

Board Brief

Designed for Club Board of Directors
September 2025

BEST PRACTICES:

Member Discipline Is a Dirty Word! How to Take the Hot Seat Without Losing Popularity

In private clubs, few topics spark more discomfort and fear than member discipline. The idea conjures images of finger-pointing, gossip, and fractured relationships. But here's the truth: when it's done well, discipline is not about punishing individuals; it's about protecting the culture that defines your club. And yes, you can take the hot seat without losing popularity if you approach it with empathy, clarity, and process.

The Goal: Protect the Culture, Not Punish Individuals

When a member's actions threaten the harmony of the community, leadership must act. But action doesn't mean punishment, it means preserving the standards that the membership expects. Every club has a unique culture, and part of leadership's duty is to protect it. That means holding people accountable, but in a way that feels fair, not personal.

Reframe the situation for your members: "We focus on upholding the standards that make this club a place where everyone feels respected and valued."

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What You Can Say (Even When You Can't Say Much)

One of the toughest parts of handling member conduct issues is the confidentiality required. Members will ask questions. Rumors will fly. And yet, you can't disclose specifics.

But you can reinforce the integrity of the process. Here are key talking points:

- "When concerns arise, they're handled thoughtfully, confidentially, and always with fairness. Our goal is to protect what makes this club great, not to embarrass or punish."
- "This concern went through the proper channels, and the recommendation came from the committee, not me acting unilaterally."
- "This decision aligns with our commitment to protect the culture our members have built."

If someone presses for details: "I'm not able to share details out of respect for confidentiality, which is a key part of our process. We'd do the same for any member."

Use the Process, Don't Own the Outcome

This is key: don't play judge and jury. That's for your Member Standards Committee to address. The GM or club president's job is to facilitate the process, not shoulder the consequences.

Positioning Tips:

- Reference the process, not the person.
- Speak about shared values, not individual failures.
- Emphasize principles and discretion, not drama.

Think of the committee as the firewall between leadership and perception. When you refer to a transparent, fair system, you depersonalize the decision and defuse controversy.

Words That Work (and Words That Don't)

Words to Use:

- "Protecting the membership experience"
- "Upholding our shared expectations"
- "Addressing a serious concern with fairness"
- "Stewarding the values of our community"

Words to Avoid:

- "We had to punish someone"
- "They had it coming"
- "He crossed the line"
- "We had no choice"

Tone matters as much as content. Even justified actions can breed resentment if explained with harsh language. Stay on the high road, even under pressure.

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The Backbone: A Strong Member Standards Committee

Your Member Standards Committee (MSC) is your most powerful ally. With a clear charter and trusted members, the MSC gives legitimacy to any corrective action.

MSC Charter Highlights:

- **Purpose:** Uphold values through peer-based, confidential review of member conduct.
- **Mission:** Preserve a respectful and inclusive environment by promoting accountability.
- **Scope:** Advisory only; the committee makes recommendations, not rulings.
- **Membership:** Balanced, diverse, and trained members who reflect the club's values.
- **Confidentiality:** Non-negotiable. Breaches result in removal.

By anchoring discipline in a process that is objective, educational, and confidential, you protect members' dignity and your reputation.

Bottom Line: You're Being Protective

Handling member conduct issues doesn't have to cost you popularity if you lead with empathy, structure, and discretion. People don't need every detail; they need to trust that leadership is principled and fair.

Remember: Leadership isn't about being liked in the moment, it's about being respected in the long run.

If you model fairness, shield individual identities, and remind members that these efforts are for the greater good, you'll not only avoid losing popularity, but you'll also earn deeper trust.

And that's how you turn a "dirty word" into a cornerstone of club integrity. 🧱

Insights by Jeffery Murray, CCM, CAM, FMP, Senior Club & Community Consultant at Strategic Club Solutions



BY THE NUMBERS:

Strengthening Club Governance

Private clubs are making progress in adopting governance best practices, but significant opportunities for improvement remain. Club leaders can focus on strategic oversight, risk management, and improving member communications to increase governance effectiveness.

The 2025 edition of the Club Leaders' Perspective Report from CMAA and GGA Partners dives into these insights. The following is excerpted from the 2025 Club Leaders' Perspective Report:

