



## GOOD MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

Ray Burniston, in February 1998, gave advice to the secretary about the different approaches of catering (*reviewed October 2012*)

With increasing competition from new clubs, many private members Golf Clubs now wish, or need, to increase the profits (or reduce the loss) from their catering activities.

Before carrying out any changes, the Committee should first take a careful look at its present catering arrangements, and then decide what if any changes they should consider. The type or style of catering will vary between clubs but will fall somewhere within the following confines:

- a) A comparatively small operation usually run by a steward and stewardess providing mainly bar type catering with occasional meals for matches and club events.
- b) Similar to the above but with a higher standard of catering with perhaps lunches being provided on certain days and dinners for societies and club events. This may be provided by a steward and stewardess, franchise caterer or even by the club.
- c) On lines such as at the Berkshire Golf Club with a snack bar offering quick counter service at reasonable prices throughout the day, plus a restaurant service providing three-course lunches and special dinners, both profitable. This is usually provided either by the club themselves or a franchise caterer.
- d) A small number of clubs provide a very high standard of catering to the members and guests at a loss. It is important that if this type of operation is carried out the policy followed is abided by and is kept within budgets.

The Committee will first have to decide how its catering facilities are to be managed. Will it employ a Steward and wife, a Catering Manager, or a franchise caterer? It is important at this stage to look at the current operation and list its apparent faults and advantages. Sometimes in doing this the Committee will decide that they may well have the best operation to suit the club. It may be useful at this stage to circulate members with a simple survey to see whether the club is aware of what the majority of members may require. If you decide to take this action then questions should be framed along the following lines:

- ✂ Are the members satisfied with the present catering arrangements?
- ✂ Is the quality of the food provided adequate and if not what is required?
- ✂ Are the opening hours satisfactory for the members?
- ✂ Is the level of charges acceptable to the membership?
- ✂ Are the staff levels satisfactory to provide a good service?
- ✂ Members should be asked what they expect to get from the service and if it is improved would they use it more?

## **The Steward & Stewardess**

This system has existed at golf clubs ever since they first started. Usually the Steward looks after the bar and the Stewardess (wife) runs the catering for her own benefit. The club provide the equipment and facilities with any profits going to the Stewardess. Most of us will have experienced in our time couples who provided first class service to the club and in some cases they became legendary. Usually the problems arise once they leave and it becomes extremely difficult to find a good cook and a good barman who are married to each other. Usually one half is good and the other the club has to carry. It will also depend on the size of the club and the likely throughput. If you have a first class couple then look after them and make sure the members do not spoil them. At many medium to small clubs this system works well and will continue to, so do not make change for the sake of it.

## **The Franchise Catering Contractor**

Many clubs today use an independent caterer who is self employed. This may be the Steward's wife or partner at the smaller clubs or an outside contractor at larger clubs. Much will depend on the turnover and potential for any improvement.

Before engaging a catering contractor, it is advisable to identify the reasons why this is being considered. If you have completed a survey then the information gleaned should be carefully taken into consideration before any decision is made. If the current operation is run by the club, current weaknesses should be carefully listed so that these mistakes are not made in the new operation. Both the survey if one has been done and the Committee should attempt to list the problems. These could be along the following lines:

- ✂ Poor standard of food.
- ✂ Inadequate staffing and/or poorly trained staff.
- ✂ Numerous complaints. (It is important to put these in perspective, some members will complain about anything.)
- ✂ Not able to adapt to the needs of the club
- ✂ Large events, can the current staff cope?
- ✂ Too much interference from the House Committee.

The Committee, once they have decided to appoint a Catering Contractor must draw up very carefully the guidelines before making an appointment. To do this properly they must have some idea of the current turnover, gross profit, staff costs and what the net profit or loss is. Great care should be taken in drafting the contract and all points should be fully discussed with the Catering Contractor. Most problems invariably arise through the failure of the Committee to explain the type of service the club is looking for. The following points need carefully watching:

- ✂ Fully agree the type of catering and service required. It is important to make sure that hours of availability and staffing levels are agreed.
- ✂ Make sure that the details on prices and controls are understood by all.
- ✂ If the club is to charge the contractor based on turnover or profitability then this method needs to be assessed and must be fully understood by both parties.

