Govern Better With Chair Rotation
-Your entire club will benefit from a logical system of officer succession
By Richard Kopplin

If you want to have a model club operation you need a seamless transition from one president to the next. While every private club is governed by a set of by-laws that will vary from club to club there is one critical area the best-governed clubs have in common; they have provided for an orderly transition from the outgoing to the incoming club president.

The "perfect governance rotation model" I am going to describe has been successfully used for more than thirty years by a very recognized and established club in the Mid-West. I would suggest that replicating this model, or some variation of it, would allow your club to enjoy similar success and stability in the area of board governance.

Our model club has thirteen board members. They include nine regular board members, the club treasurer, the vice-president, the club president and the past president who serves as a non-voting member.

Step Number One: The ad-hoc nominating committee has received suggestions for three new board candidates to be elected to three-year terms. There will be a slate of three candidates nominated for the three open seats on the board. Each of these candidates would serve a three year term. Additionally, the nominating committee is recommending one candidate for the position of club treasurer. The candidate for this position has often served a full three-year term on the board or at least a year or two. Occasionally, candidates who have not served on the board but have served on a club committee might also be nominated. By the way, this club actively solicits the recommendations of the club general manager for both the club treasurer candidate position and the board candidates since he/she is often one of the best resources for knowing which club members would serve the club in a dedicated and non-partisan manner.

Step Number Two: The election at the annual meeting results in three new board members who will serve three-year terms and a new club treasurer. Once elected treasurer the officer moves automatically into the vice-president's chair the following year and the president's chair the next year.

Step Number Three: The newly elected board members join with the existing board and three new officers at the first board meeting. There will typically be three new board members joining six on-going board members. Additionally, the past club president, who will remain on the board for another year as a non-voting member, will join the new club president who has moved into that chair from the vice-president's position, the new vice-president who has moved into that chair from the treasurer's position and the new club treasurer who was elected at the annual meeting.

The reason this club has enjoyed stability in governance and management through the years is because of the sincere desire of the elected board members and officers to insure that only committed and dedicated members volunteer to serve the club. Many club presidents have served a three-year term as a board member before they were nominated for the club treasurer's position so their entire length of service to the club board, including one year as past president, was seven years.
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Why would your club consider a similar method of governance? Two very compelling reasons; First, you will develop continuity in the governing philosophy of the club. There will not be any radical change of direction which is often detrimental to private clubs. Second, you will enjoy consistency and stability in the management of the club. An effective and perspicacious club manager will have a great opportunity to work with the key leader of the club, the club president, over a period of three years, as he/she moves through the officer chairs.

Sometimes a club board will be reticent about enacting a process, which would allow for chair rotation because they believe it will require a by-laws change. If that is the case, change the by-laws. The dramatic improvement in the governance of your club will more than compensate for any time and effort required to update your club by-laws. If you sincerely desire to develop a model club operation you need to have an orderly transition from club president to club president. An effective method of chair rotation will allow you to do that.