

Quality and Service In Private Clubs

What Every Manager Needs to Know



Ed Rehkopf



Quality and Service in Private Clubs - What Every Manager Needs to Know

Here are eight thought-provoking articles that explore the full dimensions and challenges of organizing your club to provide high levels of quality and service. Many of the organizational requirements mentioned in these articles are available through Private Club Performance Management and are listed in the appendix.

Quality and Service

I have often come across hotels, resorts, restaurants, clubs, golf courses, or management companies that claim to offer their customers: Extraordinary, Legendary, Remarkable, Superb, or World-class Service.

Yet how many of these organizations have taken the time or made the effort to define their quality and service standards?

Let us take a moment to define what we mean by service and quality. According to Dictionary.com:

- Service is “the act of helpful activity.” In club operations it is the process or performance of some task or event for your members.
- Quality is “a characteristic or property that signifies relative merit or excellence.” In our industry the word is used to express the relative merits or excellence of the facilities, amenities, activities, and service provided.

Given that the quality of a club operation’s is defined by the relative merits of those things and the service provided to members, let us pose some questions regarding the service to which you aspire or claim to offer:

- Have you or your club defined what service is for your service-delivery employees?
- Have you explained or trained your employees what you and your members’ expectations for service are?
- Do you know what your members expect when it comes to service? If so, how do you know? What methodology is used to determine members’ needs and expectations?
- Have you identified your key service touch points or moments of truth for your employees?
- Have you taught or demonstrated for your employees how to handle various touch points in all their possible variations and contingencies?
- Have you documented touch points and service standards, policies, and procedures to ensure that they are taught consistently to each new employee and new generations of employees?
- Do you have a means of measuring compliance with service standards, policies, and procedures?



- Do you have a process to address service failures?
- Do you have a process to make service failures right for your members?
- Do you have a process to discover underlying causes of service failures to ensure they don't happen again?
- Do you have a consistent process to educate employees about changes to standards, policies, and procedures to eliminate service failures?
- Do you have a means of monitoring service failures to identify trends or spot problems?
- Do your employees know that they can self-report their service failures without fear or repercussions?

If you've answered "no" to most of these questions, you do not provide quality service. What you do provide is a series of interactions between employees and members that may or may not meet the expectations of members or management. The quality you provide is based purely on chance and, therefore, has an unacceptably high risk of failures.

If the above describes your club's quality and service, there is much to work on to meet the implied or explicit promises you've made to your members.

What Price Poor Service in Private Clubs?

No two people would describe service in the same manner, as service like beauty and quality is in the eye of the beholder. Yet, there are certain words or terms that are routinely used to describe the expected norms of service in private clubs. To name a few they include: adhering to commonly accepted standards of etiquette, prompt, courteous, alert and aware, knowledgeable, engaging, responsive, consistent, anticipatory, effortless, and friendly.

We've all experienced poor service in restaurants or retail establishments and seldom return to those places where service does not meet our expectations. After such experiences we'll warn family, friends, and acquaintances to avoid such businesses. On the other hand, when we come across a business with outstanding service, we'll sing their praises from the mountaintops and return often to spend our money.

But these experiences are in public establishments that serve the wider public. What about the service that members might experience at a private club? What are their expectations from a place where they are known and where they pay regular dues? What happens when a member or members are dissatisfied with the service they receive from club staff?

First, they are offended, sometimes deeply, that their own club performs so poorly, and their disappointment is compounded by a monthly reminder when they pay their dues. Often, they'll come to the club less frequently and will feel the value of the club is not worth the expense. In the dining room this is made even worse by the seemingly coercive nature of food minimums.

Second, they complain to other members, some of whom may have experienced similar service breakdowns. Individual complaints when repeated widely can develop into an undercurrent of dissatisfaction particularly when there are repeated service failures.

Third, in focusing on past service issues members can become hyper-sensitive and critical of even the smallest service faults.



Fourth, negative comments about service at the club are made to non-member friends and acquaintances in the community making it harder to attract new members, particularly those who may be on the fence about the value of joining, thereby choking off the continuing lifeblood of the club.

Fifth, members are less inclined to bring their guests to the club out of fear that they'll be embarrassed by further service failures. This can impact the club's revenues significantly in all areas – golf, food and beverage, catering, activities, and club events. Declining revenues in some clubs are met with staff cutbacks that only make service levels worse.

