Executive Tenure: 
A Model for Effective Leadership

MONOGRAPH

BY

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Executive Tenure: A Model for Effective Leadership

A Monograph by
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Executive Summary

The tenure, or lack thereof, of general managers in private clubs has been the subject of debate for many years. The reasons for short tenure or executive departure are varied and can be voluntary or involuntary. The costs associated with turnover and the revolving door take its toll on both the club and the manager. In today’s volatile economic environment, it is becoming more difficult to achieve General Manager/COO tenure.

The objectives of this study are to identify what characteristics, values, and behaviors are significant contributors to executive tenure in club management; what advantages and disadvantages are gained from long term tenure; and to what extent executives with long tenure were satisfied with their current position, as well as the club industry.

To achieve the objectives, thirty-two club managers with tenure of 7 years or more at their current clubs were selected to participate in the study. Of the thirty-two managers identified, sixteen managers elected to participate. The research method that was selected for this study was the Delphi Method. Powell (2003) and Rowe and Wright (1999) asserted that the Delphi method requires that participants are experts in the specific subject matter or the general topic area.

Sixteen general managers agreed to participate in the study. Though there is no agreement on the appropriate size of a Delphi panel, a number of studies (Akins, et al, 2005; Spinelli, 1983; Brockhoff, 1975; and Best, 1974) have suggested a Delphi panel size of 5-20 is appropriate for validity and reliability of the study, especially when the panel members have similar experiences and knowledge.
The first round of the survey asked general managers to list at least 10 important attributes that they think have contributed to their longevity in their clubs. The first round produced over 160 attributes from the sixteen club managers. The top twelve attributes with highest frequency were selected for further analysis in a second round. A follow up survey was sent to rate each of the top twelve most mentioned attributes from 1 – 5, one being least important, 5 being the most important. Based on the results of the second round, 10 most important attributes were identified. All sixteen managers from the original response group were surveyed and all sixteen participated in round two.

After a careful analysis of the 10 items, three distinct patterns were developed: 1) the highest rated attribute was integrity, 2) a number of attributes closely related to inherent leadership traits or personality characteristics, and 3) the remaining attributes were analogous to leader behaviors. This was later used to create a model of leadership characteristics and behaviors that contribute to general manager longevity.

The second round of the Delphi also dealt with advantages and disadvantages of executive tenure. Based on the frequency of responses, five most important advantages and disadvantages were identified. Finally, participants’ degree of satisfaction with their current position and their belonging to the club industry were explored.

The findings of this study categorize the most important behaviors and characteristics contingent to club manager longevity, develop a model of success for those managers that value long term standing with their clubs, and provide advantages and disadvantages that managers need to be aware of when choosing a path of longevity. Finally, the study explores
the extent to which managers with long-term tenure were satisfied with their current position and the club industry.
Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to identify what personality characteristics and leader behaviors contribute to executive tenure in the private club industry and what advantages and disadvantages are gained from longevity. The tenure (or lack thereof) of General Managers in private clubs has been the subject of debate for many years. Because of their significant position in the club, high executive tenure is an important topic for the strategic and organizational management of private clubs. The benefits of executive tenureship can best be understood by studying the divergent and opposite sides of it, namely voluntary and involuntary departures. Voluntary departures typically include retirement or deliberate strategic change for personal benefits, such as pay, prestige, or power. Involuntary or forced succession can have many reasons, such as poor executive performance, disagreements, or ethical reasons. Bell, et al (2006) in a study of nonprofit executives reported that 64% of executives left their organization voluntarily, over one-third (34%) were forced out, and 2% left with an unknown reason.

Voluntary and involuntary departures both have many associated costs. Kelly (2007) in his article, “Roller Coaster Leaders” in Business Strategy Review, states that, “Experts estimate that the cost of a failed hire is at least four times salary and bonus.” Beyond replacement costs, there are hidden costs, such as productivity loss and morale issues (O’Connell & Kung, 2007). Other costs may include micro management of club boards, manager burnout, low member morale, lack of consistency in services and procedures, short-term focus vs. strategic planning and a multitude of other trickle-down negative consequences. Additionally, the cost of non-routine departures (involuntary departures) for managers could include legal fees, executive
search fees, public relations issues, and other quality/life issues. The findings of the study will benefit the club industry and club managers to better plan and prepare for a long-term relationship and its strategic gains.

One’s decision regarding voluntary or involuntary departure is largely determined by the interplay of a number of an organization’s internal and external environmental factors (Wei & Cho, 2005). For example, in hard economic times one may be reluctant to pursue a position with another club, or he/she may be forced to exit due to inadequate results, or bringing in someone with new knowledge, etc.

