

## Club Governance in Private Members Clubs

# Mind the GAP

The relationship between a manager and the committee or board can define the success of the whole club.

Industry expert Kevin Fish explains how you can make it a successful one



**MIND THE GAP**

**Governance is the hot potato that no club manager can ignore. In fact, it perhaps affects their enjoyment of their job, and their career prospects, more than any other area of operations.**

**Few know more about the ways of club committees and boards and how to handle them than long-time GCMA member Kevin Fish.**

**Consistently rated by delegates as the stand out speaker at last year's National Conference, his success at Cotswold Water Park was forged by three revealing sessions on the fundamentals of club governance.**

**He's since been delving deeper, carrying out further analysis on a subject that's only grown in importance this year with the coronavirus pandemic and the way it has affected clubs.**

**We asked him to reveal his findings...**

**Kevin, you have been diving deeper in to club governance – what have you learned?**

Our research has shown that the average tenure of a Golf Club Manager in the UK is just over 4 years. And whilst the primary reason given by a Club Manager for moving on is their own desire to change clubs to further their career, a quarter (23%) of managers admit that they were “nudged out” of their jobs.

A further 21% describe that departure as “through mutual agreement”. When added together, this data tells us that when things got tough at the club, for whatever reason,

almost half (44%) of managers were not on the same page as their Board members.

These statistics are consistent with studies in other countries and simply reinforce the importance of managers being able to work with, and not against, their Committee.

### **What is at play here?**

I have seen club governance up close from every angle and know what an incredibly challenging working environment this can be. I firmly believe there are two key aspects to being successful in getting long term, sustainable results in and around the boardroom.

Firstly, as Club Managers we must be able to demonstrate consistently high levels of emotional agility. I would define that as being sufficiently aware of our own emotional reactors, in order to manage our behaviours, to best achieve our goals and values. Quite a mouthful to get your head around, but we recognise it when we see it, and its clearer still when that skill is missing. Just think of a busy Christmas

period with the extended family and the in-laws and you will know the skillset I am describing!

The second key factor for long-term success as a Club Manager, is to surround yourself with a Committee full of well-intentioned, passionate volunteers who are highly trained in the unique world of private golf clubs.

### **And in the real-world Kevin...**

Ok, I admit, getting just two out of three of those characteristics is as much as we can hope for. Whilst most of us can relate to the passion and positive intentions of the Committee Members we serve, I suspect that the one area where we might, just might, fall down, is that last element – highly trained in the unique world of private golf clubs.

In the absence of a Swiss finishing school to train our Committee Members we are often left with people who are undoubtedly experience rich, but sadly, theory poor. This makes for frustrating periods where the newcomers to the board room are getting up to





speed on how things work in a golf club. Worse still, some newcomers arrive with a single item agenda, perhaps representing the views of a vocal minority. You as the experienced Manager may skilfully win that particular battle with the new Board member, but you know that this victory comes at a cost, and you have in effect, laid the foundations to potentially lose the war.

***Haven't Club Managers always had this problem working with committees?***

Yes, and I must confess that people like me may have even inadvertently played a part in making the problem worse. Let me explain. For the last decade we have raised the profile and the importance of Club Governance in this country, ensuring that it is thoroughly

understood and introduced to the board room by the many managers who have attended governance training and workshops.

It is possible that by doing so, we have widened the gap between the knowledge level & expectations of our Club Managers and the knowledge level of the Board Members who have been left behind.

With more clubs fighting for fewer members these days, the boardroom practices and behaviours that could be accommodated during the boom years of golf, simply are not enough in today's competitive environment. Frustratingly, the well-meaning Club Managers who try to highlight these deficiencies are rarely thanked with a pay-rise.

What I can say with certainty is that after every Governance workshop I deliver for Club

Managers, the most common piece of feedback I receive from delegates is "I wish my Committee had been here to hear that, Kevin."

