



NEW MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

Iain Donnelly, Parley Court Golf Club, reflects on the Association's Residential Training Course and 2011 National Conference.

Secretary At Work: January 2012

Over 1000 delegates have completed the Introduction to Golf Club Management Course run by the GCMA since it started. I had the good fortune to gain one of the last places on the 70th course last September at Weston-super-Mare. I feel very lucky to have completed the course; like so many delegates this is a move for me into a second career.

My first recollection of a Golf Club Secretary was back in the 1970's as a junior golfer I used to pass a big closed door on my way to play golf. Looking back now through the decades, I can see how the role has moved on and still is developing. The door at most clubs is now open more often than not as golf clubs need golfers more than golfers need golf clubs!



To help me deal with this challenge and the many others, my learning experiences at the Introduction to Golf Club Management Course run by the GCMA has been my 'cloak of armour'. All aspects of golf club management are covered by numerous tutors who are amply experienced and are very capable of communicating in-depth subjects in a very understandable manner. At this stage of my personal development the one point I constantly remind myself of is to accept unconditionally that you do not know the answer to everything: in golf club management, the key to success is knowing where to get the correct answer! In finding these answers, a number of options are open to me, one being my notes and files collected at the GCMA course. These provide much more than the top line data you would expect but also links to specific organisations related to the golf club market. As time passes and my knowledge grows, I may use the files less. However, I know this 'cloak of armour' will not be far away from me for reference.

The course was spread over 5 days and consistently covered every relevant subject. My fellow delegates were invaluable for additional advice as a number of them are already a few months into golf club management job roles. The following subjects covered have already proved to be 'winners' for me:

- ✂ time management – having just started my golf club management position this has been key to ensuring I am being effective

- ✎ bar/catering costings – we have just established cost/margin parameters and are now able to identify real up-sell opportunities
- ✎ golf course development – winter preparation, recognising what is important and what can wait.

These are just a few areas I have used been able to use the manuals for. This has given me the confidence to then go on to use the GCMA online library.

We had a visit from Dorset Fire and Safety purely to provide advice and one of the areas we needed to develop was staff training and safety auditing. I found 2 very useful files, Fire Risk Management – Marshalling and Fire Safety, which when presented to the officer proved to be better equipped to cover the requirements than the files he had!

One of the newer course subjects on the agenda was marketing. Golf clubs have not taken this too seriously until more recent times. My own background of 23 years as a Regional Sales Manager including achieving a Diploma in Leadership Management via the Institute of Leadership & Management has helped to stand me in good stead when it comes to building



Parley Court GC's business. My enthusiasm in this area sometimes needs to be kept in check, however I am very careful when it comes to how much to spend on marketing. In fact to date I have spent nothing (not just because I am Scottish). My biggest and best opportunity to build business is through the golfers that have chosen to come and play at our course. Keith Lloyd, Chief Executive of the GCMA, explained 'Customers go where they are welcome; they stay where they are appreciated'. As I have said, my door is open and as soon as I see any fresh faces I take the time to ensure they are provided with the service they need. I am very lucky at Parley Court GC, the staff enjoy meeting new people so bridging the gap to appreciating our customers is not a difficult thing.

During this autumn, a time when footfall tends to drop, we have gained 20 new members (and counting) with the prospect of keeping them when the main subscriptions arrive next April. The trick is not necessarily in the membership cost but in the service and benefits around it. One of the fears I had of changing my career path was taking my sales background into the golf club environment. I did not want to appear 'maverick' in my actions. The 2011 GCMA Conference titled 'Changing Times' and some of the parallel sessions based upon negotiation skills plus the keynote speakers with infinite sales and marketing experience reminds me of many conferences I have been to in my previous career. Personally, it fills me with great assurance to see a sales focus building in the golf club environment as it shows we are fighting to maintain the history and heritage of the great game. Far better than to watch it dwindle away. The fact that the GCMA embraces this only adds to confirm my decision to complete the course and become a member.

Now where is that file, Health & Safety needs checking... aaggh!