



# SINGAPORE CLUB MANAGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CLUB MANAGERS ASSOCIATION OF SINGAPORE

## The Search for Leaders

By: Mark Robson

With both budgetary and time constraints increasing, there is a discernable move for General Committees to recognize the need for a more professional manager to take the helm and free them from micro management and micro decision making. This is leading towards the CMAA's "Management to Leadership" model and should be welcomed. Whilst this approach is still in its infancy here in Asia and, as yet, has only been taken up by a small number of forward thinking

clubs, the ball is definitely rolling and this trend will start to shape modern club management and club governance in Asia. This in turn places new pressures on General Managers to adapt and grow into this role or be left behind. The real sea-change comes with the General Manager using the committees as a tool to achieve the broad aims of the club rather than the General Manager being the tool of the committees. Put another way, the emphasis has shifted from a search for managers to the search for leaders.



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## Conference Preview: CMAS Conference 2010 18-20 April 2010, Raffles Town Club

By: Benjamin Tan

### GENERAL INQUIRIES:

Please mail Jennifer at the CMAS Secretariat at [jen@cmas.org.sg](mailto:jen@cmas.org.sg)

### COMMITTEES:

#### Exco:

President	Roy Higgs
Vice President	Benjamin Tan
Hon Secretary	Peter Goh
Hon Treasurer	Rowland Wong
Members	Selina Ho Charlie Ng James W K Tan

#### Education:

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Members	David Brightling N K Hazra Roy Higgs Y P Loke

#### Conference:

Chairman	Benjamin Tan
Co-Chairman	Roy Higgs
Members	Rowland Wong Peter Goh Y P Loke Selina Ho Charlie Ng David Brightling Tan Hua Chiow James W K Tan James Wee Joan Ho

### NEWSLETTER

*Singapore Club Manager is the quarterly e-newsletter of the Club Managers Association of Singapore. Submissions are welcome and should be forwarded to the Editor, David Brightling, at [brightling@one15marina.com](mailto:brightling@one15marina.com).*



The last CMAS Conference in 2008 was the most successful ever, boasting a 40% increase in attendance, with nearly 160 attendees from 12 countries and a who's who of prominent Clubs both from within the country and the region. For next year's event, taking place in Singapore from 18 - 20 April, we've built on that success to create a programme of intensive conference sessions featuring the best and brightest minds in the industry.

The theme for the Conference is "Riding The New Wave", in view of the many changes in the business world that occurred worldwide after the financial turmoil in 2008. Of the feedback we received about the 2008 event, by far the most notable

was a desire for more management, new trends and best practices contents. Next year's event will have tracks devoted to Management, with the others covering Club trends and best practices. We are also pleased to announce that we will be having Joe Purdue and Norm Spitzig back as our speakers. For those who attended the last Conference, you would have enjoyed and benefited from the sessions with these two industry maestros.

The question is, are you ready to give yourself a boost as a Club professional? If so, come and join us in the CMAS Conference 2010! Let's be prepared to ride this new wave. See you in Singapore. ✨

# The Search for Leaders

By: Mark Robson

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## THE NEED FOR CHANGE

In my recent searches for Club General Managers, the committees have, in the first instance, recognized the need for change. This requires huge buy-in from the club and it takes strong leadership and willpower to implement but, without this buy-in, the General Manager will not have a platform to initiate change. At the same time, the General Manager must be seen to be able to lead the change process, through facilitation and strategic leadership at the committee level, and through superior communications and leadership skills at the staff level. The latter is particularly important in Asia in view of the many long serving staff at private clubs who might be resistant to change.

## BEING COMMERCIAL WITHOUT SEEMING "COMMERCIAL"

Recently, Search Committees have directed me recently to tap into a perceived pool of more 'commercial' talent coming from the hotel industry and other hospitality sectors in addition to the traditional club manager. Broad hospitality knowledge is paramount but increasingly candidates require a deep financial understanding of the business and the ability to drive sales. And yet, sales maximization and diligent cost control must be accomplished without the club appearing too commercial, a delicate balancing act.

## TRAITS OF AN "IDEAL CANDIDATE"

So, what are Search Committees looking for? Recent searches and ideal candidate profiles have tended toward consensus on the following needs/attributes:

1. Leadership & direction
2. Cultural and 'local' sensitivities
3. Awareness of the role and use of committees
4. Financial knowledge
5. Change management

The profile of a modern club manager in Asia is not that much different from the traditional club manager's job description.

The difference comes with the ability to really lead, to implement change, to take on board new ideas and commercial practices, to maintain a balance of objectiveness and practicality.

