

Time for a Change

2006

By

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The Wake Up Call

I'm a fifty five year old General Manager, twenty-four years at a single club and midway through The Great Journey. The Club has a waiting list. The Club has money in the bank. The Club has members who visit in droves and when they visit they "glow." By anyone's definition, the Club and I are on a roll.

It's only natural that I should be feeling a little smug, self satisfied, at peace with the world, secure in my victories, confident in the future. And I was.

Until the other day.

It happened in a flash. I was taking a break from "preaching, teaching and facilitating" at an all day BMI-V seminar at UNLV, yapping over caffeine with a bunch of long time, high octane, take charge, card carrying CMAA Certified Club Managers, talking about clubs and the characters who manage them.

Then the bomb went off.

"Do you know Manager X??? He's a great guy, a truly *Big Cheese* manager in the Association, the general who led The Full of Class Country Club from insolvency to prominence, and a "Mega Bucks" manager who's in the upper one percentile of pay and benefits. He was closing in on sixty, at peace with the world, looking forward to a cash filled retirement five years in the future. And then, "Wham"---the board said *it's time for a change* and he's gone, erased, exited, out. Just like that."

The coffee chilled in our mugs as we stood there, motionless, numbed by the news. How could this be!?!? How could our hero be told that it was *time for a change*? Tell us it ain't so!!!

But it was so. And we needed to talk about The Fall. We needed to understand the reasons, needed to bulk up our defenses, needed to arm ourselves for combat.

We stumbled back into class. I threw out the lecture notes and asked these BMI-Five'ers the ultimate question---"Why?"

Something Changed

All of us agreed that this wasn't the first time that a long tenured, highly successful, "happy in his or her job," middle aged club manager had been told that it's *time for a change*. So why would a board want to disrupt the apple cart, toss out a winner and go foraging in the "unknown" for a replacement? Why indeed?

Obviously something had changed in the culture, in the man or in both and "the alignment" between manager and club had evaporated. Dozens of "Maybes" were thrown on the table. Here are a few.

Maybe He Forgot that Love ain't enough: Was he lulled into believing that "the warm embrace" would compensate for his operational shortcomings?

Maybe He Lost The Buzz: Did Manager X lose his enthusiasm for the business? Did thirty years on the job make his daily routine a "ho hum" experience?

Maybe He Stopped Pursuing the Next New Thing: Did Manager X lose his curiosity for uncovering the new "stuff" emerging near the Cutting Edge of clubdom? Did "what is" become "good enough" for both him and the club?

Maybe He Became a No Mamma: Did Manager X begin saying no more than he said yes to new ideas from the staff, the committees and the board? Did he amplify the negatives and downplay the positives? Did he become more No Mamma than Yes Mamma?

Maybe He Was Too Aligned with the Old Politics: Did the new generation of club leadership resent Manager X's open and obvious alignment with The Old Politics and The Ancient Regime? Did they resent his equally open and obvious condescension toward the New Generation and their vision of The Good?

Maybe He Lost the Inspirational Edge: Did Manager X lose the "divine spark" that all leaders need to get things bubbling, to get the sedentary moving and to make the comfortable itchy? Did he lose his ability to inspire the club and its people to The Next Plateau of Performance?

Maybe He Lost Focus: Did our manager friend forget that operational performance needs focus, that operational focus is diluted by "peripheral interests" and that members resent a manager's "other enthusiasms" when operational performance begins to slide?

Maybe He Became Blind to the Signals: Did Manager X lose his ability to “read the signals” and to hear “the unspoken?” Did he become blissfully self absorbed and oblivious to the subtleties conveyed by the big sigh, the rolling eyes, the upturned eye brow? Did he become all talk and “no listen?”

Maybe the Board Wanted to Drive the Club Bus: Did the board and committees tire of having the manager tell them what should be done, who should do it, when it should it be done, and how much it should cost? Did they resent his driving The Bus and reaping the glory?

Maybe The Club Wanted to Save the Big Bucks: Did the board decide that they could replace Manager X with an enthusiastic upwardly mobile neophyte who would give them three good years and be gone, someone hungry, young and *cheap*?

Maybe the Lieutenants Were Enough: Did the board decide that they didn’t need a Major League Manager because they had Major League Lieutenants who could lick boots, kick butt and do what they were told when told what to do directly by the board and its committees? Maybe they felt that they didn’t need a high priced intermediary to muck up their message?

Moaning and Groaning: Did Manager X become a *whiner*, always moaning and groaning about aberrant members, unproductive staff, club politics, the weather, the cost of college, and the state of the universe? Did he become a negative, hard edged bore, a sucker of energy, a whiner who made the happy sad and the sad depressed?

Maybe He Lost His Protector Director: Did Manager X lose his Board Room Defender, the director who was there to protect him against the accelerating downward spiral of negative comments and commentary? Was there no-one left to sing his praises, list his virtues, recall his glory days and dramatize the good he was still capable of doing?

Interesting maybes.

Who was at fault? What could be done?

Time for a change?

Time for a Change

Members explore these “maybes” every day---behind closed doors, on the seventeenth fairway, in the card room at 11:00 p.m. Managers can’t respond because they’re elsewhere, out of the loop and blissfully unaware. Unchecked, these yammerings can

turn negative and ugly as they spiral downward into cynicism and anger, out of control, until all who are listening leave convinced that "it's time for a change."

If the wait list is long, the financials are good, the turnover is low, the dining room is booming, and the buzz is on---these manager "maybes" are interesting asides that should cause no-one alarm. But if the opposite is true and the staff are grumbling, the members are leaving, the losses are mounting and the dining room is empty, these "maybes" can become a whirlwind of dissent and the grumbling will spread and the board will agree that "it's time for a change."

Listen for the whispers. Read the signals. Feel the fear. Avoid The Fall by anticipating The Fall.

And enjoy the journey-----