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## **How to Solve the Micro-management Curse**

Three steps to a better managed club

**By Richard Kopplin**

A few years ago a survey conducted by a respected consulting company revealed that almost forty percent of club general managers who leave their club for another management opportunity do so because of micro-management by their board or committees. Whenever I meet with a private club board I talk about what I call the “two curses of micro-management.”

If the club has a good general manager, he or she will become frustrated in a micro management environment and join the forty percent of his/her peers and seek employment elsewhere. Not a good situation. However, an even more deleterious result for the club is that a mediocre general manager will take advantage of the situation and will stay. He or she will recognize that with diluted responsibility it is difficult to hold the general manager accountable for anything and board meddling is the perfect subterfuge for sloppy management.

While it may be convenient for club general managers to blame the board for micro-management, often times it is the poor performance of the manager which necessitates a club board filling the leadership vacuum. Regardless, there are three proven strategies which you can take to solve the micro management curse and enjoy a better managed club.

**The first step is to define for both the manager and the board members what their respective roles are in the club.** This is actually easier than it sounds. Please note the “Activity/Decision Chart” which accompanies this article. The chart only outlines five items but in reality your club will have from one to a few dozen responsibilities that could be defined and identified by the board and club manager for this chart. What is important is not the number of activities but the fact that each decision is assigned to either the board or the manager for accountability purposes.

Whenever I present this chart to private club board members a vigorous discussion often ensues about the “day to day operations” category. Some board members are concerned about a chart which proclaims that they have no role in the daily management of the club. However, when we discuss the true role of the board as the oversight governance body, focused on policies and results, their concern is mitigated.

**The second step is to have a “performance description and review process” in place for your club general manager.** When I meet with private club managers and board members I often ask if they have written “job descriptions” in place for their general manager and other club employees. Most club officials raise their hands in the affirmative. I then surprise them by telling them to rip them up and throw them away. I would guess that most board members or general managers have never read them and I can guarantee you that the employees have never read them.

Instead, I suggest you create “performance descriptions” for the general manager and all club employees. What would you rather pay employees for every two weeks, their “job” or their “performance”? We need to scrap the old concept of job descriptions in private clubs and help employees create performance descriptions, which accurately describe what is expected of them on a daily basis. This is particularly important for the club general manager.

I prefer a straight forward one page performance description which will outline the five to ten key functions of your club general manager. These functions would be agreed to by the club president and the board so that the expectations of the general manager’s performance are clearly defined. Measuring the effectiveness of your club general manager then becomes a much easier process than the typical annual review which everyone dreads.

Whenever it is apparent to the club president or the board that a general manager is lacking in an area of performance the manager can be advised to self correct before the lack of performance becomes a serious issue. Since the general manager has provided input for the performance description and has endorsed the key functions as outlined, it should be an easy process to correct the deficient behavior.

Often, micro management by board members results from a general manager not performing in some of the key areas that are defined in the performance description. Rather than waiting for an annual review the club president and board can help the manager to focus on correcting the behavior.

**The third key step is to develop a “strategic plan” for the club.** It has been my observation, in working with over two hundred private clubs, that the clubs which have taken the time to create a strategic plan seldom experience micro management in their operations. A clearly defined blueprint will provide stability and continuity in club governance.

Clubs without a strategic plan will often have a “knee jerk” reaction to issues or respond based on the whims of the current president. The next president may have a view totally opposite on a key issue and the direction of the club is now altered with some potentially serious consequences.

Micro management occurs when club boards have not taken the time to agree on a long term philosophy and direction for the club. Since there is not a foundation in place which provides a framework for solving problems at the club, the “attitude of the day” seems to prevail. The results are not only disruptive for the board but also the management team which is attempting to respond to a variety of shifting and changing viewpoints.

If you believe your club may a micro management problem, the first curative step is to define where the responsibility lies for the various decisions and activities in the club. The board and general manager should also determine if there are meaningful “performance descriptions” in place for every employee. And finally, the club board should insure that a “strategic plan” is in place or the process for such a plan is underway.

When the above three steps are accomplished, the general manager and the club board will feel confident of their roles in providing the best management and governance possible for their club.

<b>ACTIVITY/DECISION</b>	<b>BOARD</b>	<b>GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Budget	Approves	Recommends and provides Input
Capital purchases	Approves	Prepares requests
Personnel policies	Adopts	Recommends and administers
Staff evaluations	Evaluates only General Manager	Evaluates all others
Day-to-day operations	No role	Makes all management decisions