

KOPPLIN & KUEBLER

“The Most Trusted Names in Private Club Executive Placement”

FIVE TRUST BUILDERS FOR THE CLUB BOARD

By Richard Kopplin

One of the most important discussions I have with private club members as I travel around the country is how they can build trust with their fellow board members. How can members of a private club board feel that they are serving the best interests of the club while enjoying the volunteer time they spend with other like-minded club members? I like to share the following five ways to build trust, which will allow for a productive relationship with every board member.

First, you need to engage a concept I call **“leveling.”** When the doors of the boardroom close it is time for frank and open discussion regarding all the issues that will flow through the agenda. Candor and spirited debate should be encouraged as the board reviews the recommendations and action plans that the standing club committee chairmen have placed on the agenda. Honest disagreements should take place at the board table, not outside the boardroom at the round table in the grille.

Second, every board member must engage in active **“listening.”** Too often there is tendency on the part of some board members to dominate the conversation. Listening is perhaps the most important communication skill and it takes more practice than talking. I suggest to verbose board members that they listen to at least two other opinions expressed by their compatriots before they comment on the issue at hand. Listening to other comments and taking time to reflect allows for more rational verbal contributions.

Third, each board member needs to demonstrate **“support”** for the work of other board members who typically chair a standing club committee. The work of the club is done at the committee level and not at the board level. The standing committees will be meeting on a regular basis and working through the “process” involved in the issues appropriate to their committee. The summary of their work will be reported by their chairperson at the board meeting and will often result in “action plans” asking the board for a decision on a particular recommendation by the committee. The board meeting is an opportunity to affirm the hard work of the committees and their chairpersons and should not evolve into a re-hashing of committee issues by the board.

Fourth, private club board members need to commit to a **“unity of purpose.”** The strength of a good club board results from its variety and diversity of composition. Every board member has a unique background and a plethora of experiences, which can contribute to the wise governance of the club. These differences, however, should not allow for board members to pursue personal agendas at the board meetings. Too often a board meeting goes awry because a narrowly focused board member disrupts a thoughtful and well-prepared agenda. The best board members understand that their role is to serve the best interests of the club membership, regardless of any partisan interests they might have. The focus at the board meeting should be on best business practices for the betterment of the club.

Fifth, every board member should commit to **“circling the wagons.”** Members of a private club will often “lobby” a board member regarding an issue they have an interest in. Board members have been elected to represent the membership at large and part of their responsibility is to listen to this member “feedback.” However, if a club member begins to attack and criticize the club president or anyone on the board the comments need to be refocused on the issue and not the board member.

“I can understand Jim or Jane that you might be upset with the recent action of our club president on that issue and I will see that your concerns are appropriately addressed. However, I need to tell you that I have observed the amount of time our club president has committed to this club. You may not agree with everything that he/she does but they have the best interests of the club at heart and they volunteer an incredible amount of their time to improve our club operations.”

As a board member, listening to some member feedback, you have just “circled the wagons.” You have told this complaining club member that while they may have a gripe with a particular action of the club president or even the board, you will not tolerate a personal attack on the president or any of your fellow board members.

If you adopt the five Trust Builders you will enjoy an improved relationship with every board member and the working environment in the boardroom will be professional and productive. You have volunteered your time for the betterment of the club and now you can enjoy your work while building a trusting relationship with everyone on the board.