

THE BOARDROOM

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WHAT MAKES A GREAT PRIVATE CLUB?

Prestige, initiation fees, popularity...yes, they're all important.
But in the end, it's the *Member Experience*.

Here are the response of some of the private club industry's top experts.

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**DAN KAPLAN**

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Club Board Members Change, Core Values Should Not

To provide some degree of continuity, most club bylaws provide for a staggered board.

Typically, two to four seats are elected each year while the remaining board members continue in their roles until they are up for re-election or retirement. In some cases, this may significantly impact board policies as new alliances are formed.

It may also create a less stable environment for the general manager and management team as they adapt to alternative opinions and directions. A well-articulated strategic plan and an effective leadership development program can help reduce this stress and keep the organization on its intended path.

Many clubs claim to have a strategic plan, but the emphasis and detail of these plans vary dramatically. Some focus on facility needs, outlining a plan for capital expenditures over an extended period.

Unfortunately, this approach ignores many operational requirements, particularly those associated with human resources, typically representing 50 percent or more of a club's operating budget. An effective plan should define the club's strategic objectives, assess its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and develop action plans to address the issues for each department reporting to the general manager and assistant general manager.

Recently, The Polo Club of Boca Raton's board of governors updated its strategic plan, detailing more than 100 specific action plans for our management team. Perhaps more importantly, we redefined our purpose ("Why we exist"), mission ("What we do") and core values ("How we conduct ourselves") to encompass not only our members but also our employees and external service providers.

These statements acknowledged how critical our management team, staff and contractors are to delivering an exceptional member experience. Once we defined these terms, we ensured that our 14 strategic objectives and our action plans aligned with these definitions.

The complete strategic plan now provides a roadmap for our current and future boards as well as our management team. We anticipate that we will update this plan periodically but will maintain our purpose, mission and core values.

The strategic plan should also identify the most significant issues and risks the club faces and the skill sets required between the board and management team to address these matters. Periodic elections and appointments can provide an excellent opportunity to fill voids in the composition of the board and its committees relative to these skills requirements. Although many board elections can become popularity contests, a well-developed nominating and leadership development process should lead to a more balanced board with the



skill sets that will provide the most benefit to the club.

Three years ago, The Polo Club launched our “NEXT” program to identify and develop future leaders for our committees and the board of governors. The NEXT program includes a series of seminars open to all members that provides an overview of our club’s operations and governance.

Attendance is mandatory for those who wish to chair a committee or participate in our audit, finance or legal committees and strongly encouraged for those seeking an elected position on our board as well as the golf or tennis/pickleball committees (Florida law allows any member in good standing to seek an elected position, so attendance cannot be mandatory).

The NEXT program helps our members appreciate the complexity of operating our club and also helps them determine how they can best become involved in a leadership role.

Since the majority of our members spent many years in leadership roles in their professional careers, there is an enormous untapped resource that can benefit the club while at the same time filling a void for those who have retired from those roles. “Graduates” of NEXT are recruited for the roles that best fit their background and skills, leading to a more effective governance process.

As a result, we are able to embrace change in our club’s leaders without abandoning our commitment to operational excellence and the exceptional member experience we have defined in our purpose and mission statements. Most importantly, while we welcome diversity of opinions among our board, committees and members, we remain true to our core values. **BR**

The Polo Club of Boca Raton

The Polo Club of Boca Raton is a private, member-owned country club in Boca Raton and Delray Beach, FL. The facility includes 1,711 homes, two golf courses, 25 tennis courts, eight pickleball courts, a spa and fitness center, five restaurants, meeting and reception rooms and other amenities on over 1,100 acres.

The residential community comprises 24 homeowners associations and offers a range of home designs, including attached townhomes and condominiums, free-standing patio homes and estate homes. Homeowners must be social members of The Polo Club but may also join the golf and or tennis/pickleball membership.

The Polo Club of Boca Raton Property Owners’ Association (POA), which was incorporated as a “corporation not-for-profit” in 1985, operates The Polo Club. An elected 11-member board of governors oversees the POA. Board members serve staggered three-year terms.

The board establishes all capital contributions for new and existing members as well as annual dues and assessments. Member rights and privileges as well as policies and procedures are defined in The Polo Club’s governing documents and are periodically updated by the board and, where required, by a membership vote.

The general manager and chief operating officer manages the day-to-day operations as well as 14 department directors, more than 200 full-time equivalent employees and numerous outsourced services, such as security, common area maintenance and valet parking. **BR**

