

What Is the CMAA Code of Ethics *Really* Talking About?

It's Tough to remember:

The Club Managers Code of Ethics is about “right behavior” for club professionals. Although some might consider the code to be short by “code standards,” most of us who are in the trenches tend to think that the code is altogether too long to read or memorize. The whole idea behind a “code” is to help the professional make good decisions quickly in accord with “right” principles. Let me assure you that the CMAA Code of Ethics does this and I’m here to show you how easy it is to “live the good life” by following its three basic precepts. Here we go-----

Remember “The Big Three”:

The Club Managers Code tells the professional to do three things---to acknowledge that club management is an honorable profession, to pursue knowledge continuously and to resolve conflicts without compromising the larger community of members, staff and club managers. Let’s explore each of these directives for a moment.

Point One...Pound Your Chest and Be a Preacher:

The Code tells you straight off that this is an honorable profession---after all, club managers are “in the happiness business”--- that you should be proud to be in the hospitality business, that you should tell the world about “clubdom” and that you should live in a way that brings honor to yourself and to the industry.

The Code implies that ours is a *meaningful* business since it impacts others at the most personal level, deals with transcendent issues like family and community and, since it is a “force for happiness,” represents “A Good” of the very highest order.

I’ve got a feeling that The Code probably addresses this issue in the very first line of the code because a lot of people end up in the hospitality business by accident and are a little uncertain about their decision. Will your in-laws be proud? Will your Harvard classmates salute you for being a club manager? There’s a demon called insecurity lurking in many of our brains and the code wants us to “wrastle” it into submission.

Point Two...Technology:

The code is explicit about the manager’s need to pursue “continuing education.” It commands that one stay abreast of the industry, absorb legal developments and be the hunter-gatherer of information for your Board of directors, staff and management team. To do so, managers are told to leave time for conferences, for local seminars, for industry readings and for brainstorming with colleagues. Once “at the top”---that is, ensconced as the general manager---people have a tendency to lose the bite of ambition, to bask in their reflected glory, to enervate a bit and to silently unbend the springs of professional action. The code acknowledges this tendency and asks that the manager counter it consciously through industry relationships, reflective opportunities and outside activities.

Point Three... Conflict Resolution:

Interestingly, very little of the code is about conflict resolution, though the idea of conflict resolution dominates one’s thinking when thinking about ethics.

The code discusses three types of conflicts. The first deals with “subsidies” proffered or solicited that are intended to alter one’s ethical thinking. “Subsidy conflicts” are common throughout the procurement

process in this or any other industry. The solution---don't ask for them, don't accept them and don't be swayed by them when offered. In the club business, these "influences" are relatively easy to ignore because they are transparently bad for the club and for one's career.

The second type of conflict has to do with being compromised during the decision making process. This, sadly, is a true club problem and is much more difficult to ignore or resolve since it involves the membership and directly impacts one's career, one's social setting and one's independent authority within the club. The people who usually want one to compromise their ethical standards are "influence peddlers" within the membership itself. Usually the "influence" is derived from a personal relationship with a particular member or in the manager's subordinate role to Board member, President or Committee Chairman. The code doesn't tell one how to neutralize or avoid the "compromising position"---that's a significant issue in and of itself---but it does alert one to the possibility. Member pressure exists and the manager needs to resist.

The third type of conflict involves manager-manager and manager-manager association conflicts. When a job arises, the Code asks that managers fill it from within "the club manager tribe." In addition, if you covet your neighboring manager's job or you hear through the "member grapevine" of a possible opening, the Code asks that the seeking manager be "transparent" with the sitting manager and discuss the situation with him or her openly in advance of the pursuit. Members of one club love to denigrate their own manager and operations to managers of other clubs and the temptation is always there for the listening manager to "chime in" with comments and hints of their own expertise. The Code asks managers to be circumspect in this regard, keep opinions to oneself and then alert the manager in question about the specifics involved during the conversation. Ours is to help our fellow club managers. Do nothing that would undermine them in the eyes of their members or their staff.

So What???

Ours is a small industry and there is a free flow of information from members to members, boards to boards, managers to managers. What you do will be known by a far larger circle of people than you could possibly suppose. The ramifications on the personal level are obvious---what you do as a manager will eventually be known by other managers, boards and members and that knowledge will either help or hurt you in getting a job, keeping a job and making more money. Doing "the right thing" will have obvious long term rewards for your career.

But equally as important, the Code emphasizes that what you do will increase or diminish the reputation of club managers as a whole. In a very real way, our individual success is inextricably linked to the success or failure of every other club manager in the country and that we have a responsibility to "do good," to encourage other managers to "do good" and to chastise others who fail to do so.

The bottom line---adhere to the code, become an example for your team, dramatize "the good" to your members and board and demand that others within the Club Managers Association do likewise. The Code would have it no other way.