

KOPPLIN & KUEBLER

“The Most Trusted Names in Private Club Executive Placement”

GOOD PRAXIS EQUALS GOOD GOVERNANCE

By Richard Kopplin

One of my favorite authors, Bob Proctor, defines Praxis as “the alignment of behaviors with beliefs.” I have observed that the very best private club boards and their general managers are committed to Praxis as they govern and manage their clubs. I am convinced that is why they are so successful.

I have also observed that when clubs have internal issues and problems it can often be traced to an absence of Praxis. When actual practices don’t match stated beliefs there is a disconnect which is evident in even some of the most recognized clubs in the country.

One of the beliefs, so often stated by club presidents and board members, is that the club is committed to the general manager/coo concept. A noble goal and certainly a proven business model that works well in private clubs. Some club boards, however, while espousing that philosophy behave very differently.

An example of behavior not matching this belief is when a club president or board member directly interacts in a supervisory capacity with department managers instead of working through the general manager/coo concept that they have said they endorse. I can recall getting a phone call at 1:30 a.m. on a Sunday morning from our bar manager who wanted to know how he should handle the board member who had consumed a few too many cocktails. He also happened to be the house chairman.

This board member, who was entertaining seven other people at the club, told the bar manager that he should keep the bar open to serve his guests even though the club policy was to close our clubhouse at 1:00 a.m. His comment to the bar manager was that as house chairman he could make that decision without talking to management.

Obviously, this board member’s actions were not matching his and the board’s stated belief, that the club was committed to the general manager/coo concept. The inherent understanding in that concept does not allow for board members to direct employees regarding day-to-day operations.

While many club presidents will tell me that their club boards are committed to the general manager/coo concept they will also admit to sometimes “coloring outside of the lines” when it comes to some day-to-day management issues at the club. Whenever I see micro-management of the general manager or department heads occurring at a club you can be sure that Praxis is out of alignment. The behavior of the board members is not matching the stated belief that the gm/coo should be handling all of the day-to-day operational issues.

Another example of a Praxis problem is when the club directors have stated that they want a high level of quality maintenance on the golf course but are unwilling to provide the superintendent and employees with the resources to reach that high level.

One of the club presidents I worked with many years ago boldly proclaimed that by the end of the summer the club would have the “best maintained golf course in the state.” A wonderful and worthy goal for the superintendent and grounds department employees.

However, the board of directors and the club president declined to purchase two important pieces of equipment the superintendent had requested in his capital budget and also vetoed the addition of two grounds keepers, already recommended for hire in the grounds committee budget memo.

Striving to achieve that goal of being “the best golf course in the state” was virtually impossible to achieve without the proper resources. The behavior of the club president and board did not match their stated beliefs and goals. Another example of misaligned Praxis.

One of the club boards I worked with recently lamented to me the lack of participation by club members and their unwillingness to serve on club committees. The president told me that he and the other board members were dismayed by the lack of interest and they couldn’t understand why club members would not volunteer their time for the betterment of the club.

When I probed this “lack of interest” issue with a few club members I was told repeatedly “the board made all the decisions at this club and never listened to any committee recommendations.” Sounds like a Praxis problem to me.

The Board said they wanted member participation and committee involvement but didn’t listen to or respect the recommendations of the committees. No wonder most club members said they didn’t want to waste their time in such a frustrating exercise.

The “model club boards” I work with understand that the work of the club is done at the committee level and not at the board level. If the Board wants truly engaged and active participation of the membership, they need to listen to the committee volunteers and insure that their recommendations receive respectful consideration at the board meeting.

Another common Praxis misalignment that I often observe in private clubs is the desire for first class service but a lack of commitment to ongoing training and education for the employees. This is often the first budget line item eviscerated during difficult economic times. Employees in every club department need ongoing training. Enlightened club boards and perspicacious general managers commit a portion of every annual budget to this important endeavor.

The more committed club directors are to aligning their governance practices with their stated beliefs at the club the more they will reap the rewards. Model clubs have discovered that good Praxis means good governance.