The antithesis of voluntary and involuntary executive turnover is longevity. Executives with long tenure generally have weathered those internal and external environmental influences and remained loyal to their constituents. As a result their tenure, to a large extent, can be explained or attributed to their personal leadership and effectiveness. This study explores those characteristics and behaviors that contribute to the general manager’s longevity through a consensus building by a panel of experts.
Review of the Literature

When reviewing the literature, multiple studies were found that discussed the problem of turnover and lack of tenure in the general field of management. However, there were very few studies that related tenure to the Private Club Management field in particular. The studies found are still applicable because they are based on managers in the business sector. Many of the studies focused on why turnover happens, while the study performed for this Monograph was focused on characteristics of a tenured manager.

The article by Donald D. Bergh (2001) entitled, “Executive retention and acquisition outcomes: A test of opposing views on the influence of organizational tenure,” describes a study that focuses on mergers and acquisitions in companies and how having a tenured CEO can positively or negatively affect the acquisition. Bergh addresses how tenured executives are more likely to be opposed to change in the workplace: “Top executives having short organizational tenure are more willing to experiment and change their company’s strategies.” While this is a negative aspect of having a tenured executive, he also lists a number of positive aspects: “Longer tenured top executives provide insights into key factors in the implementation process, such as traditions and history of the acquired company’s culture, its long-term relationships with suppliers, vendors and buyers, understanding what has worked and failed before, and the underlying structure of its political conflicts.”

Martina Musteen, et al (2006) in examining CEO attributes associated with attitude toward change, stressed, “We find that CEO tenure has a significant direct and modifying association with attitude toward change with the central tendency of CEOs to become more
conservative as their tenure increases.” In the whitepaper, *Cracking the Code on Club Management Turnover*, the authors Weiner & Weiner, founders of Search America, detailed a list of external and internal issues that contribute to management turnover at private clubs, in particular. This list provides a number of external and internal factors why managers in private clubs tend to go from club to club instead of staying at one club for multiple years.

**External Issues:**

- Inadequate on-boarding, poor orientation and assimilation into the club’s culture
- Better opportunity elsewhere
- Difficult relationship between management and club leadership
- Apprehension over an imminent board change, which may represent a new or unclear direction for the club
- Inadequate pre-employment matching of candidate and club culture
- Poor match of skills and talents with club’s needs and expectations
- A perception that difficult or personally insurmountable times are ahead
- Reduction of operating results
- Insufficient rapport and support among membership
- Micromanaging in contravention of prior assurances
- Misrepresentation of candidate qualifications or club conditions
- New Board, new goals
- Deficient pre employment background verification
- Naïve acceptance of one another based on gut feel
- Loss of Board confidence in the manager's ability to take the club to the next level that may be defined by the current and/or incoming board of directors
- Churning of candidates by unscrupulous staffing agencies who recruit those they’ve placed

**Internal Issues:**

- Misconception of how the job’s authority and responsibility were originally defined
- Burnout
- Lack of challenge
- Inadequate compensation
- Desire to relocate
- Family and personal issues
- Boredom
- Fear and insecurity
- Psychological predisposition to short-termers syndrome (Weiner).

Though this comprehensive list inventories reasons for executive departures, the review of literature is clearly devoid of reputable studies that focus on why some club executives stay and what personal benefits are gained from such longevity. On the contrary, there are a number of studies that address the unfavorable consequences of non-routine executive departures both for managers and organizations. For example, in Peters, et al (1999) article, "Leadership Lost: A Study on Executive Tenure and Experience" published by Compass-Nonprofit Services, San Francisco, California, it is indicated that, in most cases, nonprofit organizations benefit from executive tenure of at least three to five years. In addition, a series
of successive, short-term executives can do lingering harm to an organization's culture and performance (Kaufman, 2005).

Oliver (2001) in the *Journal of Business Strategy* highlighted four major problems with revolving-door CEOs. The number one problem cited was that new CEOs brought from outside lack institutional memory and understanding of the organization’s strategic traditions. Beyond planned departures that are more predictable, Farquhar (1996) argued that there are generally four reasons for non-routine executive departures:

1) Traumatic Exits: Normally caused by restructuring or acquisitions;

2) Performance Problems: This presumes that the executive is responsible for the organization’s problems, thus resulting in damaging press and placing blame;

3) Conflict-Based Departure: This occurs because of personal reasons, policy disagreements, and/or lack of it. Since such conflicts end up with controversies, the winners and losers are not clearly defined and often they lead to a need for repair.

