



THE COMMITTEE

(reviewed August 2011)

Over the past years many golf clubs have changed their committee structure in an attempt to improve the overall management of the club. Many have been successful and would not dream of going back to the good old days. However a few have tried a smaller committee system and have after a year or two reverted back to the previous set up. This article tries to explain the many reasons for changing to smaller more streamlined administration but at the same time tries to spotlight the important points that need to be considered before embarking on this exercise. For the Secretary at a club struggling with the many problems of an oversize committee this article hopefully will point you in the right direction to make changes but also as important see that they work efficiently.

There is no magic wand in a club that will change everything for the better just because you manage to reduce the committee size from 18 or so to single figures. So before recommending change spend some time analysing the current operation and above all pinpoint the obvious failings. Some areas to look at could consist of the following, but the list can be endless and only you will know the particular problem areas at your club.

- ✦ Is the Club Captain the Chairman thereby changing annually or do you have a separate committee chairman?
- ✦ What length of time are members elected to serve on the Committee - is it too short, or equally too long?
- ✦ How are the Members elected to the Committee is it by postal ballot, merely by election by those attending the Annual General Meeting or by some other means?
- ✦ Is the committee representative of all the membership or does it consist of only certain sections of the club?
- ✦ Does the committee spend its time effectively or are meetings long and drawn out often never making a firm decision?
- ✦ What sub-committees do you have and how do they operate? Does the committee go over the decisions made by the sub-committee each time?
- ✦ What is the relationship between you as the Secretary and the Sub-Committees on the day to day management of the club?
- ✦ Are you allowed to manage the club at present or does everything have to be considered endlessly by committees?
- ✦ Do you anticipate the committee allowing you to manage if the rules are changed giving you more power?
- ✦ What is the financial structure of the club and how successful has it been in the past or does the club struggle to break-even each year?

- ✂ What lines of communication are there between the Committees and the Members?
- ✂ What systems of controls are in place at present and does the Club employ the services of an outside Auditor or a club member in this capacity?
- ✂ What long-term planning has been done in the past by the Committee and equally important are these plans updated annually and kept to?
- ✂ Does the Committee seek professional advice when necessary?
- ✂ Do all Members of the Committee have a specific responsibility or does it carry passengers?
- ✂ What role do the Officers of the club currently have?
- ✂ Are the Past Captains a force in the club or do they keep in the background and only react when asked for advice?

The above list could be endless so you will need to carefully scrutinise the activities of the club and decide what, in your own mind, are the weak links and how you can overcome them. Often the problem is not so much the numbers but getting the right type of person to represent the club on the committee. If committee meetings currently drag on endlessly without the Chairman actually being Chairman, and very few decisions are being made, then often you will discover, that gradually over a number of years the committee will consist of indecisive individuals because they have driven away the more business orientated types. You need to take an in-depth look at the Sub-Committees and what they actually do and what decisions if any they actually take.

You then need to look carefully at your current position as the Secretary and what if any powers you have. Some of the points that need scrutinising are as follows.

- ✂ Were you appointed as Secretary/Manager and have you been allowed to manage the club under the guidelines set by the Committee?
- ✂ What is your relationship with the Chairmen of the Sub-Committees and what role do they play in the day to day management of the club?
- ✂ Are all the daily decisions left to you or do you have to constantly consult with others?

Again the list could be endless, but setting out on paper what you can or cannot do is important. If you find that despite the large unwieldy committee you can actually manage up to a certain point then proceed with some caution suggesting the committee structure is changed as it could actually rebound on you. If on the other hand your job is nothing more than a glorified office manager and you are getting fed up with the whole situation then you have little to lose by suggesting changes in the constitution. You need to take into your confidence senior committee members and get them thinking along your lines. If you can get the suggestions coming from them so much the better because this may well influence the other committee members. Try and pinpoint the actual weaknesses in the system and explain how this could be overcome.

Most Committees will set up a Sub-Committee. If they decide to look at the constitution make sure that you are involved in this. It is usually a disastrous mistake not to be involved as their recommendations may cut right across your job specification. Remember very few if any committee members really know much about the actual day to day management of the club. Your role on this committee can be vital in the success or failure of the whole operation. You will need to supply the

sub-committee with plenty of useful information and be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time on the whole operation. Work out a plan of action and make sure the committee keep to it.

Having taken a careful look at the current committee structure in the club, its advantages and disadvantages, you then have to decide if you are going to look at making changes. Never be in a rush to change the system just because they have changed next door. Most clubs are different and what works brilliantly at X Club can be a total disaster at Y. The two committee system in which you have a small Management Committee administering the club along with a Captains' Committee looking after the golf and social side was introduced at Langley Park Golf Club by Frank Bartle back in 1968/9. The article is available from the Information Library - No.2050. You also need to study carefully the impact that the current sub-committees have on the club administration. If they are working effectively and the club has a good record over past years then be careful suggesting changes. Many clubs have done away completely with the usual sub-committees and the onus then falls very much on you as the Secretary and the Heads of Department to see that things run smoothly under the general guidelines set by the committee.

