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Perverse Consequences----Unintended Outcomes!

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Many have thought of such issues when it comes to situations like a inventing a new ‘wonder drug’ that saves many lives, only to save the life of the mother who then gives birth to the next Adolf Hitler. True perverse consequences!

In the club world, to a clearly much less evil and catastrophic outcome, well-intended boards and executive leadership will often be part of a decision to accommodate one group or suggestion, only to later find that it greatly impacts, usually in a negative fashion, a whole array of other variables.

Consider, for example, how a recent club we visited had decided a few years ago to allow anyone who had an interest was appointed to serve on a committee. In fact, they expanded the number of committees from something like eight to twenty-eight, simply with the goal in mind “to involve as many members as possible in having a voice in their club.” *Great intentions---unintended outcomes!*

The significant increased participation of members in their club was tremendous. Unfortunately, as it was explained after the fact to us, it also gave rise to anyone with ‘an agenda’ to be placed on committees, including those who wanted to change the chicken salad recipe at lunch, those who wanted new, ‘twenty times the normal cost’ sand in every bunker to better accommodate their own +2 handicap (despite that fact that all the sand was new six months earlier), and finally, several of those who wanted five, not two types of cookies in the bridge rooms. And, all complimentary at that!

So, the twenty-eight committees now had an average (seriously!) of twenty-seven people serving on each one! Most of whom had a clear-cut agenda. And, you know where the GM/COO and Departmental managers were? In meetings most of the week, following up on what they were “assigned” by the committees the prior week!

After a year or so of this, most of the management team turned over out of frustration of their own with the committees, or out of frustration with them by the committees! And, the ones who stayed? They were ones who should have been gone, but who had figured out how to have their committee do most of the work they should have been doing!

After three more years, and pretty much three more ‘turns’ of the management team (except, again, those on the management team who actually deserved to be moved out), a new President was seated. He clearly recognized that the club had become the definition--doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result! He told the rest of

the board that this wasn't going to continue "on my watch," and he promptly led the search for a new GM/COO. And, let him find his team. The key, however, was that THEY were the ones who were going to be held accountable. But, to do so, the 'out of control' committee first had to be disbanded. Which he did to the protestations of many.

The perverse consequences---unintended outcomes of the initial decision to open the floodgates to member participation was reversed. Four years later, the club has a 94% member satisfaction rate (compared to the low 50's during the height of the unintended outcomes) and is thriving, despite the economic challenges impacting nearly every club around it.

We see many unintended outcomes in our travels to clubs around the country each week. They range from a well-intended decision to create a 'new' senior category, only to find that a few years later, a majority of members actually qualify for the new, lower dues paying level, leaving the club well short of necessary working capital! Or, the one to allow pull carts to accommodate the more health conscious golfers, without first studying the fact that several hundred thousand dollars of cart fee revenues would be lost. Or, the one that seems most prevalent---those situations where improper behavior by a member is not addressed "for fear of losing their dues revenue and support of the club," only to learn that several other members have actually left because such bad behavior is never addressed!

There is often no way to anticipate the perverse consequences of decisions, but in many cases, a stronger focus on removing the 'personal, and often self-serving emotion' from club decisions and putting each decision up against the simple measure of "is this the right thing to do, and is it the right thing for the club in the long term?"

Sounds simple and common sense. Too bad it isn't common practice.

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