

Bogey Men

Bogey Men???

Can you remember the moment when your first boogie man arrived on the scene?

You were sitting in the bar, the best back nine you've ever played now history, basking in the glory of this never to be repeated round, savoring your new role as club president, enjoying a cocktail or two with your boss and two of your long time friends. You have that warm and fuzzy feeling. The table beside you has four of the "Mafia Group"---each, if the truth be told, an ethically challenged golfer ---becoming increasingly boisterous as they do their "men thing" after a round or two of golf. Suddenly the most boorish and vocal of the group turns to your table, points to you and says "He's the President! He and the entire board are all a bunch of boobs. The manager pushes them around. He's paid too much and does too little. They're to blame. And that's why the dues are going up again..." You prepare to attack and maul this animal but the decorum of your 125 year old club holds you back. He continues to rant at the top of his voice. Your boss looks at you like you've got the plaque and your friends try to crawl under the table. Your glow becomes heartburn. The bogey-man---in this case, the scheming manager and the easily manipulated boobs on the board---, the bane of all authentic, dues paying members, has escaped his cage and is roaming unchecked through the clubhouse.

Whenever decisions are made that people disagree with, or policies are adopted which eventually fail, people look for explanations. Rational people address the problem, gather the facts, analyze the facts, draw a conclusion, articulate that conclusion and wait for the feedback to, if necessary, rethink their conclusion. However, even rational people can become emotional in their reasoning. When that occurs, an end run is made around rational thought and bogey-men are found to blame and to explain why something went wrong.

All clubs have bogey-men. Some of them are unique to a particular club but more often than not they're creatures familiar to any member at any club anywhere in the country. "The Board simply replicates itself each year." "Everyone on the Board thinks alike." "No-one wants our opinion." "Even though they listen, nobody does anything." "We're becoming a public club, what with all the non-member events we're having lately." "The Board is simply an old boys club, and it's closed to outsiders." "The manager tells the board what to do." "The manager is a wimp--he never tells the board what to do." You've heard it before and you'll hear it again. Bogey men are real, like it or not, lurking in the shadows ready to emerge and to terrify the board, committees and management team.

The "Boogie Men Mentality" breeds rumors. People love rumors because rumors are dull stories that become more interesting when the facts are embellished. Rumors dramatize facts. Rumors are safe because the "slurred one" can't respond. Bogey men are born, used and manipulated by rumor mongers to stimulate a response in those who are already inclined to think "bogey-ish" or are otherwise rational beings, bored with the subject and the person discussing it.

The need for bogey men is hardwired into our genetic code. "There be dragons out there." The world is a scary place, prepare yourself. It's part of the human condition. At some point even the reasonable ask--- "who did this to us? Who is the cause of our distress?" It only takes a double vodka rocks or too many cups of caffeine for people to begin playing the "Blame Game." Bogey men are used by the advocates of a given position to get the attention of people who are at best mildly interested in a subject or, at worst (at least for the true believer) completely indifferent to it. People who are chronically unhappy in their personal and professional lives see villains everywhere. Their unhappiness can't be of their own making. Somebody else is to blame. Villains exist. Bogey men are conspiring against "real members." Everybody

they talk to “agrees” with them. All “authentic members” agree that these evils need to be exposed, condemned, destroyed. In clubs, it’s only natural that the most convenient targets---boards, managers, committees and guests---become the bogey men of choice.

You shouldn’t be alarmed by the presence of bogey men. They have always and will always exist. When one is put to rest, others will be created. People fabricate and embellish bogey men because their emotional selves need demons to blame. Don’t condemn them. Manipulate them. Work with them. Take the offensive. Use their presence to your personal, professional and political advantage.

That being said, the pain caused by rabble rousing members is very real and difficult to escape. If you’ve skin thin enough to hear member needs then you’ve got thin enough skin to be hurt by bogey men comments.

You need to defend yourself. Here’s how.

Overcoming Boogie Men

The truth is that most people are emotionally driven. They will believe whatever they want to believe. We’re all predisposed to hear those things which comfort our existing notions of the good and to reject those which don’t. The bogey man mentality taps into the very core of our emotional being. That being said, bogey men are hard to defeat and even tougher to bury. But it can be done.

First of all you’ll need to develop a siege mentality and psychic resilience---accept that you’ll be under fire for a very long time. Secondly you’ll need to develop offensive communications to weaken the siege. This is a war not a skirmish. It won’t be quick. The process of transforming those who believe in a particular bogey men into those who no longer do takes time. People say that the “truth will always win in the long run,” and that may well be true, but the journey is a slow one, frustratingly so at times and it requires patience, perseverance and thick skin. Think pain. Accept the need for the siege mentality, for offensive communications and for patience.

