

16 YEARS OF EDUCATING THE PRIVATE CLUB INDUSTRY  
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# THE BOARDROOM

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# Surveys

## A Tool for Developing an Orientation to Excellence

*By Barry L. Morgan*

**THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO “KEEP IN TOUCH” WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP. ALL CLUBS USE A WIDE VARIETY OF DAILY INTERACTIONS FOR THIS PURPOSE - EXCHANGES THAT ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF CLUB SERVICE.**

While casual encounters with individual members are a critical source of feedback, this input tends to be biased, limiting its value in determining the opinions of the silent majority. And it's the silent majority that pays the bills.

In an industry where all stakeholders need to be oriented toward excellence a far more effective tool to test member sentiment is warranted.

Clubs expend considerable resources monitoring and measuring their financial performance. In some instances, especially if the club sports a positive bottom line, management might also be tempted to rely on these financial results as a means to measure satisfaction.

However, sales and satisfaction do not necessarily equate. Lulled by a lack of red ink, or alternatively faced with the challenges of resolving financial concerns, clubs often devote insufficient time and effort measuring and monitoring member satisfaction. Yet there is nothing more fundamental to the club's long term success.

A club with happy members predictably employs a range of best practices including:

- Understanding and responding to evolving members' needs
- Maintaining strong membership communication
- Ensuring ongoing quality assurance measurement, and
- Developing a high quality dedicated work force.

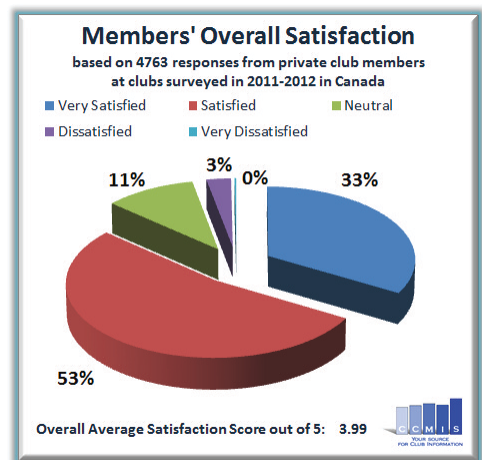
Successful clubs start with happy members and follow through with strategies that include:

- Ensuring consistent execution of the club's strategic plan
- Providing effective governance
- Developing ongoing membership marketing programs
- Demonstrating financial prudence and fiscal responsibility, and
- Providing continuous investment in asset renewal.

Typically, the vocal minority will have comments and suggestions regarding all of these factors and then some. But what does the silent majority think?

Effective surveys provide the means to gauge the opinions of the entire membership. They also offer the method needed to organize this input and put it to practical use.

In the club industry, member satisfaction isn't everything, it's the ONLY thing! Gathering input directly from the source puts you in touch with how the members really feel. An ongoing program to measure members' opinions is vital to the long term sustainable success of the club. Your members' happiness is the key to this achievement and a professionally managed survey program can help create a solid platform for an engaged leadership to build and cultivate an orientation to excellence.



Clubs commonly use two types of surveys. Strategic planning surveys provide results useful in developing the club's long range plans and strategies for future improvements, providing the club's directors with the information needed to plan for long term sustainability.

In general these surveys are best conducted when the membership is satisfied and reasonably assured that the club's operation is well in hand.

The other type is a satisfaction review that measures the members' acceptance of various club services and facilities. These help determine if current programs and activities are meeting members' needs and provide the club's leadership with information they can put to immediate use.

Typically a satisfaction review will highlight operational strengths and weaknesses, and suggest actions that fall squarely within the scope of the management team.

If conducted on an ongoing basis, successive surveys provide an efficient means to open lines of communication with the entire membership, and also provide the basis for measuring staff performance and recognizing achievement.

Online surveys are quick, efficient and relatively inexpensive. The survey software is reasonably intuitive. Information is also widely available on the internet to help guide the survey development process.

Club member surveying is a specialized field and a number of companies are available to assist clubs in conducting effective research. Using a professional service provider helps ensure that the survey is conducted properly, confidentially, and at the appropriate time. As well, an objective provider helps ensure results are properly analyzed and this eliminates suspicion in the community that the survey results might be managed.

When you seek input from members you will usually find that they are eager to respond. A 40 to 60 percent

response rate for an on line membership survey is not unusual. Members want to be heard and they are pleased to be able to offer an opinion without worrying about who might read what they have to say. Over 85 percent of the members we have asked indicate that the ability to provide a confidential response is appreciated.

In our experience, clubs conducting regular reviews typically see improvement in successive years. As they say, "What you can measure you can manage."

Clubs achieving an overall satisfaction level of 4.0 out of 5.0 have fewer operational issues and as a result, less management time needs to be spent dealing with daily anecdotal concerns.

In this case a periodic survey is sufficient to stay abreast of member opinion and move quickly to resolve any developing issues as they arise. In clubs where less than 80 percent of the members are satisfied, a survey provides clear indicators of the issues that need to be resolved.

Regular ongoing surveys also provides the means to measure the club's success in implementing programs of improvement. In addition ongoing surveys remind the members that the club is interested in resolving their issues. There is no better way to gain an advocate.

The survey results are often of great interest to the staff. Your employees long to have their good efforts measured objectively. Like any work force, they need goals to shoot for, and these goals can be quantified through member satisfaction metrics. Staff rewards and recognition can also be based on these measures.

The multiple choice question is the most common question used in a satisfaction review. These allow members to indicate preference and assign a rating to specific services or facilities. These ratings provide an opportunity to compare satisfaction across various demographic groups within your membership.

Open ended questions also play an important role in any membership

review, because members have the opportunity to speak their mind. When members can do so anonymously, they seem to enjoy offering frank and forthright comments.

Sometimes these survey comments can be blunt, and it is important to recognize that each comment made is an individual member sharing their ideas. Often what's in the survey is simply a reiteration of what is already being said privately in the community.

Establishing communication with the silent majority provides a means to enhance services to the entire community. Reliable and quantifiable information provides an empowering focus for the management team and communication of the post survey results keeps members in the loop and helps build support for the ongoing efforts of the managers and staff.

Finally, being able to quickly employ the results of a survey is the key to their effectiveness.

Men and women, juniors and seniors, active and social members all have different needs and expectations. Recognizing different levels of satisfaction within these groups can help point to the initiatives necessary to improve satisfaction.

In the club industry, member satisfaction isn't everything, it's the **ONLY** thing! Gathering input directly from the source puts you in touch with how the members really feel. An ongoing program to measure members' opinions is vital to the long term sustainable success of the club. Your members' happiness is the key to this achievement and a professionally managed survey program can help create a solid platform for an engaged leadership to build and cultivate an orientation to excellence. **BR**

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