***So what we are saying is that the knowledge gap is wider now.***

Yes, and that gap is sadly one that many a great club manager has fallen through, sometimes never to be seen again. This summer's circumstances have given us all a lot of time to reflect, and I am sorry to say that in some cases this has resulted in a few managers choosing to call it a day. The reason given to me by those managers is predominantly that they just cannot raise their game again, to deal with the perennial problem of nurturing their committee to do the right things right.

## Governance challenges in private clubs: (CCL Research 2020)



- ☐ Committee is too large & often too slow
- ☐ Meetings are often too long & often ineffective
- ☐ Sometimes not enough follow-through on decisions
- ☐ We try to be business-like, but don't have a robust plan
- ☐ Sometimes our volunteers stray in to operational issues
- ☐ It can be difficult to find the right people, with the right approach
- ☐ We can be guilty of inconsistency
- ☐ We can suffer from vocal minorities hijacking our agenda / focus
- ☐ We often feel ill prepared to make decisions due to lack of insight
- ☐ We can tell things could be better, but there is resistance to change, and we struggle to build momentum

***How many of these common problems do you recognise?***

### **So what are those perennial problems Kevin?**

As you know I was a Club Manager for nearly 10 years, and also a Board Chairman for 6, so I have seen it from both sides. I have also conducted research with both Club Managers and Club Chairmen/Chairwomen and can reveal what they believe to be the key governance challenges.

### **Is there any good news?**

Strangely enough yes. Many of the Managers reading this will confirm that the circumstances clubs have found themselves in this summer has resulted in a "can-do" or "must-do" attitude. For example Boards have:

- ✓ Moved swiftly to embrace virtual meetings,
- ✓ Communicated frequently and honestly with the members on the changing landscape,
- ✓ Switched on with laser focus to what members need from their club right now,
- ✓ Extended terms of office bearers for continuity of club business and activities,
- ✓ Rapidly updated byelaws to permit on-line voting to conduct the essential affairs of the club.

To underline that, we know from our governance survey of club managers that three quarters of managers (75%) describe their committee support as more positive this year, with near to half (40%) describing committee support as excellent.

The older readers of this magazine will remember the cartoon series about the Trumpton Fire Brigade, who came together every month to practice, but never did much more than rescue the odd cat. Well it feels like the equivalent at our clubs just showed they really can put a fire out when they need to - and we need to embrace and build on that momentum.

### **So, how do we build on that momentum ?**

I am happy to share all of survey findings with GCMA members who contact me, and there are some easy wins which I can share below.

- The average size of a golf Club Committee is 10.2 (Yes, I know you are now picturing your own 0.2 of a committee member...)
- Over half (53%) describe the number on their Committee as "too high"
- Respondents only change their answer to "about the right number" when that number drops to 8.
- The average time for a regular committee meeting is around 120 minutes and is understandably described as "too long" until clubs reach 90 minutes or less.
- The percentage of clubs who offer no training or induction at all for their incoming board members – 46%

Let us reflect on that last statistic. **Almost half of our club managers acknowledge**



### **Call the Committee!**

**that their new board members undertake no induction or training before they attend their first board meeting.** I think we may have found somewhere to start to address the situation and begin to close the gap. This is the gap that many good managers have fallen down, often without ever knowing there was a hand against their back ready to give the final push.

I have dedicated much of the last 15 years of my career and volunteer time helping to professionalise our industry and have now arrived at the point where I believe the greatest impact I can have, is to help Club Managers to close the gap.

### **How can you help Managers to close that gap?**

In creating the solution, a picture came in to my head of going to my first Newcastle United match with my Dad. Nobody handed out a song sheet on the way in. Football fans rely on a form of osmosis

to pick up the words to the songs and sure enough after a few visits it seems to work just well enough to let us join in, and play our part in doing things the way they have always been done.

Running your golf club is far too important to rely on our own form of osmosis, and if this article tells you anything it is that we do not really want things to be done the way they have always been done.

One very helpful solution is to create an annual induction day for your Board Members. Less than one in TWENTY clubs offer their Boards an induction day, although it is interesting to note that these events have been embraced by clubs in the high

tier of the industry more than elsewhere.