Sixth, members begin taking their complaints to board members and when enough similar complaints are heard, the board can become fixated with solving service issues, even to the exclusion of other important club business.

Seventh, when board and member concerns about service are not quickly addressed, it's not unheard of for some members to take it upon themselves to address these issues directly with the general manager, department heads, or even line employees. This involvement, or as many managers would say – interference – is seldom helpful in fixing the problem, and in many cases, only makes things worse.

Eighth, when service is sufficiently bad or uncorrected over time, some members may resign, further damaging the club's finances.

Ninth, the club's outstanding employees – those who take pride in their work and their place of employment – become discouraged by the failures around them and morale suffers. Reduced morale is the start of a downward spiral that is challenging to turn around. In the worst case, good employees leave for greener pastures. There is great cost in such turnover, including lost continuity and knowledge of members and their habits.

Tenth, members pick up on the declining morale which only compounds their unhappiness with the club and its service. This is especially critical when long-term employees who are well-known and beloved by members let their sagging morale be known.

Eleventh, a group of influential or vocal members begins calling for the replacement of certain department heads, or even the general manager.

Twelfth, at this point the focus of member dissatisfaction, whether general manager or department head, is so severe that it is difficult to turn around. Many members and even the board will conclude that the only solution is a change in management staff.

The above scenario usually plays out over a period of many months and creates havoc in the smooth functioning of the club. The turmoil and emotion involved impacts all involved in a most profound way and can be avoided if management simply recognizes that, despite all the other management disciplines necessary for success, service and service delivery are first and foremost in the minds of members.

As the first principle in Principles of Service states, "Service is our only product." Everything else is just the details of how to consistently make it happen. To paraphrase the old safety slogan, "Service is job one!"



The Cost of Chaos

Common wisdom tells us that quality costs more, but according to one of the foremost experts on quality this is not the case.

W. Edwards Deming, statistician, professor, author, consultant, lecturer, and individual who made significant contributions to Japan's reputation for high quality products and its rise to economic power in the latter half of the 20th Century, wrote extensively about how a focus on quality reduces costs while providing a number of other benefits. Convincingly, his ideas and methods were proven true by numerous success stories – most dramatically the rise of Japanese manufacturing to world class status from the ashes of World War II.

How does a club measure or quantify the cost of confusion, mishandled or incomplete information and orders, time to investigate and correct errors, and member dissatisfaction? The bottom line is that poor quality and disorganization is a major driver of costs in club operations. Conversely, an improvement in quality not only lowers costs but also improves service. The combination of lower cost and better service attracts more member patronage which improves the club's bottom line.

Detailed organizational systems and processes allow the operation to function efficiently. When things happen routinely and consistently in all areas of the operation, employees have the time and the inclination to focus on quality and service. When everything is messed up all the time, employees find it difficult to care.

So, help yourself and your employees by structuring the routine to happen routinely. This takes both the will and the organizational discipline to make it happen. When 80% of the details happen routinely, everyone can focus on the 20% that will wow members.

Here are some things that food service managers can do to better organize their operations. This short list is pure common sense and similar tasks apply just as much to any manager in other areas of your club's operation:

- Prepare written procedures for all routine tasks – opening, closing, and cleaning procedures, conducting inventories, replenishing par stocks, making coffee and iced tea, and on and on. Since your staff does these things on an ongoing basis, take the time to write them down in detail so they can be used for consistent training and task completion.
- Prepare and use checklists for both training and day-to-day accountability.
- Prepare room diagrams of all dining and event spaces. These will save time and avoid misunderstandings when it comes to room set ups. Prepare and save set up diagrams for all types of events – receptions, carving stations, buffets, wedding receptions, etc.
- Organize a filing system for each of the above so you can find them quickly when you need them.
- Anytime you hold a training session, organize and save the material. You'll certainly be using the same material again ... and again!