Improving Club Governance

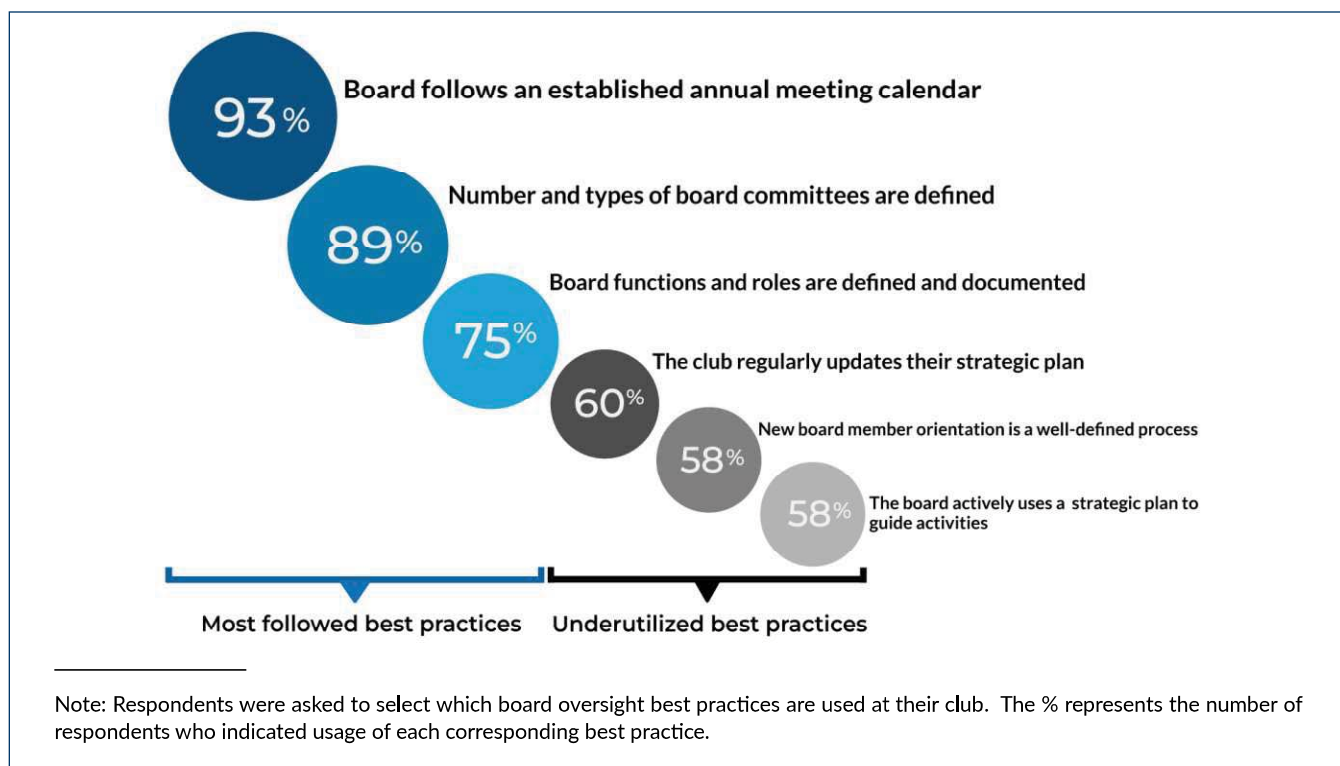
With many clubs continuing to adopt best practices, private club governance is seeing an overall enhancement in club leadership and operation effectiveness. However, opportunities for improvement remain within the key areas of board responsibility. Specifically, clubs can improve governance by increasing the use of strategic planning to enable a shift from procedural oversight to a more proactive, strategy-driven approach. Increasing the focus on risk management is another opportunity for clubs of all sizes. Finally, as one of the most common challenges in clubs, board-to-member communication is an area where dedicated efforts can be made to ensure effective and transparent engagement.

Board Oversight Opportunities

For clubs to thrive, managers focus on daily operations while board members prioritize long-term strategic considerations and enhancing board effectiveness. [This] research, which assessed the implementation of 18 governance best practices at clubs, reveals that the respondents' most commonly followed best practices are aligned with establishing core governance parameters, such as having the number and type of board committees defines (89 percent) and clearly defining and documenting roles for board functions and board members (75 percent).

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Figure 1. Board Oversight Best Practices



Enhancement Opportunities

While policies lay the groundwork for success, having an active strategic plan is vital for assessing progress toward the club's vision and objectives. Results indicate that one-third of respondents do not have a strategic plan, and 40 percent of total respondents do not routinely update theirs. For

clubs that are missing these key elements, focusing on initiatives to implement the strategic plan can improve board effectiveness.

These findings, and the fact that 42 percent of respondents do not refer to a strategic plan when making decisions, highlight the opportunities for improvement at many clubs. Additionally, having a board orientation program to help new board members integrate and contribute to strategic discussions is one of the least followed best practices (58 percent). Strengthening these areas enables clubs to transition from procedural oversight to a more proactive and strategy-driven approach.

Risk Management Opportunities

Strategic planning is associated with more effective board oversight, with an 18 percent increase in documented delegation of authority to the GM/COO and an 18 percent boost in risk management planning when a plan is in place, as results in Fig. 2 demonstrate. Effective risk management can significantly impact board oversight, especially with current uncertainties and potential economic changes. It's a guiding principle that can easily be overlooked until it's too late, especially when operating without a plan. Questions such as "what potentially threatens the achievement of our

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strategic priorities?” and “what risks are we facing as an organization?” are starting points for risk management planning.


