



## CHANGING ROLE OF THE CLUB PROFESSIONAL

Ray Burniston charts the changing role of the club professional especially in the light of the introduction of the minimum wage in 1999.

During the past winter, I was visiting a Member at his Club on a rather wet and windy day at his Club when we were interrupted by a Member who complained that he could not get access to the Professionals shop which was locked up. This was about 4.15 p.m. on an early December day in which it was estimated that less than twenty persons had been at the Club during the day.

Afterwards in the bar the Member confessed that he had only wanted to see the Professional to find out the price of a set of clubs that he was thinking of buying from the local discount store and wanted to find out how much he was saving. The Member was critical of the Professional for shutting early stating that it was his job to see the shop was open during daylight hours. Technically he was right but it set me thinking whether it was not time clubs started to look carefully at the role of the Professional and whether we can really expect the shop to be open all hours.

The introduction of the Minimum Wage has further highlighted this fact as the cost of maintaining the services are likely to rise and in many cases the Club will be expected to cover at least part of the cost.

The cost of employing an Assistant for a 40-hour week at say £6.50 per hour would be approx. £1040 per month, or £13,520 per annum, plus National Insurance. So a Club that requires the Professional to employ two Assistants will incur a cost in excess of £27,000 p.a.

Any Assistants on “accredited training” do not have to be paid the Minimum Wage of £6.50 (rates will change on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014) and the Employer can pay them a lower rate of £5.13 for the first six months. The Young Workers Rate for 16 and 17 year olds is £3.79 per hour, note 16 and 17 year old apprentices are exempt from the young workers rate.

A National Minimum Wage of £2.73 per hour for apprentices was first introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010. The wage applies to:

- ✎ all apprentices aged under 19
- ✎ apprentices aged 19 or over in the first year of their Apprenticeship

The main rate of £6.50 applies to those aged 21 and over, the development rate for those aged 18-20 is £5.13 and there are variations for those workers within the first six months of their employment. Allowances have to be made for money earned by lessons and playing with

members and commission on shop sales. In many cases the Assistants will have a low basic wage each week, which even if you only pay at the minimum of £5.13 means a substantial increase.

It must also be realised even with recent rises in the Minimum Wage a 40-hour week would be an unrealistic pay for many Assistants, especially during the summer months when longer hours can be worked.

Money earned by the Assistant from teaching and playing with members and commission from sales in the shop should be paid by the employer and this counts towards calculating the hourly rate.

It might be possible to restructure the job so that the Professional only pays for the hours worked in the shop and to keep these to the minimum hours to conform to the minimum wage and the Assistant works on his own account for lessons and playing golf with members. You will need to clear any working arrangement with the Inland Revenue if the Professional goes down this road. This will reduce the hours an Assistant works in the shop to just over 20 hours based on the main rate at approximately £130 per week.

This is probably a good time for the Club to review the Professional's role at the Club and see what if anything it can do to improve the situation. It has to be accepted that members will invariably buy their equipment in which they can get the best deal which is often not from the club shop. The standard of professionals shops vary from being as good as departmental store to poor facilities which unless radically upgraded will never achieve any real impact. Those Professionals who have well equipped premises with facilities for customers to try out equipment can compete with the best but regrettably there are vast numbers of clubs in which this is not the case.

Furthermore in many cases the Professional has not the ability to promote such a shop. This is not necessarily a disaster because in some cases the Professional has built up a reputation for coaching and the shop is only a very small part of the business. In this case it is better to provide first class practice facilities including indoor ones rather than spending vast sums on the shop. You also need to assess the membership as a whole to see what support they would give and what opposition there is in the area by means of other clubs and discount stores.

There are numerous ways which the Club can help the Professional if they are not already doing so. All entries to club competitions can be made through the shop and all prizes in the form of vouchers can be credited to member's accounts which at least encourage them to spend at least some money and bring those playing competitions into the shop which can result in extra sales by good promotions.

If all sections of the Club are made to enter their competitions in this way (men's, ladies, veterans and juniors), then this will involve a substantial number of members.

Clubs should also look at the hours the shop is open during the winter months as it is possible that savings could be made in this direction at many clubs. This is rather like the catering scenario in which some members expect the caterer to be on hand for countless hours for little or no return. It could be a good time to carry out a survey on the numbers at the club and using the facilities during the winter months. Even if the green fees/visitors fees are collected by the professional these are invariably considerably less in winter when they would normally not be taken after 12.30 p.m. because of the time involved in playing 18 holes.

The area in which many clubs could give a real boost to their professional is provide the best possible practice facilities within the club and actively encourage the members to have regular lessons. The vast majority of members rarely if ever use their professional for a check up on their swing etc, perhaps they could encourage members by marketing their services and offer group lessons etc, which many do already. A combined marketing review between the club and professional could result in more income for the latter and at the same time keep the members happy.

I have noticed at some clubs the Ladies Section has a regular golf clinic by the Professional which not only produces income but can lead to sales of new clubs and equipment. At one club they have a quarterly clinic for the veterans section and I understand that the maximum number of 20 is reached without any problems.

The vast majority of members gives little support to their professional, but complain bitterly if they do not get the service. I see no reason why the use of smart cards could not also include an amount to be spent in the professionals' shop that at least would make members go in and have a look around. But at the same time the professional must be seen to be prepared to put themselves out for the benefit of the members. It has to work both ways.

To sum up Clubs should carefully consider the following:

- 1) Can the shop and facilities be improved to provide a better base for the Professional? Before spending large amounts of money on any scheme the Club must be certain that they have the support of the membership.
- 2) Practice facilities - Can these be improved to provide a better system that will encourage more members to use the services of their professional? In some cases an additional three holes could provide an area for testing clubs and also for tuition. If land is available and the Club is in the right place the addition of a Driving Range can benefit both parties. To be really successful this needs to have covered bays and to be floodlit. You need to get non members to use these facilities so you need to be certain that there is sufficient potential in the area.
- 3) Look at the possibility of the Club helping the Professional to arrange groups of members for coaching. This means not only providing facilities but actively encouraging them to participate. You could perhaps have prizes for the most improved player (handicap wise) in different age groups. Once you get a few members cleaning up on the regular four ball because their game has improved, you may well find others keen to join.

- 4) Try to encourage the Professional to include new lines in the shop and these can often be advertised through the Club Newsletter or even on the notice board.
- 5) When circulating to members, such as the AGM or Annual Subscriptions try and get the Professional to produce a leaflet setting out the services they provide and any bargains they may have.

*National Minimum Wage figures updated October 2014.*

\*There are various levels of Accredited Training. Contact the PGA for further details:

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See: [www.pga.info/](http://www.pga.info/)

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