- Review all activities and events after the fact and record your observations. You will undoubtedly hold the same or similar events in the future. Your notes for improvement will help continually improve the quality and execution of all you do.
- Prepare written standards and guidance for such basic matters as background music selections for differing meal periods, activities, and times of day. Make the same effort to define appropriate lighting for differing events and time of day.
- Prepare and use an ever-updated list of project work that can be used to assign to staff in slow moments when you're not prepared to send anyone home early.
- Train yourself in the techniques and disciplines of time management. Time management is not about managing time, it's about managing those task that use up your limited time. When you waste your time, you can't help but waste your employees' time as well.

No one wants to work in a chaotic environment. If your department or section is well-organized, if everyone knows where things are, if employees are well-trained in opening and closing procedures, if everyone knows their responsibilities and is held accountable, the workplace runs almost effortlessly. Don't run off good people by putting them through the hell of a disorganized operation.

Improve Quality – Lower Costs

Common wisdom tells us that quality costs more, but according to one of the foremost experts on quality this is not the case.

W. Edwards Deming wrote extensively about how a focus on quality and the use of statistical process control reduces costs while providing other benefits.

In his 1982 book, *Out of the Crisis*, written with the aim of transforming American management in the manufacturing sector, but just as applicable to the service and hospitality industries, he provides a chart that shows the logic of his methods.

When you improve quality:

- Your costs decrease because of less rework, fewer mistakes, fewer delays and snags, better use of time and materials.
- This improves productivity,
- Which drives increased market share with better quality and lower prices,
- Which allows you to stay in business, and
- Provides more and more jobs.

He also clearly states that quality is not the job of production (or line) workers, it is the job of management. To this end he proposes the 14 Points for Management which he describes as the "basis for transformation of American industry." They are:

1. "Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service.



2. Adopt the new philosophy that comes with the new economic age. Western management must awaken to the challenge, must learn their responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Eliminate the need for inspection on a mass basis by building quality into the product in the first place.
4. End the practice of awarding business based on price. Instead minimize total cost. Move toward a single supplier for any one item, on a long-term relationship of loyalty and trust.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job. Training must be totally reconstructed. Management needs training to learn about the company, all the way from incoming material to the customer.
7. Institute leadership. The aim of supervision should be to help people and machines and gadgets do a better job. Supervision of management needs overhaul, as well as supervision of production workers.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. Such exhortations only create adversarial relationships, as the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force.
11. Eliminate work quotas. Eliminate management by objective. Eliminate management by numbers, numerical goals. Substitute leadership.
12. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride in workmanship. The responsibility of supervisors must be changed from sheer numbers to quality. Remove barriers that rob people in management of their right to pride in workmanship. This means abolishment of the annual or merit rating and of management by objective.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job."

While Deming's lifework was primarily with manufacturing industries, he categorically states that the principles of statistical process control that produce quality in manufacturing and "all that we learned about the 14 points and the diseases of management applies to service organizations."

Deming goes on to compare the challenges of manufacturing a product and delivering a service. These are instructive to anyone in service who wants to improve quality. As an example, he provides an observation contributed by William J. Latzko, a consultant who works with clients on quality and service:

"One finds in service organizations, as in manufacturing, absence of definite procedures. There is an unstated assumption in most service organizations that the procedures are



fully defined and followed. This appears to be so obvious that authors avoid it. Yet in practice this condition is often not met. Few organizations have up-to-date procedures. Consider a manufacturer who has full specifications for making a product, but whose sales department does not have guidelines for how to enter an order. A control on error on placing orders would require procedures for the sales department. I have seen numerous service-oriented operations functioning without them.”

How does a company measure or quantify the cost of confusion, mishandled or incomplete information, time to investigate and correct errors, and customer dissatisfaction? Without well-defined procedures how can a company consistently train its workers to do quality work?

The bottom line is that poor quality and disorganization is a major driver of costs in manufacturing and service organizations. **In the service industries an improvement in quality not only lowers costs but also improves service** (emphasis added). The combination of lower cost and better service makes the business more competitive and successful in the marketplace – and isn't this the very job that management is hired to do?

Consistency is Key to Quality and Service

When it comes to quality and service some clubs are consistently awesome, a few are consistently awful, and most are consistently inconsistent. While there may be many factors that contribute to the comparative performance of clubs, a major underlying difference is consistency, or lack thereof, in the details of their operations.

As I progressed through my hospitality career, I often heard the time-worn remark that while fast food operations don't provide their customers with the highest quality of product and service; they build their success on providing a consistent product.

