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**EUREKA!!!!**

**I FOUND IT! THE SECRET FOR BEING A GREAT BOARD MEMBER!**

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After working with more than four hundred private clubs and thousands of club board members over the past thirty- five years I am confident I have discovered the secret for being a great board member.

Club members who agree to dedicate hours of their personal time to private club board duty come in all shapes and sizes. They have all types of career experiences and range in age from the up and coming X or Y generation, to the baby boomers, to the maturing retirees. Political and religious beliefs can differ as much as their personal and family use of the private club experience.

There will be varying degrees of dedication, passion and commitment as each of these board members tackle their roles. Some will lead their assigned committees effectively and others will assume a more passive role.

But there is one trait that will set the great private club board members apart from "those who also served." It may not be evident at first and it may take some careful observation but if you look closely you will find a few of these superstars in every private club boardroom.

What is that distinguishing characteristic that sets these club leaders apart? What is the trait that the most successful board members possess? What is the reason these superstars have gained the respect of the rest of the board and the great majority of members?

The secret that great board members have discovered is the ability to ask the right questions. Not the most questions, but the right questions. They have learned to effectively communicate, not by dominating the conversation but rather by asking some key questions.

One of those questions might be "As a new board member what kind of orientation process will the general manager provide as I begin my duties?" The most effective board members have experienced a thorough orientation, which provides them the framework to make informed, rational decisions. This orientation includes a complete physical review of all club assets and an introduction to all club department managers.

Another question is often, "Are the roles and responsibilities for the board members, the general manager and the department managers defined in writing?" Model clubs have clearly outlined the role of board members in the governance of the club and the role of the general manager and department managers in the day-to-day management of the club. This practice discourages "coloring outside of the lines" which can happen without written guidelines.

A frequently asked question is “Has the club engaged in a strategic planning process and do we have a written report that is updated on a yearly basis?” Even the most prestigious and recognized private clubs have developed a strategic plan that provides a template for on going success. Clubs that are not engaged in this process may find that they will be transitioning in the future to semi-private status, or become a good candidate for takeover by a management company.

A favorite question that outstanding board members often ask, is “Does the Board have a list of ‘norms and expectations’ that provide a guideline for the monthly board meetings?” Without agreement on the norms and expectations, club board meetings can drift into hours of directionless chatter, rather than ninety minutes of meaningful discussion.

An important question that is often asked is “How can we as board members effectively support the General Manager/Chief Executive model of club management?”

The best-managed and best-governed clubs today have clearly embraced this management concept because many club board members can easily relate to how effective this model is or has been during their business careers.

A key question that effective board members ask is “How do we ‘circle the wagons’ and create a productive governing environment for each of our fellow board members?” Board members need to respond to any issues raised by club members but they also need to separate the comments from personal attacks on fellow board members. Sometimes club members need to be reminded of the dedication and commitment board members have selflessly made to their club.

A frequently asked question is “How can we as board members demonstrate a ‘unity of purpose’ once we have made a decision?” It doesn’t matter if an issue has been decided unanimously or by a close vote. What matters is that once the board members leave the boardroom, everyone supports the board decision and the details of those discussions are left in the boardroom.

There are many other questions outstanding board members will ask during their tenure but certainly those seven are commonly heard in club boardrooms around the country.

The secret to being a great board member is not how much you have to say but rather how good are the questions that you ask.