

ATTRACTING NEW MEMBERS - SOME SUGGESTIONS

What kind of new Member is being sought?

If the Club has taken steps to provide itself with good information about its own membership base and the local demographic, this process is much easier. An understanding of the makeup and movement of its membership will assist the club in identifying what type of member is absent or in decline. (Eg. junior boys and/or girls and younger women). A study of the demographics of the local area assists the club in developing strategies to fulfill its membership needs.

The approach taken by the Membership Committee will depend largely on whether the club is seeking new male or female members (or both) and on the age group of those new members, but it would be expected that all prospects are of interest.

Thinking outside the square about Membership:

Although a club may well have identified a need for more women or more junior members as an example, it would still be wise to encourage all types or categories of prospective members. Focusing only on the traditional type of club member may limit the club's opportunities to attract a different kind.

- Are there individuals or groups within the community who would be attracted to the facilities and community spirit of the club, but who do not fit the traditional "club member" mould? You can bet there are!
- Is the club's ability to attract new members restricted by preconceptions about what constitutes a member?
- How family friendly is the club?
- Many clubs try hard to encourage juniors, and run excellent junior programs, but overlook the fact that there is often a mum or dad in attendance who might be encouraged to take up the game along with other siblings.
- Clubs must make junior players and their families feel welcome or miss out on a tremendous source of future or long term members.
- Is the club a friendly, welcoming place for families to visit and enjoy the facilities?
- Has the club given consideration to maximising the use of its facilities, the flexibility of its membership and fee structures, so that different kinds of members might be attracted?

Flexibility in competition formats and programming to retain and attract members:

There are some excellent examples of clubs which have introduced more flexibility into their program of competitions, so that a wider variety of golfers can enjoy a game, without the time and other constraints of a typical 18 hole, and still retain their handicaps. This is particularly important in retaining members who might otherwise think about changing membership categories, or even worse, resigning. Many people are no longer finding the traditional 18 hole competition manageable because of time constraints. Working people and parents of young families can similarly appreciate the opportunity to play a shorter round which does not consume so much time.

The Membership Committee:

The success of any program to attract new members depends on having a group of enthusiastic and committed people who are prepared to run the program, whether a "come and try" day /morning/afternoon or some other arrangement to introduce new people to the club. The Membership Committee also has an important function in following up with those people who have expressed an interest in golf and/or the club.

Making new members feel welcome:

Once an application for membership is approved, it is important that contact is maintained over a period of time until any new members have settled in to the club and feel at home and welcome. This is particularly important with regard to women and juniors, both of whom can feel very intimidated and lacking in confidence when beginning their association with golf. However, many new golfers, men and women, report that they found their first experience with golf and their golf club intimidating. Not only are they worried about unknowingly breaking the Rules of Golf or breaching etiquette on the course, but they are not sure what is expected of them in the clubhouse.

They also worry about breaching the 'rules' of membership which they do not always understand. Providing some form of mentoring of new players is a very successful and predictable way of introducing them not only to the game but also to the club, and is a great boost to confidence for beginners. Making new members feel welcome is a good way to ensure that they do not fall by the wayside before they have become established and comfortable club members.

The support of the Board and Management of the Club is also vital, so that the aims of the membership drive and any information given out to prospective members are consistent with the Club's policies with regard to membership categories, joining processes, fee structures and membership rights. Policies for waiving Joining Fees (and any time limits for this), allowing for payment of fees by installment, special categories of membership and so on, need to be agreed by the Board in advance and communicated to Management and the Membership Committee.

Providing information about the club:

Many clubs produce a brochure which summarises their membership and fee structure, lists playing and other rights (such as voting rights) of various membership categories, the club's facilities and gives the playing and cart hire fees for members and visitors. The brochure is a useful first step in dealing with casual enquiries about membership and the club, as well as giving information to prospective new members. It can form part of a 'New Members' package.

Support of the Pro Shop:

A commitment to the membership program by the Professional (if there is one at the club) is also significant. Many successful programs for new golfers often include a series of free or reasonably-priced clinics and some organised access to the course for a limited number of holes of golf. Equipment for loan or hire is also attractive to new players, so that they can become more familiar with golf before committing to the expense of buying clubs. The benefit of a series of clinics and some limited playing opportunities for prospective members is that their contact with the club is maintained over a period of time, and they can become more familiar with the game and gain an increasing sense of their capacity to enjoy playing golf.

Advertising ideas for a Club's Membership Program:

- It's worth taking the time to produce a flyer which advertises the program and its activities, whether a 'come and try' session or some other event. This can then be used for distribution by hand or post to prospective sources of membership;
- Don't forget existing members. Many of them will welcome the opportunity to have partners, family members, relatives or friends introduced to the game which they love, so that playing opportunities can be shared. It is a simple matter to hand out a flyer on competition days;
- Local schools and colleges are a good source of potential family membership, and can also provide a source of younger adult members. A letter sent with a bundle of flyers to the Secretary of the Parents and Friends Association of the local schools, or of the local university, can be effective. In metropolitan areas and larger towns, it is important to be considerate about intruding on the 'catchment areas' of other local golf clubs;
- *Newspaper Advertisements:* These can be expensive, and unless a good deal can be done with the local paper, may not give value for money. However, it is worthwhile developing a good relationship with the local newspaper, which may appreciate a regular contribution of news and photos from the club and may give some advertising space at a reasonable rate;
- *Local Radio:* Once again, this can be a good way of advertising the program, and many local radio stations will support such advertising as a community service;
- *Golfing Magazines:* These will also carry advertising for clubs and their competitions or special programs and are definitely worth exploring;
- Enlist the support of the club's members in talking up the program and the club. Word of mouth is a powerful medium and many club members do not understand the good (or harm) they can do in the way they speak about the club;
- Perhaps offer a discounted subscription to all members who successfully introduce a new member? Or, possibly provide free membership for a year to any member who introduces 10 or more new members (within any prescribed period).