



THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Ray Burniston examines the changing role of the Assistant Secretary within a modern golf club

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Over the past few years it has become apparent that many more clubs need a competent Assistant to supplement the Secretary/Manager. Since the Association introduced the membership category of Assistant in 1996 a small but significant number have joined and equally important during 1998 no less than 17 of these were appointed to take over the role of Secretary/Manager at clubs.

Some of these were promoted at their existing club on the movement or retirement but more than half achieved it by being appointed at a different club. A large proportion of them have attended the Association's training course and in at least one case attended before starting their new appointment. This trend has continued during 1999 and supports the view that the decision by the National Committee in 1996 to recommend membership for Assistants was undoubtedly justified.

I am often asked whether a club needs a part-time or full time assistant and if so what sort of background and experience is required. Many assistants have started on a very limited part-time basis of a few hours a week but events in the club have progressed them to eventually taking over the main role. The amount of assistance that may be required in the administration of the club will depend on several circumstances.

These could consist of some of the following:

1. The number of members, this could be determined by having 27 or 36 holes or more but I know clubs that can have over 1000 members even with 18 holes.
2. The number of societies and visitors which the greater the number will mean having sufficient administration in place to cover. This is not only reflected on players on the course but will also mean greater use of the bar and catering with necessary administration to oversee it.
3. Additional facilities such as a Dormy House or similar accommodation; other sporting facilities such tennis or bowls, a health club, will all increase the need for administration.
4. Many clubs require the office to be manned 6/7 days a week during the hours between say 8 am and 5 pm. This can only be covered by having sufficient staff.
5. Running your own catering service at club will involve additional work for the administration staff.

There are still a small number of clubs where the office is literally shut or partly manned by the committee/board when the Secretary has a holiday. This is a recipe for disaster at all but the very smallest clubs and should be avoided if at all possible.

If you are considering upgrading your current assistant in the office to the role of being the Assistant Secretary then you need to go through carefully in detail all the duties and responsibilities within the administration. In some cases at perhaps two-course clubs, the Assistant may have responsibilities which include the club competitions, societies and visitors, and general play on the course. Earlier in the year I visited a busy 18 hole course in which the Assistant covered this item amongst their other duties. This certainly seemed to result in the flow of play on the course being supervised and there was sensible use of two starting points. Overall then, both members and visitors were content.

If you are considering running your own catering service at the club then this could be a good thing for the Assistant to supervise and report to you regularly on its operation. You need to involve your Assistant in all the activities of the Administration so that in your absence the club will continue to operate in a correct manner.

It is important to that the Assistant attends main committee meetings so that they are aware of how the club operates. If you have sub-committees such as House, Green and Competitions etc, then you should share the responsibilities between you and one of you should attend each of these meetings. This helps take the pressure off you as Secretary but at the same time you are kept informed through your Assistant.

It is a good idea to make the Assistant responsible for certain areas which could be Health & Safety and part of their job would be to see that the club is kept up-to-date with current legislation.

There are many other areas within the club that a contribution from a well-trained Assistant will be of great benefit to the Club. In some cases you may well be training the person to become a Secretary/Manager at another Club just as often happens with greenkeepers. But this can only be to the benefit of our profession and should be encouraged.

My experience over the past ten years is that very seldom does a well-trained Assistant Secretary fail when promoted either at their existing club or another. This unfortunately cannot be said of some of those appointed by committees as Secretary/Manager without any real knowledge of what the job entails and some of these clubs make the same mistake time and time again.

Over the past few years the amount of work needed to manage a club has increased many times than when I was still a Secretary/Manager in 1989. Not only has legislation put far greater pressures on the club but also members are far more demanding than they were a few years ago. This is probably general in all walks of life: in football, a club can win the FA Cup in May and a bad start in August will see the Manager gone by the second week in September. We all need to look closely at our work regularly and try to recognise the areas that need attention. Appointing an Assistant does not mean vast rises in Subscriptions, as many members think, if it is properly

thought out and planned. Good efficient management can save the club substantial money in the long run.

At some clubs the Office Assistant is already doing the work of an Assistant Secretary and the club should see that the person's efforts are recognised officially. This happens in green keeping and there is no reason why it should not also be the norm in administration.