

The Board Update

What we have here is a “Failure to Communicate”:

The root cause of failing manager-Board, manager-staff, manager-member, board-board and board-members relations is a “Failure to Communicate.” You understand what I’m talking about---the new Bistro philosophy is “right” for the dining room but everyone who visits wonders where the old white glove service went to. The President agrees that there should be no food or booze at the Board meeting but the eight others arrive aghast that the hors d’oeuvres aren’t being passed and the wine in the glass. Your loyal supervisors gather for the weekly senior staff meeting and discover that the Vice-President is now the President and his soon to be son-in-law---that’s the twice divorced low life member despised equally by members and staff alike--- has been appointed Assistant Manager “to help the club get things right again.”

You’re traumatized, stressed out, confused, running around in circles and wisely concerned that this year’s Compensation Committee review may be your last.

What we have here is a failure to communicate.

And it all could have been avoided.....

Subscribe to *The Board Update*:

Being able to communicate ideas, values, emotions and information is critical to the success of any manager. Anyone who aspires to be a club manager needs to communicate effectively with “The Network” to succeed. One-on-one you may be a master, but the key is to communicate the same message with the same emotional impact and the same “values emphasis” to an entire group of people---“The Network”--- with the least expenditure of time, energy and emotional resources. We all accept that the “face to face” style of communications is preferred---that’s why we’re all in the club business. But dealing with groups, building a consensus and creating “group think” is a little difficult to do one-on-one, entertaining though the prospect of doing so might be.

The solution---you the manager can initiate, direct and sustain the dialogue with your Board of Directors and senior management team by using *The Weekly Board Update*. Here’s how you can do it-----

First and most importantly, you must record info, ideas and emotions that you observe or experience. Any time you fancy an idea, think of a notion during a “walk and talk” session throughout the club or observe a development within the facility or the community, write that idea down immediately on your *pocket notepad* to ensure that the issue isn’t lost in the haze of a ten hour day. The next morning while you prepare your psyche for the coming adventures, review your notes and put each of those observations and notions on a 4” x 6” piece of paper. Then file each of those scraps in a card holder box under the title “Update.” This way you’ve documented and organized all that you’d like to communicate in that week’s Update. Keep in mind that “full disclosure” will be required---include names, times, places, participants. You’re intending to cleanse yourself and to do so you’ll need to be thorough, honest and open.

Since you’re using The Update as the “official diary of the club,” include letters to the Board, proposed letters to members or staff, applicable club articles and the like whenever you write and publish it. Write about the issue in the appropriate sub-heading then “attach” the document at the end of The Update. Incidentally, the best technique in this regard would be to scan “outside” documents---those which were generated elsewhere and are not stored on your computer--- and “affix” them to the bottom of The Update. Of course, anything written by the Manager or Board members can be attached without scanning since you’ll already have that document in your computer for manipulation as need be. By doing so, everyone will know everything that’s occurring at one and the same time while having a research document available for review as needed in the future.

Next, create a master template for the Update which you can re-use each week. Computers are great in this regard since you can store the outline for repeated use. Break that template down into your club's standing and ad hoc committees. Doing this will engage the Chairmen of those committees and will engage the senior management team who are responsible for those areas. In theory, any issue which is raised at the club could be categorized under the president, the general manager or the committees.

Here at The Beach Club, the following template is used:

<p>The Board Update Xx/xx/xx</p> <p><i>Please Note: This document is confidential and should be treated as such by all who are authorized to read it!</i></p> <p><u><i>The President</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Miscellaneous Board Issues</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Athletic Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Buildings and Grounds Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Financial Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>House Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Legal Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>The Manager</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Membership Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Strategic Planning Activities</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Youth Activities</i></u></p>

Although I've tried to write The Update progressively, it seems that I work best on a subject when I sit down at one time and dig my way through the entire writing assignment. Your style may be different so pursue whichever format works best for you. Either way, the key to success is *routine* and you need to adopt a routine that works consistently and effectively for you. By way of example, I always write the Update on Sunday mornings between 7:30 and 10:00. Regardless of routine, find yours and then stick to it.

Now that you're ready to write, style and technique are important. When I write the Update, I simply take the 4" x 6" cards, stack them on the table beside my laptop and start writing as if I was talking to the reader on an afternoon in my office. Having brought up my template and dated it, I start writing about each topic in "my voice" using

humor, anger, digressions, reflections and emotion as required by the subject. What I want the reader to get are facts, ideas, values (what is right and what is wrong according to my way of seeing) and emotions. I make no attempt to “sanitize” the info and to deny my “voice”---I leave that style of delivery for “member memos” I ghost write for the Board. Doing so will engage the readers and it is an axiom of the teaching profession that you must entertain before you can educate. Engage your readers and help them “get into” the subject at hand. The brilliance of your insights is lost on those who don’t read your brilliance. Don’t try to be professionally boring because doing so will shut down their brain waves. Good ideas that aren’t read have no value whatsoever. Give them rumor, scandal, musings and conflict and give them to the reader via anecdote. Ours is an experientially driven business and people are amused by “the human condition.” Make those anecdotes local, current and personal---Lunsford Laverty screamed at the Chairman of the Fourth of July Volleyball Calcutta during the finals for denying him a free Mai Tai between serves---and people will read The Update and remember the ideas if for no other reason than they remember the “people encounter” which was used to dramatize the insight.

Once you’ve written the Update, use the internet (or Fax or, heaven forbid, “snail mail” if you must!) to distribute it instantaneously to your “target list”---preferably the Board of Directors, the five most recent past presidents and the senior management team. Don’t brood over sentence structure or delivery---your voice will come with practice---since the immediacy of the facts and of your message are critical. By shipping The Update via e-mail, you’ll be encouraging them to respond instantaneously as well. Your intention should be to inform and to provoke, stimulating reader response and engaging them in the “club experience.” Remember, the impact of information is magnified whenever it is current, local and personal---more fun to read, more practical to use.

Time to Get Started:

Everything that happens at a club will eventually be known by everyone. There is, as I am wont to say, an “efficient market” of information. They may not know the facts or the emphasis of those facts without guidance. The manager is the catalyst for the distribution of that information and the facilitator for the generation and exchange of ideas relating to that information. I believe deeply that those of like values---club members who are selected by a membership committee and staff who are selected and retained by the manager---will, when given all the information, generally agree on a course of action. The Update is the manager’s effort to give them “the facts,” discuss the facts both in the abstract (“clubs are in the happiness business”) and in the specific (“duplicate bridge players aren’t always happy during the Wednesday evening sessions”) and to give the powers that be, both member and staff, a forum for the discussion of those issues. By doing so, the manager can bring the values of the decision makers into alignment and thereby help build a club culture that is vibrant, coherent, cooperative and thoroughly entertaining. And remember that practice and repetition will “loosen the flow” and make writing the Update a hugely satisfying administrative effort and emotional release.