In the second part of our look at the committee structure of the club we will look at ways and suggestions to making changes. It is best to handle the problem by forming a Sub-Committee. At this stage do not worry too much about having lawyers on this committee. It is better to bring them in later when the draft plan is agreed. The members who are appointed to the Sub-Committee are vitally important to the whole operation, get the wrong ones on and you might as well forget it. It is often a good idea to get any members of the main committee on it who are doubtful about the whole idea of a smaller and more streamlined committee system. Because you will often find that if you get them involved and they start to see the advantages of the system then they will move heaven and earth to get it agreed by the membership. Bearing in mind that any changes in the rules will need about 75% majority then a few Doubting Thomas' can clog up the whole works. Also take into consideration the role that the Past Captains have in the club, if it is correct that they are seen and not heard then forget them, but if they have considerable influence and some of them refuse to lie down then it is best to include one or two on the Sub-Committee to keep the peace and hopefully get their approval. Always be fully involved yourself on the Sub-Committee as you should know the club better than anybody else and can advise and guide the committee along the right path. The following points will be useful in setting up the mandate for the Committee:

- ✂ As stated in part one study carefully the weaknesses and strengths of the current system.
- ✂ Look at the roles the current Sub-Committees such as Green/House etc., are doing and see whether they could fit into a new set up.
- ✂ What influence do Past Captains or Presidents have on the Committee and the club generally?
- ✂ Does your present Committee consist of sound business and professional personnel or is it dominated by non-professionals?
- ✂ Would you get better potential Members putting up for Committee if meetings were less time consuming?
- ✂ Has the club financially prospered over the past years or have important decisions been put off because the Committee are reluctant to increase subscriptions?
- ✂ Is the club run by a small group within the Committee and the rest of the membership taking little interest?

Although the Sub-Committee will be appointed by the main Committee do not be afraid to put your views over to the Captain/Chairman and so on. Keep the Committee to a maximum of five and try not to rush things. It is best to spend the first one or two meetings generally discussing things and if possible from this you may get the chance to set a draft of what you consider is best for the club. If necessary visit club's nearby that have changed their systems but be careful following their proposals word for word as they may not be suitable for your club.

Use the Information Library from the Association and get ideas from them and decide which avenue you wish to go down. If your club has a strong social side then you will need to keep some form of Social Committee to run the events and by the same token if the club has numerous golfing fixtures you will need an active Committee to run these. Some clubs have done away with traditional Sub-Committees such as Green or House, but think carefully before you go down this road. It may look good on paper having one member of the Committee responsible for Green and House but is it going to work? If you reduce the committee to say about six persons are you likely to get a good cross section of the club represented on the Committee.

Consult and if necessary co-opt onto the Sub-Committee a representative from the Ladies and Seniors sections, their support will be vital so try and get them thinking along the lines of the Sub-Committee. You will need in all likelihood to study carefully the current and future role played by the Club Captain, Hon. Treasurer and possibly the President. You will need to determine the role that you as Secretary/Manager will play in the new set up. If your current role is that of a Club Secretary with little management responsibility then you will need to have your Job Description and Contract altered in the new set up. What also is the sort of salary the Committee are thinking about?

I have already mentioned the Langley Park system of having a small Management Committee with each member having a specific role to play but no actual Sub-Committees as such. The idea behind this is that if you have a problem then the member responsible for say Green's co-opts to a small sub-committee any member of the club who may have some expertise in the subject in question and a decision is made on that particular problem. In theory this seems good but like all theories it can create problems. You obviously depend very much on the quality of persons elected to the Management Committee and also on them actually getting persons to help them who have the necessary experience and expertise and not merely just friends. The Captain's Committee under this system which looks after the golf and social side of the club will obviously depend very much each year on the enthusiasm of the Captain. However there is no real reason why this Committee should not succeed and there is sense for the Captain to influence who is elected or appointed to this committee. This encourages the Captain to devote his year to what he should be doing - that is looking after the golf and social side of the club.

Another committee system that is successful at many clubs is to have a smaller Management Committee of between 6 - 10 persons but retain the two major spending Sub-Committees - that is Green and House. The Chairmen of these committees automatically sit of the main committee but you retain a small Green & House Committee with, say, three elected persons specifically elected to these committees. They then elect a Chairman who sits on the Management Committee. The important thing if you have this system is that you still maintain the Green and House Committees;

therefore maintaining some input from the membership. However these Committees are given specific Terms of Reference which clearly lay down the role that they play. If this is done correctly then this system works well and takes some pressure off the Secretary, as the Committees are able to look at the long-term planning and development of the club.

In the next issue we shall look at the specific terms of reference needed to ensure that these committees do their job without reverting back to the bad old days. Much of the problem with Sub-Committees is that they often have never been given a brief, meet far too often, and consequently look for something to do. Under this system the Management Committee has its elected Chairman and all members have a specific job to do. It is important to keep the size down to the number required to do this although in some cases the House and Green have both a Chairman and Vice Chairman sitting on it. The golf and social side at clubs is invariably done by volunteers and this will in most cases be under the watchful eye of the Captain. This system keeps the traditional committees within the club but brings them up-to-date and hopefully provides the strong firm management needed in today's climate and gives you as Secretary/Manager the backing and support required to do your job efficiently.

Whatever system you go for, try to keep the numbers down to a maximum of ten including any Officers. Far too often I have been told about the size of a committee at a club which is about 10/12 only to then find that there are an additional 6 Officers or even more who sit on the committee. Avoid having representatives from other sections within the club such as Ladies or Seniors. If you have a system that all members can vote and serve on the committee then this allows Ladies or Seniors to be nominated and elected just as any other member. Try to introduce a set form (Information Library - No.4024) to be completed by those wishing to serve on the committee, which should include the names of their proposer and seconder. This should be displayed on the club noticeboard so that all members can see who they are voting for and their background and qualifications.

Far too often all these things are forgotten in the excitement of a new start and then cause serious problems later on. Once you have decided all these items you can get down to drafting the rule changes. If they are substantial the best method is to rescind the existing club rules and introduce a completely new set. It is very difficult invariably trying to rewrite existing rules. You generally miss out something and then have the embarrassment of somebody getting up at the meeting and pointing it out. For the final drafting of the new rules always use the services of a solicitor and make sure the person is present at the meeting.

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