4) Scandals or Wrongdoings: This could be highly complex, with a common element that the executive, the organization, or the system is tainted. All these may result in various costs for both the executives and the organization including legal fees, public relation issues, executive search firm fees, loss of productivity and service, and turnover in supervisory ranks.

Club manager tenure assumes that managers with longevity have elected not to exit voluntarily, nor were they forced to exit. So what are the advantages for managers to remain loyal? What important attributes do they possess that might lead to their success?
A study of leadership and effectiveness is very complex and beyond the scope of this study. In summary, Jago (1982) studied theoretical perspectives in leadership and organized them in a four-fold focus:

1. The focus on a universally appropriate set of leadership traits
2. The focus on a universally appropriate behavioral style
3. The focus on situationally contingent leadership traits
4. The focus on situationally contingent behavioral styles

This study’s focus is on leadership traits and behaviors, while acknowledging that part of a manager’s tenure may be the result of situational contingent, namely club culture fit. Zenger and Fulkman (1999) studied successful leadership attributes. They developed a model of result-based leadership that provides clarity and direction to help them to succeed with their leadership challenges. Chart 1 depicts attributes of successful leadership per the Zenger and Fulkman model:

**Chart 1**

The findings of the above model to some extent have been supported by other theoretical literature in research. Forck (2011) in the article, “An explanation of courageous leadership and the three traits that can expand influence,” stressed the need to earn the trust...
of employees as well as the significance of being calm in tough situations and providing unfiltered feedback to the top management. Lowen, et al (1969) concluded that consideration by the leader and initiating organizational structure were considered two important factors in accounting for a leader’s behavior and its effects.

Boseman (2008) in studying the traits of a leader focused on both transactional and transformational leadership styles. The article also listed the traits that followers look for in leaders: honesty, competency, the ability to recognize trends and mobilize them, and the skill to inspire and empower others. Boseman and Britt (2008) in studying leadership and mentoring concluded that effective leadership and mentoring are similar. History has shown that effective leaders have emulated the behaviors and actions of successful leaders before them, and through coaching and mentoring they pass on their leadership style and behaviors to their followers.

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous studies that address factors for successful leadership, but none address what attributes are important for executive tenure, particularly in the field of club management. The goal of this study is to fill this void and explore essential leadership attributes that club managers in this study associated with their longevity, to assemble a list of advantages and disadvantages for long tenure, and to find the extent to which these club executives were satisfied with their club and club profession.
Methods for Study

The objectives of this study were to identify what characteristics, values, and behaviors were significant contributors to executive tenure in club management; what advantages and disadvantages were gained from long term tenure; and to what extent executives with long tenure were satisfied with their current position, as well as the club industry.

The research method that was selected for this study was the Delphi Method. Powell (2003) and Rowe and Wright (1999) asserted that the Delphi method requires that participants are experts in the specific subject matter or the general topic area. In the Journal of Information Technology Education, Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007) summarized the Delphi Technique as:

“An iterative process used to collect and distill the judgments of experts using a series of questionnaires interspersed with feedback. The questionnaires are designed to focus on problems, opportunities, solutions or forecasts. Each subsequent questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous questionnaire. The process stops when the research question is answered: for example, when consensus is reached, theoretical saturation is achieved or when sufficient information has been exchanged. The Delphi Method has its origins in the American business community, and has since been widely accepted throughout the world in many industry sectors including health care, defense, business, education, information technology, transportation and engineering.”

Using a self-rated tool, feedback and reflections, opinions of expert managers were solicited to reach a consensus on what characteristics, values and behaviors have contributed to their long-term tenure. The underlying assumption of this method was that the consensus
estimate would generally be reliable after the second round of estimation. In order to further strengthen the validity and reliability of the study, only expert managers were selected using a self-rated format. A study by Best (1974) shown that self-rated experts provide more accurate assessments than self-rated non-experts.

Thirty-two managers were selected for the study with the goal of achieving a participation rate of ten to twelve. Based on the study of literature there is no consensus about the appropriate size of a Delphi panel with regard to the validity and reliability of the process (Powell, 2003). Panel sizes of five to twenty have been used in various studies. For example, Best (1974) had used a panel size of fourteen; Spinelli (1983) had a panel size of twenty. Brockhoff (1975) suggested that for forecasting questions, groups with eleven participants were more accurate in their predictions than larger groups. Akins, et al (2005) conducted a Delphi survey of 23 experts and concluded that, “Panels of similarly trained experts (who possess a general understanding in the field of interest) provide effective and reliable utilization of a small sample from a limited number of experts in a field of study to develop reliable criteria that inform judgment and support effective decision-making.” For this study, the sample size of 16 club executives with at least 7 years or more in their particular clubs resembles an analogous group.

