

The Sound and the Fury---So You Think Your Members are Different???

These Characters are so Strange

Every club is filled with unique personalities. Managers and Boards love to moan and groan about their oddball members. “Poor us. Have pity.”

But wait. If you look a little more closely at each of these characters, you’ll see that they’re not so unusual after all. Strange, perhaps, but by no means unique.

Next time you’re caught in a two hour debate with one of your members over the number of dimples in a golf ball, the number of sprinkler heads on a given fairway or the reasons for denying assigned parking to grandchildren of founding members, be comforted by the knowledge that others have heard the same conversations before, that the characters you’re speaking to have surfaced elsewhere in another incarnation and that there’re really no mysteries in the human condition that you’ve not already encountered or are likely to encounter in the hallways of your very own club.

Anyone even vaguely connected to the club business should be familiar with the personality types they’re likely to encounter. New staff, new members, new committee members, new boards and your new manager all need to know the enemy and fortify their emotional defenses. Cynicism, self-pity, fear, and loathing will fill your psychic crevasses if you think that “club people are different” from all those bizarre characters you encounter at the local grocery store. They’re not, though the expression of each personality type may be somewhat different in your pro shop than in the local Safeway on a Saturday afternoon.

And a bit of advice to managers and members---don’t imagine that leaving the club you’re at, with its “strange collection of characters”, will provide escape from these personality types. It doesn’t and it won’t. You may leave, you may experience the honeymoon embrace of a new club and a different community, but the fantasy will end and you’ll be confronted by the same characters, dressed a bit differently and looking a little older or a little younger, and you’ll say to yourself, “I’ve met these characters before.” Enjoy knowing that they’re really your intimates, companions on the road you’ve traveled, friends for any journey to come.

I’ll Bet You’ve Met Me Before

I’ll make a bet that you’ve run into the same idiosyncratic personalities where you are as I have here in coastal California. If you have---and I’m sure you have--- consider us brothers and sisters in the Club Adventure. Let me give you some examples from a very large encyclopedia of personality types. Enjoy the reunion!

The “I’m an Expert in any subject and you’re going to get the benefit of my knowledge whether you like it or not” Member---No matter the subject, this person has the answer. They don’t discuss, they tell you the solution with a certainty that eludes rational thinkers. They denigrate the opposition and are hostile toward other opinions. They know, you don’t, end of story.

The “I’ve only got one issue I care about, and it may be inconsequential to everyone else, but I’m going to remind you of it every time we meet whether you want to hear about it or not” Member---This character has a pet issue---the width of the parking spaces, the way the oldest tree on the property was trimmed, the type of free razors you provide in the locker room---and they’ll remind you of the issue and its resolution (or lack thereof!) each and every time you pass them in the hallway. Escape is impossible, evasion is fruitless.

The “I remember when the club was really great, it’s too bad that those days are gone and I have to admit that the whole place and everyone it have gone to hell in a hand basket” Member----- These members have succumbed to the universal lament that “the good old days” are gone and that everything since has been a downhill slide. They have selective memory, they’re creating a fantasy past that never existed and they’re using those myths to beat and bruise board members, management and any members too young to remember the good old days.

The “I’m mad as hell and you’ll never do enough to stop me from being mad as hell because the real reason I’m mad as hell has nothing to do with the club” Member----- You’ve seen these characters drive into the lot with a cloud following their Lexus. Perhaps they’ve just discovered that their teenage daughter has eloped, that they’ve been forced into bankruptcy by their ne’er-do-well brother in law or that they’ve got indigestion from the three pound lobster they ate the night before---regardless, they’re in a nasty mood and ready to bite. The smallest issue will touch them off---the number of leaves on the ground in the parking lot, the quality of brass polish used on the entry door, the floral arrangement in the lobby. The member explodes with indignation, apologies are offered and the member continues raging throughout the day in spite of free drinks, free food, free car wash and a free shoe shine. If they’re looking for a reason to rage and bellow, they’ll find a reason to do so. Like the old adage says, “if you want to beat a dog you can always find a stick.”

