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Executive Tenure: Attributes of Club Manager Longevity

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This article identifies the characteristics, values, and behaviors that are significant contributors to executive tenure in club management, along with the advantages and disadvantages resulting from long-term tenure. Sixteen club managers, each with long tenure at their current clubs, participated in a Delphi study. All participants had served in their current clubs for more than 7 consecutive years, were employed in the club industry for more than 10 years, and had attained Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation through the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) at least 10 years prior. Many panel members were Certified Club Executives or Honor Society members of CMAA with a reputation within the CMAA organization. The top 12 most important attributes were identified, with integrity as the top characteristic for longevity. Five advantages and three disadvantages to club manager longevity were discerned.

KEYWORDS human resources management, club management, leadership, executive tenure, executive departure, effective leadership, job satisfaction, engagement
INTRODUCTION

The costs associated with turnover and the revolving-door take its toll on both the club and the club manager. Voluntary and involuntary turnovers both have many associated costs. Darcy Jacobsen (2012), in *Globoforce*, sited the costs of replacing an executive being as high as 75% of their annual salary. Other estimates are even higher. Kelly (2007), in his *Business Strategy Review* article “Roller Coaster Leaders” pointed out, “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 indirect costs include lost investment in training, lost expertise, reduced service quality, reduced productivity, increased wastage and customer dissatisfaction, negative impact on remaining staff, and the opportunity cost of lost management time (Lashley, 2001). Additionally, the cost of nonroutine departures (involuntary turnover) for managers could include legal fees, executive search fees, public relations issues, and other quality/life issues (Farquhar, 1996).

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, executive tenure is an important topic for strategic and organizational management of private clubs. The benefits of executive tenure 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 causes, such as poor executive performance, disagreements, or ethical reasons (Farquhar, 1996).

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 they may be forced to exit due to inadequate results or the hiring of someone with new knowledge.

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 (Buddhavarapu, 2008).

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 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.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review showed only one study, by Josiam, Clay, and Graff (2011), that addressed factors relating to the tenure of club general managers. The study concluded that years spent in the club industry, a sense of loyalty, clearly defined job responsibilities, and the opportunity to discuss performance with club presidents were predictors of club general managers’ long tenure. Gustafson (2002) found a mean turnover rate of 75% in private clubs, but the study did not address issues relating to executive tenure. In light of inadequate studies in the field of club management (Barrows, 1994; Barrows & Ridout, 2010), studies found in other management realms are beneficial to the study of club manager longevity.

Voluntary and involuntary turnover is common in nonprofit organizations as well as in the club industry. In a study of nonprofit executives, Bell, Moyers, and Wolfred (2006) reported that 64% of executives left their organization voluntarily, over one third (34%) were forced out, and 2% left for an unknown reason. Hume (1981) reported that the turnover rate in the private club industry is even higher than other managerial segments. Crystal Thomas (2004), in her unpublished monograph reported the average tenure of a club manager was 2.5 years.

Bergh (2001) studied the positive and negative effects that the presence of a tenured CEO could have on mergers and acquisitions. Bergh (2001) addressed how tenured executives were 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” (p. 605). While this is a negative aspect of having a tenured executive, he also listed 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. (p. 604)

Hansen, Ibarra, and Peyer (2013) studied a sample of 3,143 CEOs using performance data, such as overall shareholder performance, sales, profitability, and innovation rates. Their study made a connection between CEO longevity and performance by comparing and contrasting overall performance of the insiders (CEOs that were hired from within the company) and the outsiders (CEOs that were hired from outside). The study concluded, “Overall, insiders did better than outsiders; the insiders’ average rank was 154 places higher than the outsiders.”