Private clubs aim higher for their customers – the elite and affluent members of a community who pay a significant amount to belong and enjoy the ambience and personalized service of a club. Yet, just because a club offers more impressive surroundings, higher quality amenities, and a more upscale menu doesn't mean that members don't have a reasonable expectation of consistency whenever they come to their club.

But in contrasting clubs, which are often standalone operations with limited staffs and no economies of scale, with a McDonalds or a Subway with their significant corporate resources is an unfair comparison. This doesn't mean that clubs should not aspire to consistency of operations, but it does mean that clubs must make a concerted effort to institutionalize consistency in all areas, particularly in its relationship with members.

Here are major areas of a club operation where consistency is critical:

Service-Based Leadership. How your management team interacts with employees is critical to their commitment, performance, and engagement with members. Without a consistent conception and application of leadership at all levels of the operation, the quality and service you provide will be as inconsistent as the leadership styles of each manager and supervisor. *Leadership on the Line: A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners, and Emerging Leaders* and *Leadership on the Line – The Workbook*, both available on the PCPM Marketplace Store, spell out in detail the principles of Service-Based Leadership and are a great foundation for consistent quality and service.



An Overarching Game Plan. Every endeavor demands a plan to be successful. Without a written plan to guide various departments in the execution of their missions, inconsistencies will abound. *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Remarkable Service Infrastructure - An Overarching Plan for Club Excellence* is a good starting point in developing your specific game plan.

Organizational Values and Culture of Service. The values your club holds dear and the manner it interacts with members, employees, and the community at large is crucial to its success. As with any nuanced interaction with others, these must be well-defined, taught, and modeled to ensure consistent understanding and application. *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Organizational Values and Culture of Service* can help you define your own values and culture of service.

Club Operations Plan. How can you possibly determine what employees should be trained to know and do if you have not defined your standards, policies, and procedures? *Club Accounting Standards, Policies, and Procedures* and *Club Personnel Standards, Policies, and Procedures* are both available on the PCPM Marketplace Store. There is no better starting point to prepare your club's customized SPPs in these two critical areas. See *PCPM Insights and Ideas, The Club Operations Plan - A Legacy Contribution for Club Excellence* for more information.

Management Disciplines. In his groundbreaking book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't*, Jim Collins said, "Much of the answer to the question of 'good to great' lies in the discipline to do whatever it takes to become the best within carefully selected arenas and then seek continual improvement in these. It's really just that simple." Without disciplined managers at every level of the organization executing best practice management disciplines, a club will never achieve consistency of operations or greatness. *PCPM, Training Resources, Management Disciplines on the Go* covers these in greater detail.

Member Relations. A club's membership is its lifeblood. How the club interacts with its members in all its areas of engagement will determine the memberships' commitment to and use of club facilities. This is an area that cannot be left to chance. To be consistent in how members are engaged and treated, the club must have a comprehensive Member Relationship Management Plan and all employees must be trained in its requirements. *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Member Relationship Marketing Plan - Romancing Your Members* provides more thoughts on this important topic.

Managerial and Employee Training. If employees are to perform with consistency, all staff, including managers, must be consistently trained in all aspects of their positions and responsibilities, most particularly in the details of service and service delivery. Read *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Comprehensive Club Training - Executing on Your Promise of Quality and Service* for a broad list of training necessities.

Employee Empowerment. John Tschohl said, "Without empowerment, an organization will never be a service leader. Empowerment is the most critical skill an employee can master, and a company can drive in order to lure and keep customers." Creating employee empowerment requires leadership, planning, and training. Consistent empowerment training across all service delivery areas will transform both employee morale and member satisfaction. Read *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Employee Empowerment - Transforming Your Club's Service* for a greater understanding of this revolutionary means of service.



Planning, Execution, and Review. The operational efforts of the club are encompassed in the ongoing process of planning, execution, and review. When addressed and executed in a disciplined manner, this process can streamline your operation while infusing it with consistency. Any club task that will be repeated (and this means 99.9% of everything you do) can be examined for ways to make it more efficient or replicated with greater ease. This discipline leads naturally into the following one.

