

# 10 Trends in Clubs

## Introduction

**A**s we explain to our students, clubs have changed more in the last 10 years than they did in the previous 100 years. While this is perhaps a slight exaggeration, it is close to the truth. For many years, while the economy, legal environment, and demographics were all in their favour, clubs were able to continue managing their organizations as they have always done. Then, as their members grew older (and less active), new tax laws came into play, the economy weakened, and new generations with different needs emerged, clubs either changed of their own accord or were forced to change. When discussing changes in clubs, it is helpful to explore the trends that are occurring.

According to Merriam-Webster, a trend is a “prevailing tendency or inclination.” That is to say, trends are waves on which the industry rides. That said, not every trend is apparent in every club. Nor are trends of equal stature or power. Some trends have taken the club industry by storm while others grow more slowly over a number of years.

It is not only important for students to understand the current trends that are shaping the industry but also to learn how to identify future trends as they occur. With regard to the latter, our advice is to network, read the trade publications (such as *Club Management* magazine), attend conferences and other professional development venues, engage on social media (particularly LinkedIn and other professional networks), visit clubs and talk with managers.

Many of these trends have been discussed in earlier chapters but we will summarize some of the more important ones in this chapter, while providing greater context. We have identified ten trends which bear further examination: demographic changes; casualization; recreation; food and beverage; families; reciprocal agreements; technology; governance; capital projects; and the greening of the industry.

## Changing demographics

**T**he demographic profile of members is changing, particularly with regard to age and gender. This is critical as it, in itself, is driving many of the other changes that are taking place in clubs. Clubs are actually working against societal changes in this area particularly with regard to age. The aging of the population is well documented: populations in much of the world are aging and this has hurt clubs. Aging is particularly acute in most western countries and Japan: the reverse is true in many middle-eastern countries where the age of the population is actually decreasing.

The club industry has historically relied on the 'older' segment of the market which has the time and disposable income necessary to join a club. However, after many years during which clubs did not have to recruit new (and younger) members, clubs found themselves in a position where (1) older members were dying or moving away; (2) the economy further eroded their member base; and (3) younger members were not replacing former members at an adequate rate. For all of these reasons, clubs are now actively recruiting younger members. As they do, clubs have had to adjust their cultures, service offerings, and prices. This has had a salient effect on clubs and has led to many of the other trends discussed below.

We have also discussed the changes (decrease) in discriminatory policies at clubs against people of colour, certain religions and ethnicities. As clubs embrace members of different backgrounds, they will also have to be more sensitive to other cultures and traditions, which will necessarily impact programmes and services.

Finally, women are taking more prominent roles in clubs. In most clubs, women are now equal partners as far as membership privileges go. This has set off, among other things, a re-writing of club bylaws to better accommodate women. While there still is not equal representation on club boards of directors, women are playing more of a role in decision making in clubs.

## Casualization

**W**ith each new generation, comes a change in the level of formality and how various customs and traditions are upheld. Generally speaking, younger generations are driving society to be less formal. With few exceptions, clubs are following the trend of becoming more casual. This trend is also occurring in colleges and universities, restaurants, the workplace, and society at large. But what does this actually mean in clubs? First, it has affected the way people dress in the clubhouse, on tennis courts, golf courses and elsewhere. Clubs are beginning to eliminate (or relax) stringent dress codes that once required members to dress in a certain way. It was not that long ago that formal dining rooms in clubs required

that male members wear a jacket and tie and that women also dressed comparably. Now, it is not uncommon to see members dressed much less formally. Some clubs have gone so far as to allow members to wear jeans (although some are still debating this issue). Some clubs allow jeans but draw the line at tattered or 'distressed' jeans.

Clubs have also relaxed their dress codes on golf courses and tennis courts, although the default is often a collared short and tee shirts are still frowned upon. There may also be restrictions on athletic wear in certain parts of the club, and where (and how) hats may be worn. However, overall, dress codes are not as restrictive as they were a generation ago. This particular trend is seems more apparent in the USA though, as many clubs in Commonwealth countries have maintained more traditional dress codes.

The trends toward casualness also affects the look and feel of the interiors of clubhouses, which have come to more resemble informal living spaces. It also involves relaxing some long-held social traditions, such as how acquaintances address each other. In the end, casualization has affected clubs in many ways, beyond just how people dress.

Even though the discussion above is an accurate portrayal of the changes taking place in clubs, we must take the 'Professor's Prerogative' and share our views on students visiting clubs. Students should always remember that when they visit a club (for a class project, a field trip, or a meeting), they are a guest of the club. Further, on their visits, students are representing their class (or club), their college or university and their professor. In our classes, we always have two rules that we insist students observe: (1) cell phones are to be turned off and out of reach; and (2) students are to dress professionally. We have never been sorry to have these rules – even in cases where the students have been better dressed than our hosts!

## Recreation

**W**e know that time availability, cost and level of interest are all affecting the range of recreational activities in clubs. We have seen that because of the combination of these factors, golf is less popular that it once was – in certain regions and at some clubs. But the trend here is that clubs are looking for new and interesting ways for its members to engage in golf (as well as other activities). At a recent CMAA World Conference, a club with a progressive golf programme was profiled. At that particular club, the golf professionals get out of the office and/or the pro shop and spend the majority of their time giving impromptu lessons to their members. The pros meet and greet golfers at the tee to give advice on technique.