## VISIBILITY STILL COUNTS, BUT...

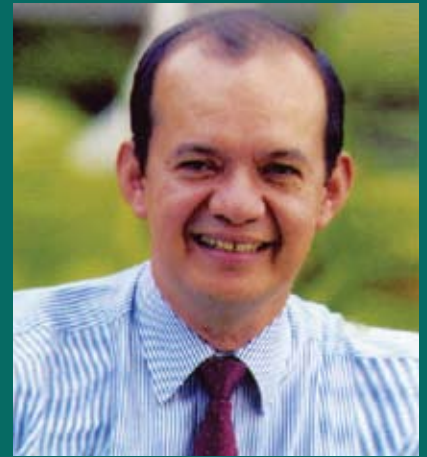
The General Manager is the figurehead and leader for the club, the top of the pyramid, who must be accessible to the membership. This is still a vital attribute for the successful manager. A sense of gravitas is essential in being able to deal with an often high-powered membership. Too frequently candidates are rejected because a perceived lack of strength in standing up to a difficult membership.

Particularly in Asia it is important to be culturally aware and have an understanding of some of the regional sensitivities such as 'face'. This applies equally to membership and staff. Where the club has taken the decision to change corporate governance in favour of the GM/COO (General Manager/Chief Operating Officer) model it is crucial that the General Manager uses the skills and knowledge of the committees and gains buy-in for the future direction of the Club. Volunteer committees are excellent areas of support and can help to sell the change to their membership constituencies.

The partnership between committees and the General Manager remains essential for success. But the needs and expectations clubs have for their GM/COO continue to evolve placing greater emphasis on the General Manager as a leader. The onus is on general managers to adapt to this new reality in order to meet the changing needs of their current - and future - employers. ✨

**Mark Robson** is the Director Asia for Portfolio, a leading hospitality executive search practice based in Hong Kong and London. Mark has managed clubs in London, New Zealand and Barbados before joining Portfolio and settling in Hong Kong. In the last two years he has placed five GM's in leading clubs in the region. He can be contacted at [mark.robson@portfolio-asia.com](mailto:mark.robson@portfolio-asia.com)

## From the President



Roy Higgs  
President

As we head into the season of good cheer I would like to wish wish all members a Merry Christmas and Happy new Year. 2009 has been a challenge and I'm sure we all are glad to see it behind us. We are busily preparing for the April Conference and we have some interesting new sessions included and if all goes well with our discussions with the training subcommittee of the AGIF we will have collaboration with them on some educational programs.

We need help form members to secure sponsors for the conference so please feel free to inform Jen if you have any leads

Cheers,  
Roy



# The General Manager Today

By: Norm Spitzig, MCM

I've had the very good fortune to work with many outstanding private club Boards over the past several years, both in General Manager searches and Board Leadership Orientations. One thing that still continues to baffle me, I must admit, is the occasional Director who, logic aside, is "just opposed" to the General Manager concept. To quote Butch Cassidy, "Who ARE those guys?" – and I add, "Why are they still campaigning for some antiquated committee system of management that other major industries no longer employ?"

Perhaps they are against hiring a General Manager for their club – someone with the professional skills, personal temperament, and vested authority and clear accountability to manage the entire operation in accordance with the history, culture, tradition and available financial resources – simply because of a basic misunderstanding of the concept. After all, the General Manager / Chief Operating Officer concept does not mean that the person in this position acts as some omnipotent, quixotic ruler, irrationally committed to replacing the Head Golf Professional and Greens Superintendent every two years. To the contrary, the successful General Manager is someone who can and will attract, retain and earn the respect of a top quality staff in spite of personal agendas, conflicting personalities and contradictory directives that inevitably occur in a private club membership community. He or she is the true leader of a team of caring and skilled professionals committed to consistently delivering what the membership wants and needs.

Perhaps it is a matter of money. I've heard the occasional misguided Director pontificate that "Our club just can't afford to pay a General Manager." My response is



that, in nearly all cases, you can't afford not to pay one! Any General Manager worth his or her proverbial salt will more than pay for the "extra" compensation in additional operating efficiencies, greater member usage and increased member satisfaction.

Or maybe it's a matter of power. Perhaps there is some irrational fear that a true General Manager will cause the Board to somehow "lose control". (Not if the Club has a strong, knowledgeable and representative Board of Directors.) Or perhaps there is the fear that the club will end up with an egomaniac who can't get along with the other members of the management team. (Not if the Club does its due diligence in the hiring process and has appropriate oversight controls and position descriptions in place.)