Continual Process Improvement. Referring again to the quote from Jim Collins under Management Disciplines above, “... *and then seek continual improvement in these.*” In the effort to continually improve, a major and continuing focus should be on improving the consistency of the club’s quality and service. See *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Continual Process Improvement - An Essential Discipline of Successful Clubs* to learn more.

Accountability. Everything we’ve talked about above to improve consistency of quality and service means nothing without accountability. Without leadership, “the will to make it happen,” and strict accountability for results, running a high-quality club is an exercise in futility.

Having discussed the major areas requiring consistency, you must understand that the way to build a high performing, consistent operation is not unknown, but at the same time, there is nothing easy about the effort that goes into it. It requires the hard work, focus, and diligence that Jim Collins described as the Flywheel Effect in building a “good to great” company,

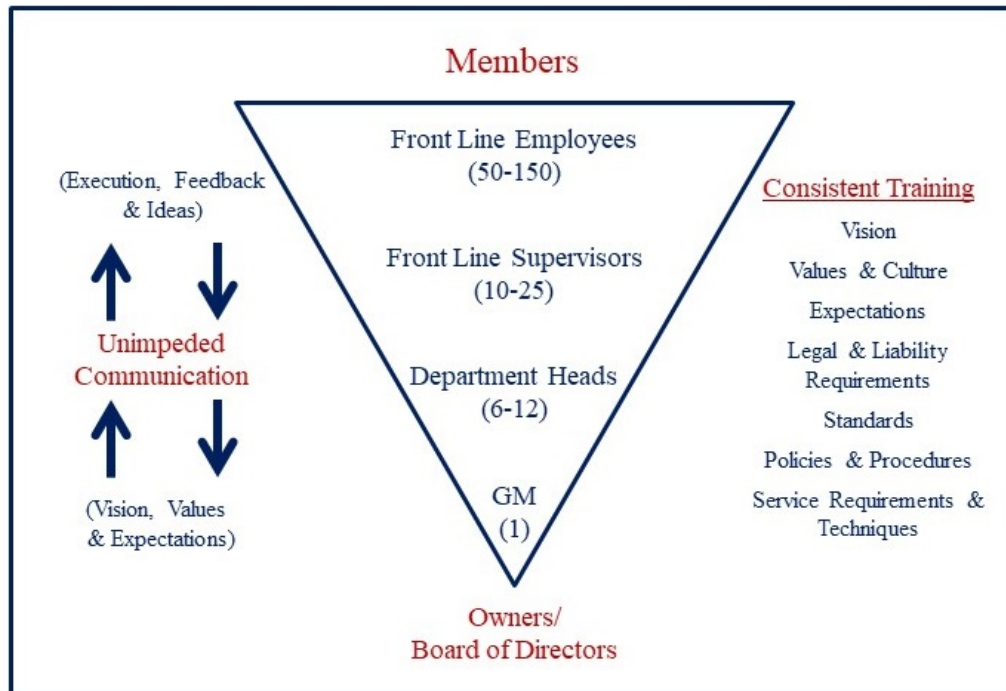
“Sustainable transformations follow a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough. Like pushing on a giant, heavy flywheel, it takes a lot of effort to get the thing moving at all, but with persistent pushing in a consistent direction over a long period of time, the flywheel builds up momentum, eventually hitting a point of breakthrough.”

Given the fact that most clubs are similar in their aims and methods, there is no sense in reinventing the wheel. Fortunately, much of the initial groundwork and documentation has already been prepared. Private Club Performance Management has a wide variety of basic resources available to help you organize your club and build an organization focused on quality and service. This material can be used as is or can be customized for you specific operation.

When you recognize that consistency is a significant underlying element of both quality and service, it is obvious that it must be a focus of everything you do to organize the club and train staff. So, do yourself, your employees, and your members a favor and ensure **Consistency of Training** for your club to consistently excel in everything you do.



The Necessity of Unimpeded Communication and Consistency of Training in Club Operations



Quality and Service are both detail- and people-intensive requiring that all employees understand what they must do in all situations. Such complexity can only be mastered through unimpeded communication and consistent training. Unimpeded communication flows naturally from Service-Based Leaders, while written values, expectations, standards, policies, and procedures promote consistent training.

Impediments to Quality and Service

I frequently write about those steps that club operations must take to promote excellence. As an alternative let's examine those things that act as impediments to quality and service.