Truth doesn’t spring forth clear, whole and obvious. It evolves out of the rumor mill. You need to understand the process and be patient. Experience has taught me that truth tends to come in three stages. Let me give you an example from the real world. Take the bogey man notion that the general manager actively solicits non-member function business to the detriment of the club’s privacy and quality of life. Although this might be a patently false statement, the idea has power because it seems to explain why more people are using the club than ever before and that a lot of those users are complete unknowns to the complaining member. During an encounter in the bar with an agitated member, a second year director tries to discuss function realities in a reasoned way but the member who sees bogey men (Stage One) responds violently to the very notion that these so-called facts are true. He denigrates the speaker and gets personal by condemning him and the other “boobs” on the board. After a series of articles in the newsletter and an open forum with the membership, this same person---now slightly toned down by the facts and the reasoned comments of their peers--- (Stage Two) ridicules the notion that these facts have any relationship whatsoever to the truth. However, it’s become a little tougher for this member to be as irrational as before since his audience has more of the facts than they previously had and are less inclined to be swept up in his or anyone else’s emotional assault on function business. The member’s no longer violent, but has become dismissive of the board’s explanations. Finally, (Stage Three) the outsider agitator is brought onto the Strategic Planning Committee where the manager and chairman review the facts with the committee, solicit the agitator’s input on the bogey men in question, respond to his and their comments, build consensus amongst the committee, after which the bogey advocate agrees that the truth---as has been stated from day one---is truly self evident. The once angry member, now a convert, has become an advocate of “the truth” and, during conversations at the bar, third tee and Starbucks, discusses “the truth” as if it had been self-

evident from the beginning. Truth evolves, and you do it by defeating the bogey men one bogey man at a time.

People will imagine bogey men whenever they feel disenfranchised, without a voice, un-represented or under-represented. One of the most important strategies, therefore, is to listen to the disenfranchised and to genuinely engage them in conversation. Don't run away from them when they approach. Don't be a mystery personality at the club. Be open to encounters in the hallways, at the bar, on the course or during lunch in the grill. This sometimes painful strategy means that the general manager, committee chairmen and board members need to "walk and talk" around the club, make a point of speaking and listening to people no matter how painful. Go out of your way to speak to members and staff, be visible and accessible. Encourage their comments. Start e-mailing them every few days. Keep them updated and in the loop. Write a couple of articles for the newsletter addressing their issues, giving their thoughts and responding in a reasoned way with your own. Embrace your enemies---put them on committees, give them a forum of their peers, let the dialogue begin. As the old Sicilian saying goes, keep your friends close and your enemies even closer.

If there's an army of bogey men confronting you, now might be the time to get radical. How about opening up board and committee meetings to observers? Hold off on the truly sensitive stuff, build in time for issues from the floor, let people see the debate. Few will ever show up, but knowing that they can will diminish the bogey factor. And those who do show will discover that some very clever, reasoned people are debating and discussing the very issues they previously thought the boobs on the board were ignoring.

How about publishing articles dealing with bogey men issues you've addressed in board and committee meetings? Don't lose them in dull columns like "Summary of the Board Minutes" or "Comments from the President." Nobody reads the stuff because it's usually a snore. Get imaginative. Take the juicy stuff and give it full play in its own column. Use catchy headings that capture the imagination---"Board Considers Assessing Senior Members to Fund Youth Clubhouse Renovation"--- and let the boogie men emerge. People will read it. The truth will be told and the bogey men will recede.

Put a President's Suggestion Box out at the front desk then publish (anonymously, of course!) each "publishable" comment monthly in the newsletter. The stuff is fun to read and very entertaining. Let the bogey men out of their cages---then defuse the emotion with a calm and reasoned response. The same is true for letters to the editor and letters to the board---share the comments with your members (they know controversy exists and love reading about it) and give them a reasoned response.

And once you've taken measures addressing specific bogey men---remember, there's a kernel of truth in every bogey man exposed!---publish what you've done so that the members will know that you've not only listened and discussed but have acted.

Enjoy the Process

Nothing mysterious about having bogey men. They've always been and will always be. Defeat one and another will arise. Enjoy the process of attack and response.

And there's nothing all that mysterious about conquering a particular bogey man. Develop an in-it-for-the-long-haul siege mentality, adopt offensive communications to weaken the siege, walk and talk with members and staff, enfranchise your bogey advocates through the committee process, develop transparent

decision making, publish bogey man comments, address the legitimate concerns at the core of those comments and then let the members know what you've done.

The more you work at defeating specific bogey men, the easier it will be to do so in the future. Creating a club culture that embraces member enfranchisement, transparency and action will reduce the power and the sting of the bogey men you encounter as manager, president or board member.