



Is your Club's Board Planning to Fail... or Failing to Plan?

by **Scott Samuels & Ron Hakala**

The top agenda item in most clubs today is Strategic Planning. This type of planning involves a complete evaluation of where you are today, what got you there, and most importantly, defining your path for the future. There is nothing more effective for the future success of your club than developing and following a long-term strategic plan. Although strategic plans may come in a variety of shapes and sizes, it is imperative for the leaders of your club to “buy into and embrace” this plan. Terms for a Board of Directors’ last on the average of three to six years, it is critical that this strategic plan be developed in the early stages of the new Board’s term.

Many consultants for this industry believe that the plan should span 10 or even 20 years. Although this insight would be valuable, most are ineffective because of the continual changes within our society, the club’s board and the demographics of your club. “The ideal strategic plan should be developed within the first year of a new Board of Directors and last through the entire term of the Board,” says Ron Hakala, Vice-President of Horizon Hospitality Associates.

Developing the Strategic Plan

Many clubs make the mistake of developing this plan without insight from the “members at large”. An effective **Member Survey** should provide valuable insight and should not be overlooked in this process. In addition to this survey, a **Club Assessment** should be conducted. “I continue to come across consultants in this industry that possess many great skills but are lacking several key attributes that make these assessments insightful and effective,” says Scott Samuels, President of Horizon Hospitality Associates. When evaluating which consulting group to select, make sure to review the extent of

their practical and operational experience (have any of them actually managed a club?) along with their formal training within the club industry. This objective assessment should be conducted over a period of 10-14 days and should include a **Trend Analysis** and **Market Study** of your club.

Executing the Strategic Plan

Now that you have done your homework and obtained critical information that will provide your club with a path to future success, it is time to implement your plans! A very effective means to accomplish this is during your **Annual Board Retreat**. This one or two day retreat should be designed around one major goal – to plan for your club’s future success. This retreat should involve a detailed agenda packed with all the tools necessary to accomplish your goals and objectives and should be led by a professional facilitator. This facilitator will make the meeting motivating, enjoyable and productive.

Putting your Plan to Work

The communication of your new plan to members and staff is a critical element to assure that it is successful. If the club employees understand the direction that the club is headed, in most cases, they will assist in helping you get there.

Periodic “check ups” to assure your plan is progressing is another important aspect to the success of this plan. Developing “benchmarks” and targets to achieve each step of the way will allow your Board, Committees, and Club Management to stay focused.

Selecting the RIGHT Leader

A part of the strategic plan should be to hire the “Right Leader” or Manager for

your club. Some clubs already have this person in place, but many do not. Why is the tenure of Managers at a club so low?

At the recent CMAA Conference in San Diego, numerous Club Managers with less than two years in their current position were seeking another opportunity. Most everyone stated they did not realize exactly what they were getting into and they wanted to find a better fit. “We believe that, in most cases, the process of hiring is flawed,” says Ron Hakala Vice President of Horizon Hospitality. With years of club management experience and as a regional manager working with hundreds of board members, Hakala is convinced that “hiring is an art” and that “compatibility” should be the main focus. Horizon Hospitality Associates recently introduced the industry’s first **Full Service Search**. This search goes beyond the Board putting together a job description and beginning the interview process either through a committee or a search firm. “As a part of this search, we come into the club, interview the staff and members, study the trends of the club and market, meet with the Board of Directors or Search Committee and discuss our discoveries. The result of this will be a profile of the ideal candidate,” says Hakala. Industry experts have indicated this technique is “revolutionary” and “right on target.” The effects of a **Full Service Search** are dramatic and the chance of long-term success is significantly enhanced! Remarkably, the famous author of *The 7 Habits of Effective People*, Stephen Covey states in a Q & A session when asked “If you had it to do over again, what is the one thing you would do differently as a businessperson?” His response, “I would do more strategic, proactive recruiting and selecting. I am convinced that done



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strategically, with long-term thought and proactivity, not based on the pressures of the moment, it pays enormous long-term dividends.”

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