## WHAT, THEN, ARE THE BENEFITS OF HIRING A TRUE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER / GENERAL MANAGER?

- A more satisfied membership. (With a General Manager, the entire staff will be on the same page with regard to the mission of the club and the real wants and needs of the membership.)
- A more cohesive and effective leadership team. (How can a club "run" by multiple committees, each professing their own separate and departmentalized agenda, determine and prioritize what is truly best for the entire club over the long run?)

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- Better financial controls, a more efficient operation and more consistently applied rules, regulations and procedures. (With a General Manager, one department won't follow some independent and/or contradictory set of rules determined by the latest committee chair.)
- Better communication within the entire membership community. (With a General Manager, the correct message will be sent to all club and staff members all the time.)
- A more talented and cooperative staff. (An effective General Manager can and will locate, hire and motivate department heads whose professional skills and individual personalities mesh with and complement each other – and also the mission of the club.)

Ironically, one obstacle to successfully implementing General Manager concept may be club managers themselves. Unfortunately, there are still some people out who just don't have what it takes to do the job. These pretenders give competent General Managers a bad name and, by inference, cause a few Directors to "dig in their heels" against the General Manager concept per se rather than the incompetent individual in question. And then there are another group of club managers who, "General Manager" title or not, focus far too much of their time and attention on those aspects of the club with which they are most familiar and comfortable, often ignoring other fundamental aspects of the job. Such myopic behavior only reinforces in the minds of committee system advocates the supposed "fact" that a General Manager is not really needed in

the private club environment. As a result, the concept itself takes an unnecessary and unfortunate hit.

The bottom line is clear: The General Manager concept is alive and well in the private club industry. If your club has a good one, tell them so, compensate them generously and get out of the way and let them do their job. The club will be rewarded with a happier membership and a more efficient operation. If your club doesn't, work with a search professional with proven private club expertise to be sure that you identify and retain the right one for YOUR club – and get the same great results. ✨

**Norm Spitzig, MCM** is internationally recognized as an eloquent and visionary spokesman for the private club industry. His groundbreaking book *Perspectives on Club Management* – now 19 years old - continues to inspire and challenge club directors, managers and students around the world.

Norm's leadership and professional contributions to the private club industry are varied and significant. Elected a National Director of CMAA in 1989, he served as National President in 1995 – the same year he became one of the six original general managers to earn the prestigious lifetime Master Club Manager (MCM) designation.

Norm currently serves as a Principal & Senior Partner in Master Club Advisors, publisher of two premier newsletters for leaders in the worldwide private club industry, *Club Management Perspectives* and *Directors' Digest*, and now regarded by more and more leaders in the private club industry as a "general manager executive search firm of choice". Norm's Board of Directors' Leadership Orientations and Strategic Planning Sessions have been very well received at national, regional and local meetings of many professional associations as well as great individual private clubs around the world.

Norm and his family reside in Mount Dora, Florida. He may be reached at 352-735-5693, [normspitzig@hotmail.com](mailto:normspitzig@hotmail.com), or at [www.masterclubadvisors.com](http://www.masterclubadvisors.com).



## Club Industry— A Club Tour Experience

• by Joan Ho



A group photograph taken during the tour at Tanah Merah Country Club

On 2nd and 3rd December 2009, 178 Senior Year students from the Diploma in Leisure & Resort Management embarked on a site visit to Tanah Merah Country Club as part of the diploma core subject 'Club Management' project assignment to develop a new Club concept. The students were also challenged to examine the critical success factors of the makings of a great Club.

The exclusive visit was hosted by Mr Roy Higgs, General Manager of Tanah Merah Country Club and president of CMAS, who graciously accompanied the group throughout the visit. Upon arrival at the prestigious premier golf and

country club in South East Asia, the students were impressed by the main lobby as well as the warm welcome by the marketing staff. Some of the students were even determined to work harder and wished to become a member of the Club.

A presentation was organized for the students in the meeting room where Mr Roy Higgs shared on the success formula as well as interesting insights on the prestigious Club. The students did not hesitate to ask questions to find out more. After which, they were taken on a tour of the Club's facilities and followed by a debrief at the meeting room where they were treated to a nice cold drink.

The students were impressed with the Club's excellent facilities and its mission to provide its members and guests with superior customer service which differentiates the Club from others.