Think about each of the following obstacles to a smooth-functioning operation where quality and service are paramount; then assign the responsibility for removing the impediment where it squarely belongs - with employees or management?

- Lack of culture or failure to consistently reinforce the culture
- Lack of standards (stated expectations)
- Lack of communication
- Lack of leadership, leadership consistency, and example
- Lack of organization; toleration of a chaotic work environment



- Lack of disciplines to hire the best staff
- Lack of planning, operational review, and process improvement
- Failure to remove obstacles to efficiency
- Lack of training or training consistency
- Lack of teamwork, morale, and enthusiasm
- Lack of understanding about what members want and expect
- Lack of member relationship management plan
- Lack of employee empowerment
- Lack of accountability

If you have a true understanding of the responsibilities of leadership – that a leader is responsible for everything his or her operation does or fails to do – then eliminating every one of these impediments is a function of management.

Intrinsically understanding this validates that W. Edwards Deming was right when he said, *“The worker is not the problem. The problem is at the top! Management is the problem!”* and *“There is much talk about how to get employees involved with quality. The big problem is how to get management involved.”*

Understanding what causes a problem is the first step to correcting it. So, take the next step and read *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Remarkable Service Infrastructure - An Overarching Plan for Club Excellence* which provides an overarching plan for excellence in club operations. Then begin implementing the processes and disciplines that will remove all impediments to quality and service.

Overcoming the Impediments to Quality

The bottom line for any private club is to consistently meet or exceed the expectations of its members. Given that the members of clubs typically come from the affluent and elite segments of a community means that their life experiences have accustomed them to superior levels of quality and service. To exceed their expectations, therefore, the management and staff of a private club must be committed to quality in all aspects of its operations.

In the 1980’s and 90’s, American businesses and industries became obsessed with understanding and implementing the necessary initiatives and processes that led to the astonishing Japanese dominance in quality manufacturing. American academics and business leaders, building on the pioneering work of Dr. Joseph H. Duran, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, and others, embraced the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) as the answer to improved competitiveness.

In 1988 a major U.S. government agency defined TQM as *“a strategy for continuously improving performance at every level, and in all areas of responsibility. It combines fundamental management techniques, existing improvement efforts, and specialized technical tools under a disciplined structure focused on continuously improving all processes.”*

While many businesses and organizations embraced TQM, not all attempts were successful.



As often stated, much can be learned from failure, which demands close examination, while success is celebrated but often less well understood. In 1996, Robert J. Masters published an article in *Quality Progress* magazine entitled, *Overcoming the Barriers to TQM's Success*. In this paper the author listed eight obstacles to efforts to improve quality (shown below with my comments and resources relating to private club management in italics):

1. **"Lack of management commitment.** Management must commit time and resources and clearly communicate the importance and goals to all personnel."

*Service-Based Leadership places a primary focus on providing all the tools, training, resources, support, daily engagement, and example to provide high levels of quality and service to members. Constant communication is an essential element of such leadership, while **Unimpeded Communication** ensures that everyone in the organization is on the same page.*

2. **"Inability to change the organizational culture.** Change takes time and effort. For the culture to change, the employees need to want change and be willing to participate. This requires reasons that management must convey. The change will only occur if the employees trust the management. It cannot occur from a state of fear."

*Well-defined and continually reinforced **Organizational Values and Culture of Service** are essential to club operations. Whether you need to start from scratch to develop such a culture or want to change an existing culture, you cannot achieve quality and service without it.*

3. **"Improper planning.** Planning must involve all parts of the organization and be communicated clearly to employees."

*A **Discipline of Planning** on all levels of the organization is crucial. As we say, the importance of disciplined planning cannot be overstated. Haphazard planning results in haphazard operations and equally haphazard performance. See PCPM, Operational Resources, Expectations, Work Planning, and Performance Reviews for additional information.*

4. **"Lack of training.** The most effective training comes from senior management. Informal training needs to occur on a continual basis."

*Lack of formal and consistent training is the Achilles heel of club operations. **Training on the Go** is an effective way to continually train without breaking the bank. The club's management team must provide a consistent message of quality and excellence and be actively involved in training. Ensuring the management team is properly and thoroughly trained is even more important than training line employees.*

5. **"Organizational structure problems** and isolated individuals or departments. Multifunctional teams will help break down some of these barriers. Restructuring is another method."

