



COULD WE GET THAT IN WRITING?

Boards that speak with one voice operate efficiently in a constructive culture. GGA consultant Fred Laughlin says documentation using a Board Policies Manual is the key.

A fundamental principle of effective club governance is for the board to speak with one voice. Too often, however, club boards comprise representatives from different factions or activity groups who believe it is their job to speak for their constituencies rather than to seek what's best for the club overall. But boards that are a collection of cliques breed an unpleasant climate and develop unproductive practices.

Conversely, boards that learn to speak with one voice tend to operate efficiently in a constructive culture. They respect differences of opinion, but they recognize the value of unity. They debate as many and govern as one.

The most direct road to establishing a club board with a single voice is to be intentional about it. Write down how you want the board to carry out its duties. Be clear about the role of the board, its officers and committees, and its relationship with the GM. And describe the culture the board members are to respect and maintain. Express all of these aspects in the form of board policies and put them in a single document, which I call the Board Policies Manual (BPM).

A BPM is a compendium of board policies. Although typically fewer than 15 pages in length, its advantages are considerable and include:

- Clearly communicating how the board will meet its responsibilities.
- Providing a single source for ongoing board policies.
- Facilitating orientation of new board members to current policies.
- Eliminating redundant or conflicting policies over time.
- Efficiently reviews of current policy when considering new issues.
- Clarifying roles of board, officers, committees and staff.

For private clubs that bring on several new board members and a new president each year, the BPM also provides continuity. Having policies in place guards against the whip-sawing action that can take place under new board leadership. If the board makes the policies that govern the role of the president, then it will take the board to change them, preventing the president from changing them on a personal whim.





Despite the benefits inherent in a BPM, few clubs have them. The reasons they give include:

- *We like the flexibility and ambiguity. We have an unwritten policy of never writing anything down.* Such clubs get the governance they deserve, including an antiquated, often dysfunctional board, where one's status is more important than the collective wisdom of those directors elected by the members.
- *It's too much work.* It does take work, but the improved efficiency of the board will more than pay for the investment of time and energy.
- *It will only gather dust.* The BPM should be a dynamic document with changes made with each new policy or changes to previous policies.

The most efficient and effective way for a board to speak with one voice is in writing, with all standing board policies in a single document, a BPM. Properly implemented, the BPM can function as a governance management system. But don't make the mistake of treating the BPM as a one-off exercise. Keep it dynamic. Develop it, maintain it, refine it, and respect it. Let it testify to the commitment your board has to governing with excellence.

Fred Laughlin is a consultant to Global Golf Advisors, specializing in club governance.





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Global Golf Advisors is the leading authority on successful ownership and management practices for golf, private club, real estate and resort businesses. Headquartered in Phoenix (US), Toronto (Canada) and Dublin (Ireland), GGA offers services in asset management and monitoring, transaction advisory, strategic planning, membership programming, research, financial analysis, feasibility planning, operations consulting and marketing and business planning. The Firm takes a 360-degree view of financial, management and operational issues before developing a strategic plan that establishes benchmarks for success and identifies potential outcomes of recommended actions. In its 20-year history, GGA has consulted on more than 2,300 golf-related projects worldwide. For more information, please visit www.globalgolfadvisors.com or call 1.888.432.9494.

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