The “The Manager is nothing but a babbling bubble headed puppet of the board of directors” Member----- This member is looking for bogeymen to blame for any ills, perceived or imagined. Members can smell weakness if that’s what they want to smell. A decision’s been made and they’re agitated ---breakfast has been eliminated, dues have gone up, the tea bags are different. They want to “vent” and need a target. They look around for someone who’s vulnerable to attack. Ah, the club manager---perhaps someone who’s a bit too timid, too respectful, too low key in their conversations or a little too hesitant with their explanations, a “wimp”, a stooge of the board, their rag doll. Dangerous stuff since organizations tend to eat up and spit out those who are perceived as weak, whether they are or are not weak. For whatever reason, they want the manager “gone” because their spinelessness is the root of all evils.

The “Board members are nothing but babbling bubble headed puppets of the general manager” Member-----This member is looking for bogeymen to blame for any ills, perceived or imagined. Strong managers, popular with the general membership, financially astute, visible and articulate, become an easy target for a whispering campaign denigrating them and the board. This type of member spins any decision into “the manager said, the Board members did” type of thing, smearing them both with a single comment, hoping to weaken their resolve and have some policy or other reversed or diminished. For whatever reason, they want the manager “gone” because their strength, industry knowledge and public relations skills are seen as hammers for the pursuit of their, and not the members’, vision of the club. After all, the club is supposed to be run “for the members.”

The “I can’t tell you how happy I am to tell you have bad things are” Member----- We’ve all encountered this member before---smiling and chatty as they tell you how perfectly horrible the new dinner rolls are, how the toilets exploded in the locker room, how the plants have all died and how no other clubs (and they’ll name a couple of your rivals to drive the point home!) do it as badly as you do here at their club. You made their day and they’re deeeee-lighted that you did!

The “I’m on a committee now and it’s time to get some of those freebies that everyone on a committee deserves and gets” Member-----Some people have the notion that the club should be as generous to its directors and committee members as World Com, that the perks should flow as they might at Enron. “Now that I’m on the inside, it’s a good time to get some of the goodies that come with power,

status, prestige and hard work.” These characters need an orientation to Committee Consumption Ethics since they love to “take and tell,” spreading the notion that member service deserves proper compensation.

The “I want the good old events from the good old days back again whether anyone will come or not, whether we’ll lose money or not and I’m going to hound you until you do it” Member-----This is the character that seems to remember that the “good old events in the good old days” (black tie New Year’s Eve with Guy Lombardo; Big Band Swing Night; costume night in Rio) were the best ever and would be once again if only someone (other than them!) would get off their duff and start organizing and promoting and spreading the word. They forget to mention that people came because they were blackmailed into doing so (“Remember, each of you is responsible for filling one table of twelve!”). They fail to understand that moods change, fashion changes, interests change and that programs need to change to capture these changes. They refuse to accept that their “good old days” are gone and that someone else’s new “good old days” are being created to replace them.

The “I’ve got my dead husband’s handicap sticker as a memory of my last conversation with him ten years ago and he’d want me to use it every day when I visit the gym with my trainer” Member----- This member conveniently forgets that the handicap sticker is for use when the handicapped person is in the car. The pass provides status and entitlement as a privileged member. They seem to think that no-one notices or if they notice, care. They’re mistaken on both points.

The “I’ll always agree with that obnoxious, combative, vocal member because it’s not worth saying what I really believe because I’m a coward unwilling to stand up for my beliefs” Member----- These members are more often than not good people wanting nothing more from the club than an escape from reality. They want to feel good things, to have good thoughts and to be at peace with the world. The club’s “verbal bully” sees them as an easy target. “Don’t you agree with this, don’t you disagree with that, let me tell you in twenty thousand words why the board is wrong.” This member sits and listens, nods their head, sees the folly of the fool’s argument but prefers to disengage from a three hour shouting match. They’re courteous but remote, mentally shut down, offering an ugh or two even now and then to pacify the jerk, letting the “Obnoxious One” think they’ve won over another convert to their madness. They’ve “signed a petition” without even knowing it.

The “everyone agrees with me cause I’m obnoxiously combative” Member----- This yaddering fool takes the nods and grunts from the “I agree cause it’s too painful to confront” member as acknowledgement of their fuzzy way of seeing the world. They tell everyone they meet that everyone agrees with their thinking. When asked to name names, they use the nod from the “I agree cause it’s too painful to confront” member as confirmation of support from the enlightened. Everyone agrees because they want to believe that everyone agrees. Only fools would think otherwise.