- ✎ The policy on the use of the catering facilities for outside parties must be fully explained otherwise major problems can soon develop. These can cost the club money in heating etc., without bringing in any additional income as it all goes to the caterer.
- ✎ It is important to establish who the Catering Contractor deals with at the club. It should be the Secretary/Manager rather than the House Chairman.
- ✎ Time spent dealing on all these points does not guarantee success but makes it more likely.

It is wise to remember that merely altering the way you cater does not necessarily ensure success. It is important to have fully discussed the weaknesses in the present system to make sure they do not appear again.

Make sure the interviewing Committee are properly briefed before they commence and ask sensible questions. If possible someone with catering knowledge should be asked to sit in on the interviews even if they are not on the Committee. It is important to find out all you can about any candidates prior to the interviews.

## What Type of Catering?

No two clubs are the same and over the past few years changes have taken place in the way people eat. There is little doubt that good quality snack meals served in the bar are popular at many clubs. It is not unusual today for societies and members to start with breakfast at the club before commencing play or part way round. This would have been unheard of a few years ago. Many societies prefer a snack lunch followed by an evening meal. In many clubs the lunch trade has been replaced by bar food and the only days set lunches are available apart from special events (Societies, Pro-am's etc.) are on a Sunday.

Self service is practised at many clubs today including some of the most famous and can certainly speed up service and reduce staffing costs. Silver service for club dinners and prestige events are fine providing there is enough staff and they are properly trained. There are few things worse in catering than poor silver service resulting in a cold meal. Members' tastes in food have changed over the years but good "home cooking" still takes a lot of beating.

A successful catering operation will attract members to club events, and make maximum use of the capital invested in the kitchen equipment. It will also increase use of the bar particularly in the sale of wines and generally give the club a good name. Like the golf greens members will always remember a bad or very good meal.

## Should the Club take over the Catering?

When reviewing the catering at the club the committee should not overlook the possibility of the club taking it over. This step should only be taken after careful analysis of the current operation. Often because the club needs to appoint someone fairly quickly this is not done which results in the same problem arising again in a few months time. All clubs are different and what suits the club two miles down the road may not be satisfactory in your club. If the turnover is substantial and there would appear to be promising potential, then it is well worth taking time to look at this. If you decide to do this the following points need careful attention:

- ✂ Make sure the office is staffed and fully capable of taking over this and that you have the necessary computer systems to assist stock control and control of prices.
- ✂ The appointment of the right type of staff is the difference between success and failure, therefore time must be spent making sure you do achieve this.
- ✂ The House Committee should decide the general policy but after that it should be the Secretary/Manager's responsibility.
- ✂ It is important to decide the type of catering and hours of availability right from the start. If you intend to do high quality evening meals then you must have the right staff to commence with, not only the cooking but the service.
- ✂ Time must be spent on securing good suppliers and you must buy at the best terms.
- ✂ Wastage is often the difference between profit or a loss; make sure this is very carefully monitored.
- ✂ This could be the time to introduce self service into the club.
- ✂ Try to get your staff to make changes, just because steak and kidney pie is always available does not mean you cannot try something else. Younger members tend to favour dishes like pasta and curries.
- ✂ Spend time on getting the message across to the membership and gaining their support. Money spent on canvassing the membership on any new changes made is always money well spent.
- ✂ This could be a good time to introduce a compulsory clubhouse voucher or smart card scheme. Make certain it can be used for catering!

## Summary

Catering has undoubtedly improved at many clubs over the past decade. What was once accepted as a loss making area can now if properly controlled contribute much needed income to the club. This will almost certainly increase with the advent of smart card systems which will encourage members to use the facilities more. Many clubs already have found that catering turnover exceeds the bar and this will continue. By the same token many clubs have no idea of the turnover from this source because they have no way of monitoring it. Whatever system you use all but the smallest clubs should make sure that they get back something from this source if only to pay the bills for heat and light.

Whatever you decide to do make sure that you thoroughly research the current operation and you can present your Committee with the relevant facts and suggest constructive ideas for the future.

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