Musteen, Vincen, and Baeten (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.” Weiner and Weiner (n.d.), founders of Search America, detailed 
external and internal issues that contribute to management turnover at pri-

tate clubs, in particular. The following lists provide 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 include:

- 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, a new or unclear 
  direction for the club;
- Inadequate preemployment 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 broom;
- Deficient pre-employment background verification;
- Naive 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, however that may be defined by the current and/or 
  incoming board of directors; and
- Churning of candidates by unscrupulous staffing agencies who recruit 
  those they've placed. (Weiner and Weiner, n.d., p. 1)

Internal issues include:

- 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; and
- Psychological predisposition to short-termers syndrome. (Weiner and 
  Weiner, n.d., p. 1)
Though these comprehensive lists inventory reasons for executive departures, the 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 nonroutine executive departures both for managers and organizations. For example, Peters and Wolfred (1999) 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) highlighted four major problems with the revolving-door CEOs. The number one problem cited was that new CEOs brought from outside lacked institutional memory and an understanding of the organization’s strategic traditions. Beyond planned departures that are more predictable, Farquhar (1996) argued that there were generally four reasons for nonroutine 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 Folkman (1999) studied successful leadership attributes. They developed a model of result-based leadership that provides clarity and direction to help leaders to succeed with their leadership challenges. Figure 1 depicts attributes of successful leadership per the Zenger and Folkman model.

The findings of the Zenger and Folkman model to some extent have been supported by other theoretical literature. Forck (2011) stressed the need to earn the trust of employees, the significance of being calm in tough situations, and the importance of providing unfiltered feedback to the top management. Lowen, William, and Kavanagh (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 previously, 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.

METHODS

Using the Delphi method, this study identifies which attributes were significant contributors to executive tenure in club management and what advantages and disadvantages were gained from long-term tenure. 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.” 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. The subjects of this study were selected based on long-term tenure with their current clubs (a minimum 7 consecutive years): all participants had been in the club industry and Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) for more than 10 years, had attained Certified Club Manager (CCM) designation through CMAA, and many were certified club executives (CCEs) or honor society members of CMAA with a reputation within the CMAA organization.

Using a self-rating 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-rating format. A study by Best (1974) shown that self-rated experts provide more accurate assessments than self-rated nonexperts.

A total of 32 reputable managers, each with a minimum of seven consecutive years at their current club, were selected for the study with the goal of achieving a participation rate of 10 to 12. 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). A number of studies (Akins, Tolson, & Cole, 2005; Spinelli, 1983; Brockhoff, 1975; and Best, 1974) have suggested a Delphi panel size of 5 to 20 is appropriate for validity and reliability of the study, especially when the panel members have similar experiences and knowledge.

Panel sizes of 5 to 20 have been used in various studies. For example, Best (1974) used a panel of 14 while Spinelli (1983) had a panel of 20. Brockhoff (1975) suggested that for forecasting questions, groups with 11 participants were more accurate in their predictions than larger groups. Akins et al. (2005) conducted a Delphi survey of 23 experts and concluded:

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. (Conclusion, p. 1)

For this study, the sample size of 16 club executives with at least seven years or more in their particular clubs and a reputation in their fields resembled a reliable sample analogous with the aforementioned recommendations.
Survey
The first survey was distributed via e-mail on February 17, 2011, and yielded 16 responses. Of the 16 respondents, 12 had at least 10 consecutive years at their respective clubs, 4 had at least 15, and 1 was nearing retirement after 30 years.

The purpose of the first round was to collect open-ended responses from those 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 10. Each of the 16 respondents listed at least 10 characteristics as asked, but 12 respondents offered more than 10 characteristics. Six of the managers gave 15 or more characteristics. All 16 gave an explanation of each of the characteristics they listed. From the responses generated, a list of over 160 attributes were gathered. The top 12 most frequently mentioned attributes were identified.

Survey 2, the second and final round of the Delphi technique, was distributed on August 13, 2011, also via e-mail. The second round was sent to the 16 of the original 32 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 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). As an additional research item, participants were asked to list the advantages and disadvantages with regard to having long tenure.

Assumptions
Josiam et al. (2011) defined long-tenured club managers as having a record of more than four years in their current club. For the purpose of this research, executive tenure was defined as a tenure record of at least seven years of service in a given club. We agree with the evidence in the literature that the benefits of tenure generally appear after five years of service in an organization (Kaufman, 2005); we assume that after seven years of service the executive is beginning to reap the benefits of tenure.