The “I know how a club should be run (even though I never ran a business that I didn’t inherit and drive into bankruptcy) and I’ve got the time and inclination to tell you how to do it 24 / 7” Member----- This member hasn’t worked at a real job in years. They’ve got money in the bank. They’re bright and opinionated and they’ve got time on their hands. The club and its day to day management have become their business, their only business and they show up each and every day for “work.” They turn into investigative reporters snooping out waste and mistakes. And like bad reporters they start to editorialize on what they’ve seen. They’re overly confident in their opinions and they let management and the membership “benefit” from their running commentary. Members and staff would like to find them gainful employment elsewhere.

The “I’m part of the Owners Group, each of us is one of the few Authentic Members in the club but when we speak we’re representing the best interests of all the members” Member-----The “Owner’s Group” is a tribe of members who feel, for whatever reason---their frequent use of the club, the amount of alcohol they consume, the years they served on boards and committees or the size of the vehicle they drive--to be the movers and shakers at the club. They relish sitting around their communal table in the grill, laughing collectively over really bad insider jokes, criticizing their fellow members and the management team, calling the board members they don’t control “boobs,” pontificating on how things should be done, slapping each other on the back and letting everyone within earshot know that they’re the “powers that be” at the club. They’re the “In Crowd” and have “de facto” power over boards and committees. They love to say that they’re doing what they’re doing or saying what they’re saying or fighting the fight they’re fighting for “the good of the membership.” What they’re really saying is that don’t like the majority of members, that they believe themselves to be the only “authentic members” and that “the good” is best defined for others by how “the good” is defined for them.

The “I’m going to bring my kids to the club and the club better take care of them cause I certainly can’t while I’m drinking and eating and socializing with friends” Member----- “Mamma Bears” and “Pappa Bears” arrive with their kids on a family outing and leave their precious ones with the staff for amusement and safekeeping. These parents love having kids but they don’t necessarily want to take full time responsibility for controlling, disciplining and entertaining them. When they visit they expect the club to provide for their every need, to amuse, to educate, to socialize and to control the madness which is at the core of every healthy child. And if the kids get bored, unruly or temperamental, or if they’re caught running about throwing water balloons at bridge players, it’s easy for the Mamma Bears and the Pappa Bears to blame the club, the board, the other members, the staff and the management for those shortcomings. After all, what are they paying dues for anyway?

The “I’ve got great ideas and I don’t give a hoot how I say it or how offended you are when you hear how I say it” Member-----This member is usually bright, insightful and “on the money” with many of their comments. However, they are completely obnoxious when they speak and take enormous pride in speaking obnoxiously. A lay psychologist might say that their I.Q. (intelligence quotient) is high, their s.k.q. (their “social skills quotient”) is low and their a.q. (“annoyance quotient”) is off the chart. If asked, they will explain away their offensiveness by suggesting that they’re “straight shooters” who “tell it like it is” and that they can’t be worried about how people respond since “that’s their problem.” If only these characters could learn a little diplomacy they might be more effective. All too often the kernel of truth at the center of their bluster is never heard. Too bad since they’ve got a lot to offer.

The “You’ll never hear me complain because I’ll speak with my feet” Member--This is the truly scary member. Their voice is loud but you never hear it. They flee from controversy and confrontation. Clubs are their escape mechanism. Rather than bluster about this or that, they speak with their feet. If they like the club they visit and if they don’t they stay away. These are the characters you need to listen to.

Be Comforted---You Are Not Alone

People are, at their very essence, much the same wherever you go. Societies, institutions and clubs create rules and regulations to control behavior. By doing so they institutionalize commonly accepted values that constrain the reptilian part of our personalities and direct actions and behaviors into "socially acceptable channels." Cultures are created when most of the people in a particular group accept those constraints. This patina of civilization, these values and rules, can weaken in some personalities under certain circumstances. When they do the twirks and oddities of the human condition will surface. These can lead to traumatic encounters with authority and community, all of which need to be understood so that they can

be avoided, minimized or muted. Understanding commonly encountered personality types provides guidance and comfort when those varied personalities emerge from the closet. Knowing these characters reduces their sting. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Next time some member is haranguing you about the size of the ice cubes in the bar, take comfort from Shakespeare's MacBeth. Remember that most of what you hear from these characters is no more than:

“..... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”