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Is it Time to Deconstruct Your House Committee?

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You have heard the term “deconstructed” when referring to changing the traditional preparation and presentation of a dish and then plating the same ingredient together but in a different way. Take for example Executive Chef Scott Ryan’s “deconstructed French onion soup.” At The Country Club in Pepper Pike, OH, Chef Ryan’s soup is composed of caramelized onion puree, warm Epoisses cheese, crispy shallots, and dissolvable ravioli filled with garlic bread crumbs and Asiago cheese. A rich onion consommé is poured table side and it is garnished with minced chives and micro onion blooms.

Now that I’ve whetted your appetite, let’s take that analogy and apply it to your house committee. When I was introduced to the private club industry nearly 30 years ago, house committees were charged with “having the authority over” and “having responsibility for” the matters of the clubhouse. That was back in the days when the bartenders who were at the club the longest kept being promoted until they were club managers (not intended to offend any bartenders out there!). Back then high quality, club-specific operations education was hard to find and the level of professionalism in the business was lower than today.

Fast forward to 2014 and the breadth and depth of high quality education both in hospitality schools and in continuing education continues to grow, and management teams are more educated and professional than ever before. These individuals have dedicated their lives to the hospitality business and have the expertise, education, and tools to effectively manage the operations of your club.

To decide if you need to deconstruct the house committee, track how much time is spent discussing operational details such as linens and the ideal carrot slice in house committee meetings and consider how much more effectively time could be spent working as a liaison between the members and the department heads.

Review the goals and responsibilities of the committee and determine if they are in vogue or outdated. If the responsibilities include words such as “authority over” and “responsibility for” it is certainly time for a deconstruction. I’m not advocating abolishing the house committee entirely (although some clubs have been very successful in doing just that). I’m simply recommending a deconstruction like Chef Scott’s French onion soup – breaking the ingredients apart and then reconstructing them in a new and more updated way.

In most successful clubs, the house committee is a sounding board and works collaboratively with the management team responsible for those departments. It provides input to the management team and recommendations to the board. The house committees of successful clubs do not get involved in clubhouse operations. They leave that to the paid professionals who were hired to lead and manage the operations of the club.

Does the focus of your house committee change depending on who the members are at any given time? Unfortunately it isn't uncommon for traditional house committees to focus on favorite issues of the committee members instead of the common good of the club as a whole. The house committee should focus on topics and issues that are in alignment with the club's mission, vision and strategic plan, thereby promoting continuity from one committee to the next and ensuring that the focus is on the needs of the many instead of the needs of the few that serve on the committee.

Review your club's mission, vision, core values, and strategic plan. The house committee charter should have a clear and validated alignment with those governing documents.

Review the goals and responsibilities that are stated in the committee charter document. Rewrite your house committee charter using words such as "liaison" and "collaborate" instead of "authority over" and "responsibility for."

Important benefits may be gained by deconstructing the house committee including shorter house committee meetings, more effective and productive use of your managers' time, and greater fulfillment and enjoyment of your overall club experience. And isn't the latter the reason you joined the club in the first place?

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Chef Scott Ryan, CEC, AAC, is the Executive Chef at The Country Club in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Chef Ryan competed on July 3rd in the Global Chefs Challenge in Stavanger, Norway and won "First Runner Up" – an impressive accomplishment! The Global Chefs Challenge is held every two years as part of the World Association of Chef Societies (WACS a/k/a Worldchefs) Congress. Chef Ryan is also President of the Cleveland Chapter of the American Culinary Federation (ACF).