

## Strategic Planning at a Private Club and Board Expectations

Today with most club boards understanding the reality that a private club is a business and should be run like one, the utilization of strategic planning as an important business tool has become a common practice at the majority of clubs. In fact, it is the opinion of many that strategic planning is one of the most important duties of a private club board member. However, all too often, once a plan is developed it may find an unfortunate home on a general manager's, club president's or strategic planning committee member's shelf or computer. So what should a board's expectations be with regard to the strategic planning process? Let's start first with defining the purpose and key components in a club strategic plan.

- It is a road map for the future
- It is not just an operational or capital plan but a combination of identified needs, goals, and objectives to help insure the perpetuation and continued viability of the Club
- It determines who and what you are and what purpose you serve as a club, and it helps you to understand what sets you apart from the competition and establishes your "Brand"
- It helps to prepare for and manage change (and yet deter "change" for the sake of "change" each year by new boards)
- It provides the club management team with clear and measurable goals and objectives
- It gets member and employee buy-in early in the process to facilitate positive (politically supportive) change
- It lends a greater degree of confidence of long-term success and improves long-range performance (helps the club remain economically viable while at the same time attempting to become recession proof)
- It creates a healthy disciplined methodology for decision making (laser-like)
- It is one of the common denominators found in today's top performing clubs

During the strategic planning process at a private club, other things to be considered include governance, board and committee structure, and membership issues. This is most often accomplished by conducting a SWOT analysis, identifying the Club's core values and developing a mission and vision statement. Through this process, key strategic issues are identified and agreed upon, and the most important step is taken by creating an action plan. This action plan establishes the goals and objectives for each issue, the strategies and tactics necessary to accomplish the goals, along with who will be responsible and when it will be accomplished. In my opinion, it is the action plan that is the most important part of the process which is emphasized by my favorite saying about strategic planning – "The purpose of a plan is not to produce a plan, but to produce results."

So how do we insure that the action plan is followed and the strategies are executed? During a conversation with a club executive from a highly regarded club who recently revised their strategic plan, he shared with me that it is now the Board's practice to begin the board meeting one hour early each quarter to thoroughly review the progress of the action plan, thus making it a "living document." To guarantee continuity, consider making this a policy as part of the Club's Board Policy Manual.

Another way to make the process a living one is to make the strategic plan the entire Club's plan rather than the Board's and Management's, getting buy-in from everyone. The best business world success story for this process was revealed recently by retiring Ford CEO Alan Mulally. When asked what he

believed has led to Ford's recent success, he responded with their strategic plan entitled "One Ford – one plan, one team, and one goal."

So let us incorporate all of these tactics into making your club's strategic plan a living process rather than a plan, because remember, "The purpose of a plan is not to produce a plan, but to produce results."

-- John R. "Jack" Sullivan, Jr. CCM