Survey:

The first survey was distributed via Email on February 17, 2011 and yielded sixteen responses. The managers, who volunteered to participate, all had at least seven consecutive years at their current club. Of the sixteen managers, twelve had at least ten consecutive years
at their respective clubs, four had at least fifteen, and one was nearing retirement after thirty years.

The purpose of the first round was to collect open-ended responses from the experts who listed the most important characteristics, values and behaviors that have helped them achieve tenure in their clubs. The request asked for a listing of at least ten. Each of the sixteen respondents listed at least ten characteristics as asked, but twelve of the sixteen gave more than ten characteristics. Six of the managers gave fifteen or more characteristics. All sixteen gave an explanation of each of the characteristics they listed. From the responses generated by the sixteen respondents a list of the top twelve most frequently mentioned attributes was attained.

Survey number two, the second and final round of the Delphi Technique, was distributed on August 13, 2011, also by Email. The second round study was sent to the sixteen of the original thirty-two panelists that elected to participate. The purpose of the second round was to solicit the opinions of executives regarding the importance of the top 12 most frequently mentioned characteristics, values and behaviors on a Likert Scales of 1-5, one being the least important and five being the most important. As an additional research item, participants were asked to list the advantages and disadvantages with regard to having long tenure. The survey also solicited a satisfaction rating for their current positions as well as the managers’ satisfaction with the club management profession.

Assumptions:

For the purpose of this research, executive tenure means a tenure record of at least 7 years of service in a given club. The author agrees with the evidence in the literature that
the benefits of tenure generally appear after 5 years of service in an organization (Kaufman, 2005). The author assumes that in 7 years of service the executive is beginning to reap the benefits of tenure.
Findings

The first survey asking for the traits of managers with successful tenure elicited over 160 traits from the sixteen club managers. The top twelve frequently mentioned responses are demonstrated in the following graph:

Chart 2

Table 1 summarizes the top twelve most frequently mentioned attributes with sample explanations from the responses.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Explanation/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Communication Skills | “Communicate constantly and well”  
                        | “Openly share club’s financial position and vision”  
                        | “Let the members, staff, etc. speak first”  
                        | “Open door policy”                                                                                                                                  |
| Vision               | “Having it and sharing it is the responsibility of the manager”  
                        | “Set goals monthly, yearly, 5-10 years and hold everyone accountable”  
                        | “Know where the organization and you are going. Work hard to see a little bit farther than the next guy” |
| Flexible             | “Change is constant and you must manage direction or be managed”  
                        | “Have the ability to adapt to difficult situations”  
                        | “The players change over time and the GM must adjust with various personalities”                                                                    |
| Financial Knowledge  | “You have to keep costs in line while maintaining good revenue streams – like dues!”  
                        | “You must understand a balance sheet, a P&L Statement and Cash Flow”  
                        | “You need to know the finances and how to manage them especially in today’s environment”                                                          |
| Visible              | “Members want to see the manager – be there when you need to be and don’t be there when you don’t need to be”  
                        | “Know where to be and when to be there”  
<pre><code>                    | “Quality (presence) over quantity”                                                                                                                     |
</code></pre>
<p>| Development of Staff | “Long term or new hires – a tenured manager must have the ability to successfully develop key staff in all areas of the club”                  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Integrity/Honesty      | “Be true to your values and morals”  
                          “Let the truth be your ally”  
                          “Strive to do the right thing and stand up for what’s right even in the face of adversity”  
                          “Always do what you say and deliver more than you promise”  
                          “It is what keeps you grounded” |
| Leader                 | “You should always focus on being a ‘general leader’ with vision and the big picture in mind”  
                          “Lead by example”  
                          “We are paid to lead, guide, direct, and not to be passive” |
| Good Club Culture Fit  | “Find one that’s right for you”  
                          “Understand club culture and avoid making highly visible mistakes”  
                          “Embracing the club’s culture and making it an integral part of programming and strategic planning” |
| Teach/Coach            | “You must teach the board, members, and employers of the good”  
                          “We must train and motivate your staff daily” |
| Organized              | “Make specific to do lists every day, have a list of professional and personal goals”  
                          “Imperative to success of operations and your ability to get things done effectively and efficiently while keeping the ship moving forward” |
| Passion                | “No matter what the belief is, all leaders are passionate and energized”  
                          “The sitting board, president, staff, and membership should experience the same (or higher) level of passion and enthusiasm from the manager as any in the past” |

From the above summary of the first round, a follow up survey was sent to each participant. They were asked to rate each of the twelve (frequently mentioned) attributes in a
Likert scale from 1 – 5, one being least important, 5 being the most important. The table below represents average score for each attribute.