One new option now available to you, is the result of my work this summer. I have applied my 20 years of theory and practice on this subject, to create a new tool that helps all clubs to "close the gap" in and around the boardroom. It is an interactive support tool for Board Members that will dramatically improve their understanding and therefore performance. Most importantly, it protects Club Managers from risking their own relationships by talking about the elephant in the room.

Board Members have earned our respect during this lockdown crisis. I strongly

recommend that Managers build on this momentum in the board room. If I can help fellow GCMA members to close the gap and in doing so, enhance your career fulfilment, I would be delighted to help you, to help your club.

**Kevin Fish CCM**

 **CONTEMPORARY  
CLUB LEADERSHIP**  
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**See overleaf for  
CCL's new  
Glub Governance  
Online toolbox**

## WHO IS KEVIN FISH?

Kevin has over 20 years of experience in the golf club industry. A former club manager at the Glen Golf Club, in North Berwick, from 1999 to 2008, he was named the GCMA's Manager of The Year in 2004.

In 2008 he became the first club manager in Europe to be awarded the global designation CCM (Certified Club Manager). He went on to work for the Scottish Golf Union for seven years, selecting and leading a team that provided support to hundreds of Scottish golf clubs. He has been integral to the introduction of structured education for club managers throughout Europe and is now the go-to person in our industry for club governance, business planning and financial benchmarking.

He has been invited to address the World Conference of Club Management on over a dozen occasions and now runs his own unique training, recruitment and consultancy business, Contemporary Club Leadership, whose aim is simply to help club leaders do the right things right.

For more, visit [www.ccl.services](http://www.ccl.services),  
email [kevin@ccl.services](mailto:kevin@ccl.services)  
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Duncan Ritchie, 2020 Captain, The Berkshire Golf Club, says:

*"What a privilege it is to be invited to join the Management of your Club, but it doesn't necessarily suit everyone. These short videos will be massively helpful, and can also be used individually during a Committee meeting. They are educational, and enjoyable - Kevin Fish is not only a Master at Club Management, but he is also an outstanding communicator, and his Geordie lilt is a great sound to hear....Bonny lad!!!"*

## HOW WILL IT BENEFIT MY CLUB ?

- » Create the highest level of decision making and underline the importance of best practice in and around the board room.
- » The highest level of coaching from industry experts, who will answer the questions your board need to ask, so that they can do the right things right for your club.
- » Total buy in will create a conveyor belt of success, and achieve the goals of your club.

***"A one stop shop that covers all the bases, specific to golf clubs. Excellent !"***

**Ian Forbes, House Convenor,  
Ratho Park GC,  
Edinburgh**

***"True professionals with a thorough understanding of our world – invaluable !"***

**Debbie Pern CCM,  
Club Manager  
Deeside Golf Club**

## HOW WILL IT BENEFIT ME AS A CLUB MANAGER ?

- » You can rely on someone that you trust, to bring your volunteers and staff on to the same page as you, and close that gap in and around the boardroom.
- » The internationally recognised leading expert in this field will guide your new committee members, and build their respect for your role as the industry professional at your club.
- » Ensure that your board understand their role is strategic rather than operational, and by doing so, remove micro management and conflict.

## HOW DO I GET INVOLVED ?

Click the button on the right to give up to 20 of your Board Members 12 months of access to the expertise you have benefited from. You can pay by credit card now, and as soon as you make your purchase, we will be in touch to personalise the platform for you and your club

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## WHY IS KEVIN FISH THE GO-TO GUY FOR CLUB GOVERNANCE IN OUR INDUSTRY ?

- » The most experienced golf club governance consultant in the UK delivering proven practical profitable advice.
- » Worked successfully with thousands of office bearers at hundreds of golf clubs.
- » Developed governance guides for the Home Unions of Golf and British Cycling.
- » Consistently the highest scoring presenter within industry training programmes on this crucial topic.
- » Hugely experienced in governance from both sides of the desk, both as a qualified Club Manager and successful volunteer Board Member.
- » I talk your language, I understand the world you work in.

