

Resolving Problems in Recreational Clubs

Dealing with Partners, Possibles, and Poops

(From the article series: “Empowering Leadership”¹)

By Del Albright

I have finally discovered the biggest problem with trying to keep clubs alive and well. Yup, after all these years as a writer, outdoorsman, and facilitator, I have found the secret to what causes our clubs and organizations to fall apart or at least get rusty. Oh, and if you’re saying to yourself that it’s not your club at issue, then keep reading because I predict that every recreationist in our country will face this issue sooner or later.

Not only will I share with you here the biggest problem we have, but I will also offer some sound solutions to resolving problems within recreational clubs and organizations.

To add some credibility to what I’m about to show you, I can assure you that dozens of recreational leaders have verified my thesis that all clubs have or will have this problem. I have developed and maintained a network of leaders in our sports who communicate intelligently about problems we face and opportunities we have. The consensus is clear. Our biggest problem is that we are people.

I suspect you already knew this and my big revelation was not a surprise. People – we humans – cause our own problems and inherently bring them with us where ever we go. It’s “human nature” as they say. And more big news – we can’t get away from it. We have to deal with it.

The way I see it, we have three types of folks in our clubs; 1) our Partners – home boys, “doods”, friends, think-a-likes, etc. that don’t cause problems because they agree with us for the most part; 2) the “Possibles” – they can swing either way, but right now they’re not very active but they’re also not causing any problems; and 3) the “Poops” who seem to be causing the club to bunch up their knickers and get cranky with each other. It’s the “Poops” we need to focus on.

In stead of writing a book about our basic problems, allow me to summarize what you probably have already figured out by saying:

- It’s human nature to disagree and have conflict
- Some of us are hard-headed and don’t see things other than our own way
- We tend to attract to others who think along familiar lines
- Some personalities just don’t mix
- Cliques develop in groups and leaders emerge naturally
- We could all use some help with our communication skills

So we gather up in our clubs and butt heads, find new things to get cranky about, disagree distastefully, get mad, and some times leave. Leaders burnout after a short period of time, because solving these human nature issues can be time-consuming and energy-draining. We can't afford to have any more leaders burn out; and we certainly would rather have a club that is fun to be part of. Let's look at how to do that.

STEP 1: Find Out. The first thing to do is find out why clubs have problems -- to recognize and accept the fact that we are people and we have shortfalls, as well as personalities. Learn to accept the basic fact that we are not all poured from the same mold. In stead, find ways to understand and make better use of our differences. But that comes from first finding out (identifying) just what causes our club problems.

STEP 2: Focus. Next, focus on the issue or problem, not the personalities. Learn to separate a problem from the person who seems to be causing it. Lay the problem on the table, dissect it and figure out how to put it back together in better shape than when you started. Enlist the help of the person you think is responsible for the issue, if possible. Get them to become part of the solution. But whatever you do, learn to address the issue, not the person or personality. It's not Joe that is causing the club to drift apart; it's something Joe is doing – his behavior. That is what we must focus on – the behavior that needs changing.

STEP 3: Facilitate. Facilitation is a skill every leader or club activist should develop to some level. To facilitate means to make things easier – to lessen the resistance; to smooth the path. In clubs and groups it means finding ways to help people help them selves.

Once you find out what is really the issue, and you focus on that issue, you then begin to facilitate a resolution. In volunteer organizations there is seldom a rank structure (like the military), so we must learn to ease the resistance and smooth the path with facilitative skills and techniques.

Some of those facilitative techniques include increased listening skills; improved communication skills; letting people solve their own problems by helping them see the real problem; laying out options and possibilities in clearer and cleaner terms; and learning to not get mad every time things don't go your way so you can continue to facilitate the growth of your club.

SUMMARY: You can read any number of books on this subject to improve your chances of success. You can sign up for training courses. But whatever you do, recognize that the "Possibles" are just waiting for something to happen to help them decide whether they're going to be on the team, or a problem for the team.

You don't have to worry about your partners; heck, they're with you. Put them to work to help you. The "Poops" will continue to cause problems and perhaps bring down the club until someone does something about it. And there may come a time when you just

have to pack it in and move on, give up and find a better outlet for your interest. But don't give up until you've tried some of these resolutions. The future of our recreation lies in changing the behavior of the "Poops" while keeping our clubs alive and well, as well as recruiting the "Possibles" to our side.

The other lesson here is that none of this will happen on its own. Someone has to do something. Step up. Find out; focus; and facilitate!

(Look for another article soon in this leadership series with more on how to facilitate.)

###

ⁱ "Empowering Leadership"TM by Del Albright, is a series of articles focusing on developing leadership skills in recreational organizations and clubs. Learn more at www.delalbright.com/leadership/.