Figure 2. Influence of Strategic Plan on Risk Management Best Practice

Top Oversight Best Practices Followed	% Usage (No Plan)	% Usage (Plan)	Strategic Plan Impact ¹
Club's legal compliance reported to the board?	80%	94%	+14%
Documented delegation of authority for the GM/COO?	75%	93%	+18%
Least Followed Oversight Best Practices			
Club has a risk management plan/framework in place?	48%	66%	+18%
Succession plan in place for senior management (i.e., GM/COO)?	31%	48%	+17%

¹ Respondents were asked to select which governance oversight activities are currently used at their club. The differences in risk management best practices adoption were determined by comparing usage among clubs with a strategic plan versus those without.

Enhancing Member Communication

According to [the] research, data indicates that outward board communication is a significant governance challenge. Only 46 percent of clubs rate current communication as adequate, while 18 percent report it as ineffective.

CMAA members may access their complimentary copy of the full report through [CMAA Connect](#) in the [Best Practices Exchange Community Library](#) in the [CMAA Annual Reports](#) folder. 



INSIGHTS:

Three Big Influences on Private Clubs

Like the people who join them, private clubs are ever-changing. Three of the greatest influences on change in clubs are food and how members want it, golf and how people will use it, and women and how they have changed their clubs.

Everyone Eats

Dining and entertainment venues in private clubs are a platform for socialization...with food and drink. However, members' preferences for dining experiences have changed in three significant ways:

- **Al Fresco Dining Is Preferred** – Open-air dining where either management has brought the outdoors in or taken dining and drinking outdoors is highly popular in most clubs. Regardless of climate, members like the idea of open-air dining, although they will express concern that “it is too hot (or too cold)”. Design professionals are finding tremendous solutions for dining spaces.
- **Portion Sizes Are Shrinking** – With America's increased alertness to obesity and bring overweight, portion sizes are growing smaller. This step enables some operators to address margin imbalance on menus.
- **Make Reservations Easy** – Rising generations who have become accustomed to online reservations elsewhere expect their clubs to be easy-to-reserve, so clubs are using more online reservation capabilities more frequently. Usually, it is the most tenured members of the club who resist this trend and continue to want personal attention for making reservations. Most members have accepted the notion that reservations are advantageous to them.

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Golf Is Evolving

Golf has experienced its greatest boom cycle since the days of Arnie's Army and televised golf events. According to National Golf Foundation data, the pandemic era added six million golfers and golf in the US accounts for 528 million rounds played annually. Beyond the popularity of the game, growth has arisen from alternative golf options, such as 3-, 5-, and 9-hole short courses, putting courses, and golf training and game improvement technologies.

While some observers questioned the durability of golf after pandemic-driven out-of-office options were curtailed, play counts and golf viewership continue strong.

EVEolution Is Real

In her 2000 book, *EVEolution*, futurist Faith Popcorn predicted the growing influence of women in society. As is often the case, Faith was correct and in a big way for private clubs. Women notably influence their clubs' activities, social calendar, governance, and facilities planning.

She advised, "the companies that do the best job of marketing to women will dominate every significant product and service category." Beyond marketing in a private club, female members in most clubs have reshaped their clubs in three important aspects: governance, amenities, and socialization. 

Insights by Henry DeLozier, Partner, GGA Partners



EXTERNAL INFLUENCES:

Podcast Spotlight: Tips and Overtime and Taxes, Oh My!

On July 4, HR 1, the 2025 tax legislation was signed into law. The measure features the extension of several expiring tax cuts passed in 2017 and new tax reductions including new federal tax exemptions for qualifying tip and overtime income. There's a lot to unpack here for clubs.

In this episode of *Let's Talk Club Management*, we're joined by Brad Steele, J.D., a long-term collaborator, to talk more about what this means for the club industry. We'll explore what we know about these two impactful changes and learn what details remain to be released with further regulatory guidance. 📺



CMAA NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Club Resource Center: Training for the Whole Club. Under One Roof

With a subscription to CMAA's Club Resource Center, your leadership and staff team will have access to hundreds of essential training courses and resources on a multitude of topics, from food safety and sexual harassment to conflict management and first aid.



There are 17 courses featured in the Kitchen and Dining categories and 23 courses from Auguste Escoffier in the new Culinary Training category.

Check out these popular courses:

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Greeting and Reservation Management | ■ Introduction to the Kitchen |
| ■ Setting the Table | ■ Culinary Essentials |
| ■ Taking the Order | ■ Baking and Pastry Essentials |
| ■ Suggestive Selling | ■ Holistic Wellness Essentials |
| ■ Correct Sequence of Service | ■ Plant-Based Courses |

To request a demo of the dynamic system, visit clubresourcecenter.org or email crc@cmaa.org. 📺