Chart 3

As shown in Chart 3, most all attributes were rated very important with rounded values between four and five, making it difficult to delineate from among the top twelve which would be the most important. However, after reviewing the items three distinct patterns were developed: 1) the highest rated attribute stood up above all was integrity, 2) a number of attributes closely related to inherent leaders’ traits or personality characteristics, and 3) the remaining attributes were analogous to leader behaviors. This was later used to create a model of leadership characteristics and behaviors that contribute to general manager longevity.
Question two of the round two dealt with advantages and disadvantages of executive tenure. Managers were asked to list advantages and disadvantages of manager longevity. Chart 4 shows the top five advantages:

**Chart 4**

![Advantages Chart]

Managers also listed a number of disadvantages to manager longevity. Chart 5 shows the top five disadvantages.

**Chart 5**

![Disadvantages Chart]
Tables 2 and 3 list all advantages and disadvantages proposed by Delphi participants and how many participants named each advantage or disadvantage.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Times Repeated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of membership</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of the board/members</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of club culture</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represents consistent/reliable presence for club</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to have positive impact on club</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to see projects/events to finality</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasting relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More efficient</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence governance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know nuances</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know yearly flow of club (operations)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club historian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive to new members</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and support of staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead club in best direction for growth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better chance of surviving risky ventures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know when to avoid risky ventures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked at as club’s CEO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life with scheduling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become part of community</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proven success</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to see future board members and adjust</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not faced with uncertainties of job market</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>Times Repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complacency</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be perceived as inflexible</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accumulate enemies with good memories (board members/other members)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stretched</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to change/adapt</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t make as much money</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can get into maintenance mode as opposed to maintaining job enthusiasm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to keep fresh with programs/ideas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harder to make noticeable impacts to improve organization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose touch with other club’s actions/events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits opportunities to be exposed to new managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation becomes an issue</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom is taken for granted</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know too much</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid risk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always someone suspicious of your success</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He has too much power” syndrome</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to engage membership on needs of club</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity breeds contempt</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More accepting of shortcomings of tenured staff</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to treat all members same after relationships are formed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The satisfaction survey resulted in an average value of 4.4 out of 5 for both satisfaction with their current position and satisfaction with the profession. The result included an individual responder who rated (2) for satisfaction with the position and (3) for satisfaction with profession, while all others had assigned a value of four or five. This low rating by one individual would have skewed the results. Eliminating the lowest response brings the average
up to 4.6 for position satisfaction and 4.5 for profession satisfaction. Charts 6 and 7 demonstrate the results.

Chart 6

Chart 7
Discussion

The open-ended survey elicited dozens of attributes that managers associated with their longevity. It was apparent by repetition that some attributes seemed more important than others. The trait that was rated highest in importance was *integrity*. So it was delineated to stand alone as the center of the model for effective leadership tenure. All other attributes were compatible with two basic subject matters: leader traits and leader behaviors. A model using the top ten traits would appear as follows:

**Chart 8**

This model assists club managers to identify their areas of effectiveness and those areas that they wish to change. All other attributes not listed in the top ten can also be put into the model.
**Integrity** is thought to be the most important trait of a person in management, making it the center of the model. Integrity is defined as “the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles or professional standards” (Merriam-Webster). Many of the managers in the panel listed integrity as the highest and commented on its importance.

- “Be true to your values and morals”
- “Let the truth be your ally”
- “Strive to do the right thing and stand up for what’s right even in the face of adversity”
- “Always do what you say and deliver more than you promise”
- “It is what keeps you grounded”

Without this core, one might think, none of the others matter.

**Personality Traits:**

Beyond the core value, integrity, the panel identified four other most important personality traits that are perceived associated with manager longevity. Personality traits included: Flexibility, Passion, Vision, and Club-Culture-Fit. The following passages illustrate further:

**Flexibility** within the management field is something that becomes harder to retain as time passes. In support of the above statement as many as five participants in the study listed complacency as the number one disadvantage of longevity. Many managers become set in their ways and refuse to try new things. This is something that a tenured manager needs to avoid to be successful. From the study group, Participant 2 stated that “Change is constant and you must manage direction or be managed.” From personal experience, I concur with the study group that being flexible is necessary to adapt to ever changing internal and external expectations.
**Passion** is always important in a job, but it is even more important when the job is kept for multiple years. As one of the participants said, “The sitting board, president, staff, and membership should experience the same (or higher) level of passion and enthusiasm from the manager as any in the past.” Without passion in a tenured position, complacency becomes an issue. An example of this loss of passion and the onset of complacency was listed by a participant who had lost his passion for the club board but never lost his passion for the club or the industry. This has helped him to endure, even in the face of adversity.

