



3. DISCIPLINE - GOOD MANAGEMENT WILL AVOID MANY PITFALLS

Ray Burniston, National Secretary GCMA (now retired) writes in a series of articles about the committee.

Secretary At Work: May 2003 *(Updated November 2011)*

One area within the club that a secretary/manager often gets criticized is applying discipline on members and visitors who transgress. I can recall many years ago receiving a verbal complaint from a member of the committee concerning another member who he claimed had failed to rake the bunker after playing a shot out. Unfortunately I missed having a word with the alleged miscreant before I departed that evening from the club. The next day the committee member on asking what I had done suggested that I was not interested in looking after the course and seeing the members and visitors kept to the rules. This annoyed me and I wrote what I thought was a fair letter to the alleged member asking for him to give me his version of events sending a copy to the chairman of the committee and the complainant.

Within a couple of days I received a letter from the alleged miscreant's solicitor and the issue was blown out of all proportion. The committee member had named two other members he was playing with who had witnessed the alleged incident. When questioned by both myself and the chairman both admitted they had seen nothing and had only expressed the views of the complainant. Furthermore the incident happened in the afternoon of a late November day in poor light and the complainant was all of 250 yards away. The matter was eventually sorted out but it brought home to me the fact that despite having been a secretary at that time for twenty years it was still easy to make a fundamental mistake. I was unfortunate not to have sorted the matter out the day it happened before I left the club. But I should have checked fully the complaint before writing to the member concerned. I took at face value the facts from a committee member, which turned out to be incorrect. In circumstances such as this always check and check again the facts and talk to any other independent witnesses.

Most members, and I include myself in this category, merely wish to play their golf at the club with as few restrictions as possible. In most cases we appreciate that sensible bylaws and local rules are necessary for the overall enjoyment of the game. If the club has above average amount of play throughout the year then one has to accept a control over starting times and general play. The nightmare of most secretary/manager's is the club member who never reads the notice board and generally manages to turn up to play on the day that the club has some event which means restrictions to the members. The banning of caddie carts/trolleys during inclement weather along with the use of temporary greens and tees can add to the frustration. Providing they are done sensibly most of these restrictions will be accepted by the majority of members, albeit sometimes reluctantly. If your club has a regular daily inspection during periods of adverse climatic

conditions and members are told this is done, you will still have moans but hopefully no need to discipline a member for ignoring the regulations.

Clear cut and decisive rules on dress on the course and in the club house can avoid arguments. Players wearing shorts in the summer months can be a source of argument especially for females when the rules state a limit of so many inches above the knee. Miscreants of this particular rule are best dealt with by having a few quiet words on the side and appealing to their commonsense. Although the best advice is to only have carefully defined rules that are easily understood by all.

For visitors more and more clubs have brochures, which they send out to visiting parties who book in advance. These should give the dress code of the club for both the course and the club house. Restrictions in the club car park should be clearly marked and any alternative overflow parking area clearly defined. If you have a visitors' car park in an isolated area you should have some means of security by lighting and cameras. I remember attending a meeting at a well-known club in the London area, which made visitors park in an area the other side of the road. On driving in the area I noticed signs of broken glass suggesting numerous car thefts. All this at a club which charged some £75 for a round of golf. To be fair several clubs I have visited on busy days have employed security staff to protect the car park, which at least is some reassurance.

Dealing with the aggressive member who parks in the wrong place or wants to play golf in jeans is not easy. In most cases they will back down if you confront them in a dignified manner and do not return their aggression. Never get down to their level and if they persist then you will have to hand the matter over to the committee to deal with. This is not a sign of weakness on your part but pure commonsense. If the committee set the rules then they must deal with the habitual offender and support your action.

No club can cover every eventuality but by assessing the risk factors on items you can help the members and make the club a better place. Once you have achieved this the need for imposing discipline becomes less of a burden and in many cases the members will impose it on their own; thereby making your job that much easier.

Key Points

- ✎ Keep your local rules and bylaws simple and easy to understand.
- ✎ Communicate full details to all visitors that book in advance and devise a system for informing day visitors these rules and bylaws.
- ✎ Make sure any temporary local rules are displayed in prominent places.
- ✎ If you employ a starter or course ranger make sure they are kept fully briefed on any changes or new regulations.
- ✎ Unless the matter is serious then try to deal with the miscreant on a one-to-one basis in private.
- ✎ Always spend time getting the full facts of any incident. You will be surprised how that often turns out to be the opposite of what you were first told.

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