They were very appreciative of Tanah Merah Country Club for giving them the opportunity to learn more about its operations. At the end of the site visit, the students left with an unforgettable experience of Tanah Merah Country Club's approach to Club Management and stirred up their interests to work in the Club industry. ✨

# The Clubhouse Planning Committee Who Serves and What Does it Do

• by William P. McMahon Sr., AIA, OAA  
Architect and Chairman



I cannot say how many times we are asked, "How is the Planning Committee selected?" and "What will this Committee do?" What is the job description?"

The Importance of the Clubhouse Planning Committee cannot be overemphasised when it comes to developing and communicating a successful Clubhouse Improvement Program. Some Boards are tempted and even try to do the clubhouse planning themselves. This is a mistake. The value of having a good, representative Committee of well-respected members and spouses is critical for success.

## WHO IS ON THE COMMITTEE?

A typical Clubhouse Planning Committee should have (8) members/spouses-at-large appointed by the Club President. These eight persons should be good club users from all age and activity groups. They should not be members who are architects, interior designers or contractors. Such technical people will be needed later during construction.

The planning committee should also include (4) Board members (usually the President-elect, Treasurer, House Chairman and Greens Chairman, if a golf club).

The Committee should be a consumer-oriented committee, not a construction committee. The president should also select a capable leader from the twelve person Committee to be its chairman. The last three persons assisting the Clubhouse Planning Committee are ex-officio members consisting of the Club President, General Manager and club planning consultant.

## WHAT DOES THE COMMITTEE DO?

The Committee is appointed to study the existing Clubhouse with the planning consultant, to utilise input from the members (usually from focus groups / membership survey), and to include the club management team in the planning process. The goal is to propose improvements that are needed and wanted by the members. The Committee always needs a clubhouse planning consultation to assist in analysing the existing building(s), to plan alterations/ additions, to sometimes plan totally new buildings, to develop cost analysis, to develop financial plans, and finally to assist in presenting the committee's recommended clubhouse project to the Board and ultimately to all members for clubhouse approval.

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## WHO WHAT & WHERE

Managers on the move, keeping in touch, and much more.

**David Brightling** is handing over the General Manager's post at ONE°15 Marina Club to **Franck Hardy**. David will be moving to the parent company's Corporate Office to work on marina development projects in the region.

**Col (NS) Eugene Cheong** is the new General Manager at Sembawang Country Club.

**Norbert Finger** has left the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club and has returned to Malaysia.

## The Clubhouse Planning Committee Who Serves and What Does it Do

• by William P. McMahon Sr., AIA, OAA  
Architect and Chairman



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The Clubhouse Planning Committee meets with the planning consultant on a monthly basis. The committee members have an initial meeting to develop the architectural space program and the planning criteria for the clubhouse improvements. Subsequent meetings then focus on reviewing clubhouse floor and site plan solution. Ultimately, a final clubhouse Master Plan design is developed along with a recommended initial project that meets all program requirements of design, cost and affordable financing.

### MEMBERSHIP PRESENTATION

The clubhouse planning consultant assist the committee in presenting the project to the Board and ultimately to the members.

The Board approved clubhouse project is put into a PowerPoint/town hall presentation and mail-out booklet for communicating the project to the members. This then allows for a membership vote.

### THE ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

Upon approval of the clubhouse project, the Clubhouse Planning Committee is dissolved, and each member is thanked for his or her effort.

The approved project is then handled

over to a small four or five-person Design and Construction Committee. This committee usually consist of experienced real estate and construction members, building developers, real estate lawyers or contractors. Again, it is wise to avoid members who are architects and interior designers on this implementation committee since they will tend to want to dictate based on their own personal tastes. The chairman of this Committee should have been on the original Clubhouse Planning Committee for continuity reasons.

The Design and Construction Committee is responsible for selecting the final consultants, i.e., architects, engineers, interior designer, kitchen consultant, project manager and contractors. This Committee, along with the General Manager, monitors the project until completion. ✿

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## DIARY

Forthcoming events from around the world for club management professionals.

### 8-13 February 2010

World Conference of Club Management, Club Manager's Association of America, San Diego, California, USA. [www.cmaa.org](http://www.cmaa.org)

### 28 March – 1 April 2010

BMI III – The General Manager / Chief Operating Officer, Club Managers Association of America, Michigan State University

### 18 April 2010

Asian Club Manager's Conference, Raffles Town Club, Singapore

## Final Thoughts

“The opposite of luxury isn't poverty, its vulgarity.” – Coco Chanel

“It's never too late to be what you think you might have been.”  
– George Elliot

“The secret of getting ahead is getting started.” – Mark Twain

“The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.” – Oscar Wilde