**Vision** can sometimes go hand in hand with passion, but vision is the ability to take one’s passion and create goals for the future. Vision can also be associated with creativity and keeping things fresh within the day-to-day aspects of a job. Vision, big picture thinking and leadership, were mentioned frequently by the tenured managers:

- “Having it and sharing it is the responsibility of the manager”
- “Set goals monthly, yearly, 5-10 years and hold everyone accountable”
- “Know where the organization and you are going. Work hard to see a little bit farther than the next guy”

**Club-culture fit** occurs when the manager is flexible enough to adapt his/her leadership style, or as one of the panel participants put it, “find one that’s right for you.” Club-culture fit is particularly important in the club industry where culture is highly regarded. Culture is defined as “the attitudes and behaviors characteristic of a particular social group” (Merriam-Webster). When choosing a club to work for, managers need to make sure that their values, beliefs, and attitudes are aligned with those of club’s membership, board, and employees. Failure to do this will make the job ahead very difficult. The relevance of club-culture fit was further emphasized by the panel:
“Find one that’s right for you”
“Understand club culture and avoid making highly visible mistakes”
“Embracing the club’s culture and making it an integral part of programming and strategic planning”

**Behavioral Traits**

Although the previously listed personality traits are somewhat challenging to change without deliberate commitment, the behavioral traits are things that can more readily be altered at any time with the correct amount of effort. Study participants identified five most important leader behavior attributes effective for obtaining longevity and club tenure. These five attributes are: Organization, Financial Knowledge, Visibility, Teaching/Coaching, and Communication skills.

**Organization** is key to the success of a tenured manager because there are so many aspects to the job. Without organization managers can miss meetings, deadlines, or other important club related time-sensitive issues. Participant 2 summarized it best: “Imperative to success of operations and your ability to get things done effectively and efficiently while keeping the ship moving forward.”

**Financial knowledge** is an integral part of running any business. Managers must focus on club’s finances and accept responsibility for the results, as one of the panel members emphasized, it is particularly important in “managing today’s volatile environment.” Participants used examples such as “keep costs in line,” and “understanding financial statements.” To my knowledge understanding financials would appeal to the club’s board and
make it easier to effectively communicate with the controller and anticipate problems immediately.

Visibility most often will be learned over time. It is important to know when to be visible and available to the membership. In the words of one of the panel participants, “Members want to see the manager – be there when you need to be and don’t be there when you don’t need to be.” Participant 8 put emphasis on “Quality (presence) over quantity”. Tenured managers know what is important by going through the cycle of club activity for multiple years. This will help the membership to feel comfortable and taken care of, and also allow for the balance of work life and personal life for the manager.

Teaching and coaching is a trait that is continuous to learning and growing as a leader. Tenured managers should always be leading by example and challenging their management staff and line staff to do their best in all member services. As one manager said, “Long term or new hires – a tenured manager must have the ability to successfully develop key staff in all areas of the club.” When a manager is a natural teacher, turnover can decrease because employees feel cared-for and empowered. One participant suggested that, “you must teach the board, members and employees of the good” that the club has to offer.

Communication is one of the most frequently mentioned attributes to longevity. Panel members stressed:

- “Communicate constantly and well”
- “Openly share club’s financial position and vision”
- “Let the members, staff, etc. speak first”
- Have an “Open door policy”
In the researcher’s experience, without communication with the employees, accounting department, members, Golf Professional, superintendent, and the Board, a manager wouldn’t be as informed as needed. Many of the managers in the study noted openness, transparency and active listening as pre-requisites to effective communication skills.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Longevity**

The advantages and disadvantages listed by panel participants clarify, at least in part, the discussions for or against managers’ longevity. There were many variables for or against managers’ tenure, though more managers listed advantages versus disadvantage. Surprisingly, only three panel participants mentioned compensation as a disadvantage. Most managers mentioned the following advantages:

- Knowledge of membership
- Trust of board and members
- Knowledge of club’s culture
- Opportunity to develop staff
- Club’s stability

Several of the tenured managers agreed that their personal effectiveness improved as tenure increased. Obviously, the managers’ knowledge of membership, board, and club culture improves club manager’s effectiveness and in turn helps the club to operate better, put the right staff in place, and provide a more balanced quality of life for the manager.

