club president is normally an ex-officio member.

Whatever the means by which this often thankless pinnacle is reached, the house committee chairman faces a formidable array of duties and responsibilities. However generally or specifically worded, club by-laws charge this group with the

responsibility for every facet of clubhouse operations. One club's rules are quite generalized:

"The House Committee shall be responsible for the clubhouse and its facilities; shall make periodic inspections thereof and shall make reports and recommendations to the Board."

Another club is much more specific: "The House Committee shall be comprised of five (5) members and shall have charge and supervision of the clubhouse and immediate premises; shall employ and discharge the manager and others who shall serve under their direction; shall make or authorize all necessary purchases and audit all accounts arising out of the conduct of the club; regulate the prices of articles sold at the clubhouse; receive and consider complaints; and have general supervision over the internal economy and regulation of the club and immediate premises and the personal property pertaining thereto. It shall have the power and it shall be its duty to make rules and regulations relating to the use and enjoyment of the clubhouse and immediate premises, and it shall perform such other and further duties as may be prescribed from time to time by the Board of Directors. All of its acts, however, shall be subject to the approval of the Board of Directors, to whom it shall report from time to time through its Chairman."

How can this man—with his own business to attend to, his own personal life to enjoy and all the other demands on his time and energy—accomplish this panorama of club activities? Patently it is not a one-man job; assistance is needed. How much, depends upon the scope of the club's activities. The small, informal facilities of a nine-hole golf course run for summer vacationers presents one problem. A caterer handles the limited food service; a trusted lockerman, perhaps a bartender and a houseman, often complete the clubhouse staff. Each reports indi-

vidually to the house chairman, probably to the golf professional in the chairman's absence. At the other end of the scale is the multi-million dollar, year round operation, with a total staff of more than one hundred. Here a general manager or executive director is essential. Between these two extremes lie the three thousand bona fide private golf clubs of America.

The average club finds it advantageous to employ a full-time manager to handle daily clubhouse operations. Usually employed by the board as a whole, his relationship with the house committee chairman is similar to the golf professional's and golf course superintendents' arrangements with their respective committees.

The board of directors enunciates policy in accordance with their understanding of membership desires. Management operates club facilities within the framework of these policies. Proper communication at this point spells the difference between good and mediocre operations. The house chairman must insure that the club manager clearly understands the policy, including all its ramifications and background thinking. Similarly, the manager must be equally certain the house chairman (and directors) are fully aware of results or consequences of a projected action. It is also the manager's responsibility to insure implementing orders are transmitted clearly and completely to the club staff.

In as much as the manager customarily attends board meetings, some house chairmen assume no further discussion is required and virtually turn their responsibilities over to the manager by default. This is unwise. Despite acceptance both professionally and socially, the manager is still an employee, and not always in a position to resolve problems of members on the same plane as an elected club official.

The house chairman need not be a decorator, builder, hotelman, or restaurateur; that is what the manager is for. Instead his best qualifications are an open mind, equable temperament, willingness to devote his time and talents. The position is not for a newcomer. This chairman must know the club's financial position and its policies.

In essence, it behooves the club president as captain of the ship, to insure he has a competent pilot in his house com-

mittee chairman. Similarly, it behooves both to make certain they have a good rudder in their manager. The first have responsibility and are due credit for guiding the ship, but neither can adequately perform the rudder's function and exert the forces necessary to keep it on course. Edgar Guest closed a poem about club managers with four lines that apply equally to a house chairman:

"And since their patience I have not
I'm grateful when I see one
That easier has been my lot,
For I could never be one."

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(signed) Charles H. Ward, Notary Public,
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