*Structure and organization are fundamental in any complex enterprise, as is the discipline of utilizing industry best practices on a consistent basis. The **Remarkable Service Infrastructure** is offered as an overarching plan for structuring club operations*



for quality and service. PCPM, Training, Management Disciplines on the Go provides additional helpful information.

6. **“Ineffective measurement and lack of data.** Effective decisions require that the employees have access to the necessary data.”

***Benchmarking Operations** in detail will provide the data to keep stakeholders informed and focused on continual improvements. Judicious sharing of the data with line employees will furnish the necessary feedback and incentives to excel in their efforts. Check out PCPM, Operational Resources, Club Benchmarking Resources for greater detail.*

7. **“Inadequate** attention to internal and external customers.”

*The feedback loops in **The Remarkable Service Infrastructure** graphically represent the need to listen to both internal and external customers. Knowing and addressing the concerns and challenges of employees is just as important as providing for the needs and desires of members.*

8. **“Inadequate empowerment,** lack of teamwork. Teams require training. Their recommendations should be followed whenever possible. Individuals need to be empowered to make decisions.”

*Note the requirement for employees to be willing, committed, AND empowered in **The Remarkable Service Infrastructure**. This powerful tool of quality and service is described and explained in **Employee Empowerment**.*

The first step in overcoming any obstacle is to identify it; once identified you can formulate initiatives to address it. Private Club Performance Management provides a wide variety of resources to put your club on the path to improved levels of quality and service. Despite whatever success you’ve achieved in your own quest for high levels of quality and service, reviewing the PCPM materials may inspire or materially assist in your efforts towards excellence.

Structure for “the Groove” and Avoid “the Rut”

Every new General Manager has tackled the challenges of their position with vision, vigor, and enthusiasm to address the expressed concerns of the board and the needs of members. It’s something we’ve all experienced – analyzing the operation, discovering the problems, formulating a plan of action, winning the support of employees for the new agenda, and executing to completion.

While there are few things as satisfying as overcoming obstacles to improve a club operation, the larger challenge that never goes away is how to keep the spirit of renewal alive over time. This is so because it seems that despite whatever progress is made, things still fall apart, old habits die hard, and new initiatives, no matter how exciting, grow stale and uninspiring in short order. It is just too easy for your “in-the-groove” operation to backslide into that “same ol’, same ol’ rut.”

So, what does the conscientious manager do to break through the seemingly endless cycle of groove and rut? The simple answer is to instill a strong sense of constant renewal in the club’s



culture. While this is easily said, the reality of making it happen is far more complex and challenging, requiring a significant degree of organizational structure and focus. Here are some things to consider:

- Make ongoing renewal a priority in departmental expectations and departmental plans, ensuring that department heads spell out goals and specific steps to keep each operation's events and activities fresh and compelling. **Tools: Annual club planning, individual work plans, measurable accountabilities, and accountability for performance.**
- Focus on the fundamentals of service and service delivery with ongoing reminders to managers and employees alike. As Mac Anderson says, "The three keys to inspiring . . . service – Reinforce, Reinforce, Reinforce." **Tools: On the Go Training, Daily Huddles, Notable Quotables.**
- In each department, encourage employee feedback on what works and what doesn't. As prominent technology and entrepreneur blogger Bill Robinson says, "To be able to regularly solicit, capture and execute upon the strong ideas of those on the front lines who really know what the customers want will be the panacea for the 21st century business world." Act on the information your employees bring you to continually improve all aspects of the operation – organization, planning, execution, training, service, and service delivery. **Tools: Continual Process Improvement.**
- Using the principles of Service-Based Leadership, work continually toward the power of employee empowerment. An entire staff that understands what must be done, how to do it, and acts without fear of making mistakes and repercussions will bring far more to bear on success and renewal than the efforts of a handful of managers and supervisors. **Tools: Leadership on the Line, Employee Empowerment.**
- Use every opportunity of interaction with employees to reinforce organizational values and the culture of service. Whether it's pre-shift meetings, the habit of daily huddles, or casual conversations and direction throughout the workday, managers must constantly "spread the gospel" by word **AND** deed. While the message is important, there is no substitute for example – not only in how leaders interact with members, but more importantly how they interact with their employees. There is no substitute for the example of leadership. "A leader leads by example, whether he intends to or not." **Tools: The Bully Pulpit, Daily Huddles, Notable Quotables, Service-Based Leadership.**
- Seek the feedback of your members. Ultimately, it's their perception of your operation that guarantees success. Feedback comes in many forms – formal surveys, departmental comment cards, personal interactions, and benchmarking member spending habits within each department. All of these will clearly point to member boredom or dissatisfaction with your operation. **Tools: Surveys, scored and benchmarked comment cards, daily interactions, monitoring and analyzing spending habits.**
- Take time for analysis, exploration, and reflection. Most managers stay busy all the time. Many simply react to daily and weekly crises. Some only give infrequent and passing thought to the strategic direction of their operations as if everything runs well