FINDINGS
The first round of the survey asked participants to list at least 10 characteristics, values, and behaviors that contributed to their longevity in their current club. Over 160 attributes were gathered. The top 12 frequently mentioned attributes are demonstrated in Figure 2.

Table 1, summarizes the top 12 most frequently mentioned attributes, including some specific comments and examples provided by participants. The top 12 attributes are communication skills, vision, flexibility, financial
knowledge, visibility, development of staff, integrity and honesty, leadership, good culture fit, teaching and coaching, organization, and having passion. The associated comments and examples provided by participants are valuable source of reference for managers in their day-to-day practices.

From the aforementioned summary of the first round, a follow-up survey was sent to each participant. They were asked to rate each of the 12 (frequently mentioned) attributes on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Figure 3 represents the average score for each attribute.

As shown in Figure 3, most attributes were rated as very important with rounded values between 4 and 5, making it difficult to delineate from among the top 12 that which was the most important. However, after reviewing the items, the highest-rated attribute stood out as integrity followed by vision.

Question 2 of Round 2 also dealt with advantages and disadvantages of executive tenure. Managers were asked to list advantages and disadvantages of manager longevity. Figure 4, shows the top five advantages, with knowledge of membership, trust of board/members, and knowledge of club culture receiving the top three highest ratings.

Managers also listed a number of disadvantages to manager longevity. Figure 5, shows the top five disadvantages. Based on the consensus of participants, the top three disadvantages were: become complacent, inflexible, and accumulate foes within membership.

Tables 2 and 3, list all advantages and disadvantages proposed by Delphi participants and the frequency with which participants named each advantage or disadvantage. Managers can apply the advantages and disadvantages to their own needs and their particular club’s culture as they see fit.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Explanations/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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “Quality (presence) over quantity.”  
                              | “Long term or new hires—a tenured manager must have the ability to successfully develop key staff in all areas of the club.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “You must teach the board, members, and employers of the good.”  
                              | “We must train and motivate your staff daily.”  
                              | “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.”  
                              | “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.”  |
**FIGURE 3** Average rating for the most important characteristic, values, and behaviors.

**FIGURE 4** Consensus on top five advantages of long-term tenure.

**FIGURE 5** Consensus on perceived disadvantages of long-term tenure.
TABLE 2 Advantages of Longevity With Frequency of Responses

<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>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

A Model of Attributes of Club Manager Longevity

We summed up all 12 attributes in a schematic, a model of attributes of club manager longevity, to assist the reader in the recollection and conceptualization of the findings. The open-ended survey elicited 12 attributes that experts associated with their longevity. It was apparent by consensus that some attributes were more important than others. The top two traits that were rated highest in importance were integrity and vision. As such, they were delineated to appear at the center of the model. Five attributes were selected as functional attributes of manager longevity. We define functional attributes as activities that are closely related to day-to-day activities of the club manager. These five functional attributes were: financial knowledge, visibility, development of staff, teaching and coaching, and being organized. The remaining five attributes were categorized as personal attributes of club
manager longevity. These five attributes were: communication skills, flexibility, leadership, good club-culture fit, and passion. These frameworks are not separate from one another, but rather complement each other to potentially assist managers to attain longevity at their current clubs. Figure 6, depicts a model of attributes of club manager longevity.

This model assists club managers in identifying their areas of effectiveness and those areas that they wish to change. The following sections further illustrate the comments of research participants and personal experiences of the authors.

**INTEGRITY/HONESTY**

Integrity/honesty 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, n.d.). 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.”

### TABLE 3 Disadvantages of Longevity With Frequency of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Times repeated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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>
“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 other traits matter.

