



9. CONTROLLING SELF EMPLOYED PERSONS

Ray Burniston writes about controlling self employed persons in the club.

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The practice of having self-employed persons working within the golf club has increased over the past twenty years or so. This is probably due to a variety of reasons but often especially within the clubhouse in a private members club the catering and in certain cases the bar is operated by person(s) who are self-employed.

The other main area is the Club Professional who operates invariably on his/her own and has the concession of using the shop and practice facilities for coaching. Many proprietary clubs do not give this concession but operate the clubhouse activities, golf shop and coaching facilities themselves employing individuals to run them who are employees of the club. There are certain very large clubs in which those who operate these facilities pay an annual fee to the club based on turnover or profitability.

This paper deals with the average golf course operation both in the clubhouse and the professional shop and coaching. It is a fact of life especially in the case of the professional that once they are in place they are left to their own devices in how they operate.

Basically I want to suggest a simple method of control which in many cases will be welcomed by both parties because things change and the committee/board should always be aware of the current situation and any factors that could affect operations.

The introduction of the National Minimum Wage some years ago caused problems in the way the club professional operated and paid their assistants. This highlighted a weakness in communication between the club and the professional when in some cases the professional was faced with a substantial increase in the basic wages paid to their assistants. At least it had the affect of bringing both parties together and in many cases helped to make improvements to the system.

The Clubhouse

The main area that is often operated by a self-employed person is the catering. In the past clubs often operated a steward and wife to run both the bar and catering with the proviso that the catering was their own financial responsibility. Often the club would get a good caterer but a poor bar person or vice versa. It was usually stated at their interview that all the catering profit was theirs. In most cases the club had no actual proof of any profits other than if they took expensive holidays and generally seemed 'in the money'.

If the catering is operated by a self-employed person often this is called a franchise - although this is not really correct unless you have a national company operating your catering who specialize in a franchise.

What controls should you have or try to implement?

Firstly you should have in place a Contract for Services to provide catering at the golf club. This should provide details of what is expected in the catering service - hours; quality; notice of termination of contract and other things suggested by your legal adviser. It is important that you do not establish a master/servant relationship, which could cause problems later on.

One particular point that should be attended to right from the start is uniform for all the clubhouse staff. Some clubs provide it; others state what is required but the staff or contractor has to provide.

One thing you do need to do is have regular meetings with the contractor so that both parties can bring any problems that may occur. These are best left with the secretary/manager on a regular basis with perhaps a quarterly or half yearly meeting with perhaps the House or Catering member of the committee/board and the Financial Member. This is better than having regular meetings with a House Sub-Committee, which often achieve very little other than upsetting the Contractors. Much will depend on how successful the secretary/manager is in building up a good rapport with them. If you can achieve this and obtain their full confidence in you then not only are you in a good position to help and advise them but you also know how they are faring.

It is essential to treat in strictest confidence any confidential financial information they give you. If they give you this sort of information and ask you not to pass it onto the committee then you must respect their confidence.

There is a fine art in running a successful clubhouse operation, which very few club members understand or even attempt to. Many secretaries make the mistake of assuming that if they have a contractor operating they can leave it alone and only get involved when things have gone wrong and it is too late. You should not interfere but at the same time your job is to see that the members and visitors to the club are getting the service. You should deal with any complaints with the contractor and follow up by either writing or discussing it with the complainants. Nothing is more annoying to a member than to take the trouble to complain about something and not even get an acknowledgment. Some complaints will be frivolous and not justified but some will be genuine and your job is to sort them out and take action.

The Professional

If your Professional is self-employed it is important that you have a system of regular meetings to discuss the operation of the shop and coaching. In the past this has been neglected at many clubs leaving the professional to look after themselves and often over the years a lot of problems have arisen, which culminate in members ceasing to use the service provided and general decline in that part of the club. These days' clubs have set up a sub-committee consisting of the

secretary/manager, financial officer and club chairman. They meet with the professional on a regular basis and discuss the whole operation.

In many cases the financial situation is looked at in depth with full confidentiality on both sides so that the committee/board can be better informed when making decisions such as retainers, opening hours, assistants and other items.

It is important for you to have regular meetings with the professional so that you are able to access the operation. One secretary told me he had persuaded the professional to start regular teaching classes for different sections of members within the club. It had become so successful that there was a waiting list of those wanting to attend. Also the club had agreed to install a covered area so that even in inclement weather these sessions could take place.

As members have email addresses in some cases the professional has sent out details of sale items either by this method or by direct mail. Often the secretary/manager can influence the professional and help with the publicity for an annual Sale. This can be timed when communications are being sent to the membership on things like annual subscriptions or the AGM notices.

Check List

- ✉ In drawing up a contract for services with a clubhouse contractor or professional make sure you cover all the significant points.
- ✉ Avoid giving the committee/board direct control on prices as this can cause problems at a later date.
- ✉ If you are a private members club with a club premises certificate for the bar you will have to change this to a personal licence if you hand over the bar to a contractor. You will need to get legal advice before going down this avenue.
- ✉ Keep regular contact with both the clubhouse contractor and the professional on an informal basis and keep your ear to the ground to nip any problems in the bud.
- ✉ For major club events have meetings to set out the role each person has to play. This is of vital importance when you host a major golfing event because your club will be judged on how things run on the day.

Most of the problems with both professionals and clubhouse contractors are caused by lack of interest by the management of the club, which lets things get to a situation that cannot be corrected. Make sure this does not happen at your club by keeping your ear to the ground.

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