enough on autopilot. Without blocks of time set aside on a regular basis to consider their operations and the ongoing or dominant issues that impact their business; to analyze the ebb and flow of their business; to read, research, and reflect on operational ideas and best practices; and to work continually to improve all aspects of what they do, the club will reflect in systemic ways their disinterest and neglect. Ongoing reflection, analysis, and engagement are essential. **Tools: Benchmarking and review; structured set-aside time; professional reading lists; ongoing review of trade journals and other publications; adequate time off property for perspective; relationships developed with other club managers on online club manager forums and CMAA conferences to discuss, compare, and brainstorm issues and solutions.**

- Make wow factors a significant part of your team's effort. It stimulates the creative juices, breaks the tedium of habit, and can be fun for your staff while thrilling to your members. **Tools: Wow Factors.**
- Make time for constant renewal – Arrange and organize your operation to handle the fundamentals routinely. The less effort you and your staff must spend to execute the basics, the more time and focus you'll have to conceive and execute the extraordinary. Follow the Pareto Principle to organize your operation so that 80% (the fundamentals) happens routinely, allowing you and your staff to focus on the critical 20% of member service and satisfaction. **Tools: Remarkable Service Infrastructure, Productivity Disciplines.**

Get your club operation "in the groove" with organization and structure. Then focus on ongoing renewal with **Continual Process Improvement** and **Wow Factors** to avoid being "in the rut" of stale, uninspired programming, service, and service delivery.

Appendix - PCPM Information and Resources

As mentioned in the Introduction, Private Club Performance Management has created a wide range of operational resources for improved club operational performance. These resources represent a fully integrated and holistic approach to club organization and performance management. A sampling of these resources is presented here.

PCPM Insights and Ideas Articles

- Service Based Leadership – The Foundation of Successful Club Operations
- Remarkable Service Infrastructure – An Overarching Plan for Club Excellence
- Organizational Values and Culture of Service
- Beyond Oral History – The Importance of a Club Operations Plan
- The Club Operations Plan – A Legacy Contribution for Club Excellence
- Benchmarking Operations – The Key to Understanding and Improving Your Club
- Member Relationship Management Plan – Romancing Your Members
- Comprehensive Club Training – Executing on Your Promise of Quality and Service



- Employee Empowerment – Transforming Service in Your Club
- Continual Process Improvement – An Essential Discipline of Successful Clubs
- Performance Management – An Essential Discipline of Success
- Member Surveys
- Wow Factors – What Have You Done for Me Lately
- and more!

PCPM Operational Resources

- Leadership on the Line: A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners, and Emerging Leaders
- Club Benchmarking Resources
- Club Accounting Standards, Policies and Procedures
- Club Personnel Standards, Policies and Procedures
- The Power of Employee Empowerment
- Food Service in Private Clubs
- What I Expect from My Club Management Team
- Internal Control in Private Clubs
- 101 Tips to Improve Your Club Operation
- Basic Accounting and Financial Management for Managers
- Expectations, Work Planning, and Performance Reviews
- and more!

PCPM Training Resources

- Leadership on the Go
- Service on the Go
- Values on the Go
- Management Disciplines on the Go
- Food Service Management on the Go
- Accounting on the Go
- HR on the Go
- Alcoholic Beverages on the Go
- Safety on the Go
- Positional Training Manuals
- and more!

About the Author

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Master of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.