Disadvantages stated by panel members were often related to complacency, inflexibility, and inability to change. These items predominantly reflect on a managers own actions. Such disadvantages could be mitigated by a managers awareness of these limitations and by avoiding the pitfalls of complacency. This self-policing outweighs the challenges
associated with the disadvantages. Another frequently mentioned disadvantage was creating enemies within the membership and board, especially among those with long term memories. This is certainly a challenge inherent in all clubs.

**Job Satisfaction and Job Identification**

Job satisfaction and profession satisfaction were high among the survey group of long tenured managers. With the exception of one manager, all participants rated that they were highly satisfied with their current position (4.6 out of possible 5). As the survey did not include short tenured or frequent job changers, it is difficult to offer their satisfaction level as a comparison. Similarly, with the exception of the same manager who was dissatisfied with his/her current position, all participants were highly satisfied with the club management profession. Given the apparent benefits of job satisfaction and job identification to organizational engagement, one may conclude that manager longevity provides latent advantages not to be ignored.
Implications/Conclusion

This study provided many benefits of club managers’ longevity along with its likely disadvantages. Club managers must decide for themselves if longevity is a priority from a professional and personal standpoint. This monograph was designed as a model for longevity. It provided a list of inherent personality traits and leader behaviors that can help a manager to potentially attain longevity in their club. The attributes identified by the participants are not strange to club managers. Education through the Club Managers Association of America is packed with how one might approach personal and professional changes to achieve these qualities listed in the monograph. This study’s findings underline the most important of those characteristics that would likely produce success. The educational level of the tenured managers varied from an academic standpoint, but all the responders except one had achieved the CCM designation through CMAA. Many were CCEs (Certified Club Executives) and Honor Society Members of CMAA.

This model can also help new and incoming managers focus on the necessary skills and traits for achieving tenureship. Lowered turnover rates allow clubs to enjoy benefits such as consistency of management, lower costs and keepers of the club culture. Turnover has been exacerbated by a number of internal and external factors, namely a difficult board, history of short tenured managers, and other non-controllable situations, such as a poor economy, change in board philosophy, and catastrophic events (lost greens, fire, etc.) among others. It is logical to think that in such situations tenured managers are often better equipped to handle non-controllable events. They have established a proven record, have influenced events, and politically maneuvered themselves to be less vulnerable.
There is also a lesson for formal education, such as hospitality schools. It is essential for such programs to focus on values, characteristics, and behaviors that promote longevity for those who wish to attain long-term tenure, job satisfaction, as well as finding the best club-culture fit. The managers studied in this monograph all have reached the capacity to successfully manage clubs over an extended tenure and as a result have achieved a high level of personal satisfaction. Additionally, finding a mentor who has achieved long tenure at a club might be considered an alternative method for acquisitioning of such skills.

The model developed in this Monograph underlines ten traits/characteristics as necessary ingredients for longevity by tenured managers in the survey. The model uses integrity as its center. Integrity is at the core as the group of managers rated it highest among the attributes. In the club business, a manager’s integrity is constantly challenged. Whether from staff, board, vendors, or the community, the manager is under a microscope and the value system he/she uses in decisions sets the tone for the entire organization. If there is a perceived weakness with issues of integrity, it lessens the respect of the leader. As the survey group rated this the highest among attributes and had several comments regarding morals and values, the conclusion could be drawn that lack of integrity would have negative consequences.

The four inherent personality traits are flexibility, passion, vision, and club culture fit. Flexibility is necessary as day to day operations offer daily challenges. “Putting out fires,” dealing with difficult members, and changing course during a renovation are just a sampling of examples when the ability to adapt and be flexible is necessary, though it is never easy. Passion is another inherent trait that is often a driving force in successful leadership. Tenured
managers are challenged with complacency, the opposite of passion. Those that deliver results long term are able to exude passion – passion for their club, their staff and members, their community and their family. If one loses the passion, he often loses the desire to inspire and lead. This loss of passion was magnified by a participant who has, since the preparation of this monograph, moved on after a very successful tenure within the club management field.

Vision is another important trait as the staff, membership, and board want to be lead by a visionary. One participant mentioned that staff and membership want to be guided by a visionary, not by a passive manager. The ability to respect the past, lead today, and proactively impact the future is a trait of a visionary and of a tenured executive leader. Visionaries can also see trends and navigate clubs through transitional times. The final inherent trait is club-culture fit. If a manager is able to share a value and belief system that is consistent with the club, it is easier to lead, manage and be part of the organization. Many of the leaders in the survey believe that it takes many years to truly understand an individual club’s culture, but it takes very little time to know if the culture is not a match.

