

# GCCMA



## CATERING: OPTIONS FOR GOLF CLUBS

It is probably true to say that more problems are caused by catering at a club than any other area. Most clubs will go through a difficult phase from time to time on this matter. Unfortunately, the main cause is invariably the members who want top class catering at rock bottom prices.

With the increase in new clubs, mainly proprietary ones who in many cases produce good quality catering and often run their clubhouse along the lines of a good quality pub/hotel, the pressure is often greater on the private members' club to produce something better than they have done in the past. This article looks at the various ways you can undertake this at a club and hopefully spotlights some of the problems. However, beware of making changes for changes sake. If the current system you have in place is satisfying the bulk of the membership it is probably a good idea to leave things alone. Below I have looked at some of the different ways you can operate the catering mainly at a private members' club.

# Steward & Partner

This system has been in place since golf clubs started and has been successful at countless clubs. Basically one partner is employed to run the bar and manage the clubhouse whilst the other one operates a catering service as a private contractor.

Usually they live on the premises in accommodation provided by the club. Providing a catering service six/seven days a week all year apart from holidays can be a considerable strain especially if they are committed to supplying the service for long hours. Invariably the committee set the prices which in many cases can be a quick way to disaster. Despite the problems there are many clubs that operate this system with varying degrees of success.

## Advantages



The caterer is working for themselves so all the labour and food costs are their responsibility.



The club still controls the use of the clubhouse with regards to societies and visitors.



Apart from keeping an eye on it, the Secretary does not have to spend time on checking food purchases, sales and invoices.



The club can still control the prices charged at least to members.



Apart from supplying the equipment and premises the club should have no other costs.



Good quality food is most important so this will be the primary consideration when appointing staff rather than the bar.

## Disadvantages



If you have an unsatisfactory person controlling the bar but a good caterer you will lose both if you decide to get rid of them.



Each time you make a change you have to find new staff for both the bar and catering.



Often they will work exceptionally long hours especially in the summer because the catering turnover does not merit sufficient backup staff.

# Franchise or Independent Caterer

This system in which the club contract out the catering to a third party has become popular over the past years for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it separates the bar from the catering so that if one or other leaves you are merely looking for either a Bar Manager or a Caterer. It relieves the club of much of the responsibility of running a catering system. However, like any system it has weaknesses and often causes the Secretary as many problems as having a Steward and Partner.

If you decide to operate this system you are advised to carefully draw up a job specification and service contract. Many of the problems arise because of lack of detail when you engage them and this problem is that much greater if the person has not operated at a golf club before. It is therefore vitally important to lay down the type of catering and service the Club will require.

One of the problem areas is invariably the prices charged. The committee usually set them and often are at odds with the caterer after a short time. It is best to have some form of agreement which allows the Caterer in conjunction with you as Secretary to make minor adjustments which are bound to happen with seasonal variations. An inflexible policy inevitably causes problems which can quickly escalate.

Some clubs try to offset the cost of providing heat, light and equipment etc, by having a clause that the Caterer pays either a percentage of the turnover or an agreed amount per month. Before embarking on this you will need to know the turnover of the previous caterers to ascertain whether it is a sensible policy or not. If the turnover is low, you will soon find problems trying to extract a fee from the Caterer.

It is sometimes the policy of the Club to pay for some of the staff perhaps at off peak times or for extra staff for major club events. Be wary of doing this without having a firm policy on it because invariably the costs get out of hand. Far better to agree a sensible pricing policy that allows the caterer to get a reasonable return but at the same time does not make the members feel they are being ripped off.

Also allow a more flexible pricing policy for outside events such as golfing societies as these can help the caterer make up for the shortage by giving members a better deal. Today with many new clubs having sprung up in the past few years the club and the caterer will have to be competitive otherwise they will price themselves out of what is now a very competitive market.

# In-House Catering

More clubs are doing or considering this than a few years ago. Before embarking on this policy it is important to obtain a few simple facts. What is the current turnover and what do you estimate is the likely potential? Unless you are looking at in excess of £120,000 – nearer £170,000, it is doubtful whether the Club should really consider this option. If you decide to go ahead then you must realise that this will add to the office work – not only the control of receipts, but also the purchasing and payment of accounts.

First of all, you will need to appoint either a cook or chef to operate the catering. This appointment along with the necessary support staff will be most critical and time and effort should be made to see that you obtain the best possible personnel.

You will also need to establish the responsibilities for the bar staff and those which the catering staff are expected to perform. Duties such as who serves wine in the dining room and collects the money and who collects and washes up the dirty glasses can soon lead to disputes if these areas of responsibility are not clearly defined.

You also need to set out a clear cut catering policy right from day one so that both staff and the members know what to expect. Far too many clubs drift along without really working out what is required.

You will also need to communicate to members the change of policy and get their support right from the beginning. Be wary of trying to run before you can walk and things like evening catering should not be introduced until you have everything in place. Nothing is worse than for parties of members to come along to a supper night and the club unable to supply the quality of food and service required.

You also need to assess the type of membership carefully when deciding policy – will it be all the older members supporting the catering or is it likely to be the younger ones. If the club has a regular newsletter, then this can be used to promote the proposed change and possibly carry out a survey of what the members think and require before finalising your plans.

Whatever you decide to do, it is sensible to look carefully at the catering policy when you are changing staff etc, so as to see whether you can implement any improvements.