

## **Who Are You?**

### **Discovering “Who You Is” On The Commodity to Community spectrum**

2004

**Gregg Patterson, General Manager  
The Beach Club**

#### **The “Hmmm” Moment**

You're sitting in the club bar slurping down your second blended margarita, decompressing after a long day fighting the corporate wars, reading through the agenda of the upcoming board meeting---your first!---preparing yourself for a bit of “rubber stamping”. Nothing complicated here. Continuing reciprocity with clubs Big, Middle and Small. Approving a sponsorship request for a function hosted by the executive secretary for a member's third cousin's second wife's estranged daughter. Extending course privileges to Fire Station Number One. Issuing a two-week guest membership for Joe the Used Car Salesman's tire supplier from Detroit. Mailing an invitation for the Club's annual October Brew Meister Dinner and Keg Party to the membership of the Hill and Dale Country Club. Approving the budget for the coming fiscal year with projections of more, more, more---more functions, more new memberships, more cash to the bottom line. Nothing important. Hmmmmm??? You order another blended and begin to ponder “the big picture.” An issue is surfacing through the growing haze. Who are we?

#### **Commodity or Community**

Who “you is” is complicated. What you do is a matter of public record. But the reasoning behind each decision is more hidden, more touchy-feely, less obvious. Are you “who you want to be” or are you doing one thing while preaching another? Are your facts at odds with your philosophy?

“Facts is only facts” until you examine facts with principles. Principles are the bricks used to build club culture. They guide decisions. They provide explanations. “We do what we do because---we're a broad spectrum family club; we're a men's golf club; we're a food and wine club; we're a private hotel / restaurant catering to the elite of the world.” One club's “too many functions” is another club's “cash cow.” One club's “family new year's eve” is another club's “hostile take-over by the younger generation.” It's all about principles. Who are you?

It is often the case that people---“people” meaning both members and staff---will join or leave a club because of where they see it on the community to commodity spectrum. As with universities, some “like ‘em big” and some “like ‘em small.” There are advantages to both. How people weigh those advantages depends on their perspective and their relative need for commodity (big translating into “more stuff”) or community (small translating into more “broad based relationships”).

### Community or commodity---who are you?

Every club falls somewhere on the commodity-community spectrum. Every club has things---goods, services, programs, facility---which are commodities. They can be reproduced elsewhere, manufactured, replicated. Every club has people---staff, members, guests, relationships---who are its community. The type of community is defined by the intimacy of its relationships. Communities, unlike commodities, are unique and can't be easily replicated, manufactured or opened to outsiders.

The more “accessible” your commodities are---goods, services, facilities, programs---the more of a “commodity club” you have. The less “accessible” your community is to outsiders, the more a “community club” you have. Who you are can be seen in what you do. It's all about “who's first”---members first, bottom line first, me first.

There are moments when every club stretches from its stated concept of self. Principles are violated. If your club is committed to building community, “who you are” can be seen in how far you'll “stretch” from the concept of club as community. How do you fill those empty hotel rooms on weekends? What do you do to get those functions in the front door? Who promotes? Who invites? Who sponsors? If your club is committed to building commodity (new dining rooms, new irrigation system, new computer systems) and accumulating the dollars to do so, how far will you go to restrict function business? To attract “the affluent” at the expense of a broad spectrum member community? How far will you “stretch” from “self” to achieve another goal not necessarily consistent with your definition of club?

Different clubs sell different things. There's no “right” or “wrong” unless what you're selling is inconsistent with who you think you are or who you want to be. Understanding the “community to commodity spectrum” and where you are on that continuum provides insight into your club culture. Knowing “who you is” will help boards and managers make good club decision.

Who you are---commodity or community---is revealed each day in the decisions made by boards, management and staff. You are what you do.

Time for an audit.

## **The “Who You Are” Quiz**

A club is what it does. Behavior is everything. Action defines self. Principles underpin action. Who are you?

Quizzes can clarify “who you is” to management, directors and new members. Quizzes are fun. People like to be challenged. They think they “know” and in their arrogance wants to be quizzed.

Quizzes can reveal truths and guide decision making. So consider giving your new manager and new board members the “Community or Commodity Quiz.” Here’s how it goes.

Develop a list of questions focused on specific club behaviors. Make some of the questions true or false, others “fill in the blanks” and still others open ended. See how the “testee’s” answers comport with “what is.” Discuss their answers. Explain why “what is” is as it is. Discuss whether “what is” should be “is” in the future.

You’ll soon notice that “what is” and “what should be is” are different. What’s laid out in the Bylaws or the House Rules isn’t always done. Intents are perverted over time. Rules that were clear become hazy. Circumstances force compromise. Decision makers stretch core principles to accommodate situations.

The Commodity to Community Quiz should deal in reality. Answers must acknowledge current behaviors and practices. Deal in the facts. Be honest---don’t talk “house rules” if the reality is quite different. (The Rule---all functions require a member sponsor. The Practice---a sponsor will be found (wink, wink) who’ll be willing to sponsor.) Discuss inconsistencies. Debate “right and wrong” as part of the process.

Quizzes give insight into the collective club psyche. Quizzes reveal culture. Who are you?

### **a. Reciprocity:**

1. How many clubs are on your club’s reciprocity list?
2. Can reciprocating club members use the club without a member host?
3. Can reciprocating members bring guests?
4. Can reservations be made by the visiting member, or must the club member make the reservations?

### **b. Private Functions:**

1. Can members sponsor non-member events?
2. Does your club have “phantom hosts” to sponsor private functions?
3. Who approves sponsored events?

4. Is the inconvenience of outside events explained away by telling members they keep the dues down?

**c. Admissions:**

1. How long does it take to process a candidate?
2. How many members must the candidate know and for how long must they know them?
3. How long must a member be a member before being allowed to sponsor a candidate?

**d. Guests:**

1. Are extended family members given special guest consideration?
2. Can guest cards be issued to locals?
3. Are multi-week guest cards issued?
4. Must the member be present when the guest visits?

**e. Members:**

1. Do most members recognize most other members?
2. Do most members know the names of most members they see?

**f. Staff:**

1. Do most staff recognize most members?
2. Do most members recognize most staff?
3. Do most staff know the names of most members and staff?

Create the quiz. Discuss each question. Talk behaviors and principles. Explain “what is,” why “what is” is; where “what is” puts the club on the commodity spectrum; and whether “what is” should be different in the future. Want to change “what is?” If “what is” isn’t what “what should be,” become a change agent.

Who are you?

**Know Your Place, Like Your Place or Switch Places**

It’s all about behaviors. Are your club’s current behaviors---House Rules, Bylaws, policies and procedures---consistent with who “you want to be” on the commodity to community spectrum? You are what you do. Who are you?

Listen for symptoms.

Angst over “who you are” translates into moans and groans. Are members moaning because function guests are parking in prime parking locations? Are the “dues too high?” Do members regret not having the newest gym equipment and the best dining room china? Have you heard members complaining about all those “new members” who are flooding the clubhouse? Do board members justify functions because “you need the cash?” Is the first comment made about the food that’s served or the people who serve it? Is the first comment made about golf the people in your foursome or the designer who made the course? Does the behavior (take your pick!) build that “bond of brotherhood” or diminish it? Is cash truly king? Do relationships trump everything?

Examine “who you is” on the community to commodity spectrum. Ask tough questions. Begin the dialogue.

Who are you?

And enjoy the journey-----