The behavioral skills and traits often can be learned and improved upon. The five most frequently mentioned are prevalent in tenured managers. First and foremost, being organized is necessary when leading a private club. Depending upon the number of direct reports and the level of operational influence, being organized varies from club to club. A disorganized manager leads to a disorganized support staff and it runs downhill from there. Second, the hallmark of successful operator in any business is strong financial knowledge. Club managers are no exception but clubs are unique. Understanding and preparing budgets, and more
complex financial issues relating to capital resources, financing, cash flow and other related topics are just part of today’s necessary skill level for successful managers. The old “salad bar university” managers are not typically groomed with the financial acumen necessary to lead a modern day club. Third, visibility is also at the forefront of tenured managers in clubs. Members want to touch, feel, and see their manager. They want to know the steward of the business is there to oversee. The tenured manager knows how to be in the right place at the right time. It could be the tee box on Saturday morning, the card room on a weekday, the dining room for brunch, a committee meeting, or an open office door for members and staff. Visibility keeps the staff on their toes and the members confident.

Fourth, teaching and coaching are skills successful leaders employ. These skills support the people around them and guide them to perform better. This is not limited to the staff; it could be educating and teaching new Board Members. People are drawn to those willing to share their knowledge. Finally, communication drives all these skills and traits. Verbal, written and even nonverbal cues all play a large role in maintaining relationships within the club’s constituents, setting effective goals, resolving conflicts, providing feedback, persuading others to change, and many other business necessities. If the manager is not able to communicate the information, then the organization will flounder. Although communication is a basic skill, those who work at it and make improvements are able to increase their value to the organization.
Survey 1

Dear Fellow Club Manager:

I am pleased to announce my intention to pursue my Master Club Manager (MCM) designation. As a part of requirement I will conduct a study that will potentially benefit the Club Management profession. The topic I have selected is: Executive Tenure: A Model for Success. By way of this email I am requesting your participation in my research. You have been selected because you have reached tenure at your Club of at least 7 years. My research is intended to provide a framework for those Managers that desire to attain longevity at a particular Club.

The research method I am using is a two-step Delphi technique:

1. You provide a written response to my initial inquiry. The initial inquiry is to list and briefly describe the most important characteristics/skills you think that have helped you to achieve tenure at your club. Please list as many characteristics as you would like, but at least ten.

2. After the results have been formulated, the top characteristics/skills of tenured managers will be developed based on the number of like responses and will be sent back to you for ranking.

The attached spreadsheet allows for your responses.

I thank you in advance for your time and please know that the success that you have achieved in your career is the reason I am asking you to participate. Because the sample group is limited, your participation is absolutely crucial. All the responses will be kept in strict confidentiality. The results of the study will be published and shared through CMAA.

Mitchell Platt, CCM, CCE
General Manager
Woodholme Country Club
(410)486-3700(office)
(410)486-8794(fax)
plattmit@woodholme.org
List and briefly describe the characteristics/skills/values that have helped you achieve tenure at your Club:

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<th>Characteristics/Skills/Values</th>
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Survey 2

Dear Fellow Club Manager:

Thank you for your participation in the first round of the survey: *Executive Tenure: A Model for Success*. I have gathered significant quantity and quality information. To complete the second and the final round of the Delphi process, I ask your assistance in the following **FOUR** questions:

1. In the first round of Delphi survey, our participants identified the following 12 attributes in alphabetical order (most commonly mentioned) that have helped them to achieve tenure at their clubs. **Please rate these attributes on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes: Alphabetical Order</th>
<th>Rating: 1-least important 2-somewhat important 3-neutral 4-important 5-most important</th>
<th>Notes, if any</th>
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2. Having long tenureship has some benefits and some challenges as well. Please identify what **Advantages** and what **disadvantages** you attribute to having long-tenure in your club.

**Advantages: Please list**
Disadvantages: Please list

3. How satisfied are you with your current position? 5 being the most satisfied

Satisfaction with your current position: 1 2 3 4 5

4. How satisfied are you with the club management profession? 5 being the most satisfied

Satisfaction with your profession: 1 2 3 4 5

Thank You.

Mitchell Platt, CCM, CCE
References


Forck, Matt (2011). Courageous leadership: Three traits to expand your influence, professional safety. 56(3), 34-35.