Vision
Vision is the ability to take one’s passion to find solutions to problems that the club does not yet face and to create goals for the future. The success of every leader starts with vision. The club manager needs to assist the board to formulate a compelling vision for the club and must effectively communicate the vision that would bring followers together towards common goals. Drawing from other attributes, such as developing staff, coaching, and training, as well as financial knowledge, successful managers empower subordinates to make new ideas happen. Vision is also 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.”
Personal Attributes of Club Manager Longevity

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication skills was one of the most frequently mentioned attributes to longevity. Many managers in the study noted openness, transparency, and active listening as prerequisites to effective communication skills. Communicating with confidence and accuracy increases the manager’s ability to persuade followers toward the vision. 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 our experience, without precise and effective communication skills it would be hard for a club manager to earn the respect of employees, the accounting department, club members, golf professionals, superintendent, and the board.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility within the management field is something that becomes harder to retain as time passes. In support of the aforementioned 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, “Change is constant and you must manage direction or be managed.” From personal experience, we concur with the study group—being flexible is necessary to adapt to ever-changing internal and external expectations. Other comments included:

- “Have the ability to adapt to difficult situations.”
- “The players change over time and the GM must adjust with various personalities.”

LEADERSHIP

Leadership has been defined and used in a variety of contexts. A comprehensive discussion of leadership is beyond the scope of this study. However, Merritt and Collins (2013) defined leadership as:

Directing an individual's or group's activities toward goal achievement. Combining values and sharing a vision, both of which create
an environment others can support and work to improve. Providing meaningful direction to common effort. Delegating, and motivating others to contribute to an organization’s effectiveness.

The common element in this definition is that a tenured manager is expected to influence followers. The participants in this study highlighted:

- “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.”

**CLUB-CULTURE FIT**

Club-culture fit occurs when the manager is flexible enough to adapt their 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” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). 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.”

**PASSION**

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. For example, loss of passion and the onset of complacency were 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.
Functional Attributes of Club Manager Longevity

Functional attributes are expectations from managers relating to day-to-day operations within the club, things that can more readily be altered at any time with the correct amount of effort. Study participants identified five most important functional attributes effective for obtaining longevity and club tenure. These five attributes were: financial knowledge, visibility, developing staff, teaching/coaching, and organization.

FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

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 to “managing today’s volatile environment.” Participants used examples such as:

- “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.”

To our 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

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.

DEVELOPING STAFF

Developing staff provides opportunities for delegation, which gives managers time for other functional activities, such as board and member satisfaction, as well as time for planning. Expanding job capabilities of staff leads to improved decision-making, subordinate commitment, and manager–subordinate relations (Robbins & Hunsaker, 2009). Club managers notoriously complain about interruptions on their day-to-day operations due to excessive phone calls, problem solving, unscheduled meetings, or walk-in visitors. A well-trained staff can address many of these issues freeing
time for managers to tend to the “big picture” issues and gain prominence. Thus, responsibility of developing staff falls squarely on the shoulders of club managers. As one executive said, “Long term or new hires—a tenured manager must have the ability to successfully develop key staff in all areas of the club.”

**Teaching and Coaching**

Teaching and coaching helps staff to become more competent and skilled, which in turn leads to better results. One of the consequences of effective teaching and coaching is a reduced need for managers to problem-solve, creating a win-win situation for employees, the manager, and the club. Tenured managers should always lead by example and challenge their management staff and line employees to do their best in all member services. When a manager is a natural teacher, turnover can also decrease because employees feel cared-for and empowered. Attesting to the importance of teaching and coaching, managers wrote:

- “You must teach the board, members, and employers of the good”
- “We must train and motivate your staff daily.”

**Organization**

Organization is key to the success of a tenured manager because there are many aspects to the club manager’s job. Without organization managers can miss meetings, deadlines, or other important club-related time-sensitive issues, thus losing credibility. 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.”

**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 manager’s own actions. Such disadvantages could be mitigated by a manager’s 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 adversity within the membership and board, especially among those who have been there a long time. This is certainly a challenge inherent in all clubs.

Implications and 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. We designed a model for longevity that provides a list of attributes that can help managers to potentially attain longevity in their clubs. The attributes identified by the participants are not strange to club managers. Education through the CMAA is packed with how one might approach personal and professional changes to achieve these qualities. This study’s findings underline the most important of those attributes that would likely produce success in longevity.

This model can also help new and incoming managers focus on the necessary attributes for achieving tenureship. Today, turnover is rampant and loyalty is hardly appreciated. This trend 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, as well as finding the best club-culture fit. Additionally, finding a mentor who has achieved long tenure at a club might be considered an option for receiving coaching and counseling.
REFERENCES


