



2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SECRETARY AND THE CLUB CHAIRMAN

Ray Burniston writes about the relationship between the Secretary/Manager and the Chairman at the club.

Secretary At Work: April 2003 *(reviewed November 2011)*

One of the more sensible moves taken by many golf clubs during the past two decades is to appoint a club chairman rather than have this job done by the captain during his year in office. Apart from taking the pressure off the captain and allowing him to run the golf and social side of the club it has given some continuity to the club. In most cases the chairman may well stay in office for several years subject to re-election perhaps annually or a set number of years.

This should make the secretary's job easier providing the two persons are compatible and obtain a proper working relationship. Unfortunately over the years I have seen quite a few cases in which this has not happened. In some cases it may be the fault of the secretary and in other cases it would appear to be the chairman. One case that comes to mind involved a secretary having been interviewed and appointed by a small sub-committee of three. He duly arrived at the club some three months later to find that the chairman had decided to resign at the AGM and that only one of the two committee members who appointed him was left. Furthermore the newly elected chairman for the past two months had been standing in for the secretary and was not happy about handing over the reins. Regrettably the new secretary decided after five months that he could not work under these circumstances and departed.

Fortunately this sort of situation is rare and in most cases the chairman and committee of the club will at least give the new secretary a fair crack of the whip. You may join a club with a club chairman who has vast experience in human resources and very quickly both of you will strike up a good working relationship. If the previous secretary was dismissed for certain reasons, then you may encounter some problems in your first few weeks. This really depends on how quickly you gain the confidence of both the chairman and committee. Once you have proved your ability and they realise that you know far more about managing a golf club than they do you should find the pressure eases off. Much will depend on you getting a good working relationship with the club chairman. You must remember if both he and the committee feel they were duped by the previous occupant, they will have no wish for a repeat performance.

What you do at the outset may well help the situation. Firstly communicate with the chairman. Try to avoid running down all that has taken place at the club before you arrived. Even if you can see some disastrous decisions were made, remember some of them may well have been suggested by the chairman himself and nobody likes to be made to look a fool. Far better to discuss with him and the

committee what they require from you, gradually introducing them to your ideas and methods, which you know from your experience will work. Much groundwork to this can be achieved by having regular meetings with the club chairman and spinning your ideas to him. He in return will give you much insight into the club and also his assessment of the members of the committee. This is of great value during those first vital weeks at the club when you are still coming to terms with the ways of the club.

You need to assess the role of the chairman fairly quickly on arriving at the club. If the previous secretary is there to hand over to you then he/she should be able to brief you and give you much valuable information on the workings of the club. This is of great value. If he/she is moving to another club or job before you arrive suggest spending a day at the club before you actually take over. In most clubs there will be at least someone in the office who can supply much information and give you an insight on how the club operates. But remember in this case they may not have attended committee meetings and have only a casual acquaintance with the club chairman and the committee. It is vital that you keep the club chairman fully briefed on all matters that you consider important. He will normally not expect you to brief him on mundane day-to-day matters but if for instance the club steward had handed in his notice he should be informed straight away. Nothing causes more upset to the officer of a golf club than to arrive and be surrounded by infuriated members about a matter in which he knows nothing about.

In these days of varied forms of communication it is sensible to create a system within the club in which you can inform club officers and committee members promptly on matters of importance. In some cases you will only brief perhaps the club chairman, captain and perhaps the chairman of a sub-committee who will be affected by the circumstances. Whether it is telephone, fax, email or some other method, make sure your lines of communication are first rate. Your first contact should be the club chairman who will probably discuss with you any immediate action. This works both ways and you would expect him to inform you of any matters within the club that have come to his notice.

Most of what I have written would seem to be good plain commonsense and the vast majority of secretaries from my experience are good communicators. A professional secretary/manager knows that they must keep their finger on the pulse of the club at all times. Your points of contact are numerous throughout from staff through to members and sometimes, regular tradesman who deliver at the club. By regular meetings with your club chairman in which all matters are discussed you will be on the road to building a successful relationship.

Key points

- ✦ Have regular informal meetings with your club chairman and keep him fully informed on all relevant matters.
- ✦ Develop a full-proof system of communication for all club officers and committee members.
- ✦ Try and discover the role the club chairman had with the previous secretary.
- ✦ Try to avoid running your predecessor and previous committees down. It is far more satisfying to introduce and new develop new ideas to the chairman and committee.

[This document is prepared for guidance and is accurate at the date of publication only. We will not accept any liability (in negligence or otherwise) arising from any member or third party acting, or refraining from acting, on the information contained in this document.]