

# Can You Walk the Walk?

By: John M. Brown

We've all heard, "It isn't bragging if you can do it". Can you "do it"... lead by example, get in the trenches, roll up your sleeves and do Club Business 101? When was the last time you actually sold a membership? Could you still do it? Have you ever done it? Are you asking things of your staff you couldn't do yourself?

While we're all surrounded by the ideas and pontificating of others, the best route for business success is for owners and managers to actually "work the business". All the lectures, workshops, conventions and consultants can't

replace a hands-on approach to operating your club. Sure the business is changing, but all the doom and gloom isn't necessary. The best hedge against any business adversity is proficiency, consistency and competency; and the ability to sustain these qualities through the storm.

No one is adept at everything, and yes, if you don't know how to do something, you should get some help. But, don't mistake an idea for execution. Don't confuse theory with action. If you are a manager or owner looking for help, then the following might help you move from "knowing about it" to "knowing it".

1. Are you "above re-

(In your day-to-day club operations battleground)

*Do you need a  
 philosopher-in-the-clouds ...  
 or a soldier-in-the-trenches?*

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proach?" No one really is... but does your staff see you as someone who can do their jobs as well as than they can? Do you follow your own rules and systems or do you take shortcuts simply because *you can*? Do they ever actually see you in action? If they all walked out today, could you answer the phone, check members in and sell memberships all at one time and all day long?

Did you train your staff or did someone else? There's nothing wrong with outside professional training as long as you participate in the training also, and you use it like you're asking the staff to use it.

2. Are you a "back office" manager or are you out front? It's hard to get staff respect, much less demand performance, if you're always behind the scenes totally deferring your business to your staff. Yes, you have to delegate, but try taking a turn on a "walk-in" or a telephone inquiry. Put yourself in the loop. You'll hear what your customers are saying as well as sustain credibility with your staff. When the staff gives you "I can't" or "I couldn't" or "they didn't want to", you can say, "listen, if I can do it any of you can too!"

3. **Inspect - don't expect.** I know you trained them exactly how to do it. I know that's the way it's supposed to be done, but is it actually being done? Two words: verify and validate. Go check... Often. In order to maintain quality, continuity and sustainable sales, you have to ensure those qualities are actually present and recurring day-in and day-out. Don't *think* you know. *Know*. As Yoda said "No! Try Not! Do or do not. There is no 'try'!"

4. **Get out there and Walk the Walk!** Whatever works best for you (either serendipitously or on a scheduled daily basis): get out of your office and walk the walk. Check in some members. Review their screen information. See if it's all correct. Sell a membership, take a telephone inquiry or prospect for some new business. Let the customers, members and staff see that you are with them, not above them. Staff members get very motivated, and learn to respect you when you work side by side with them. Not only can you help them learn from example, but you

can also learn and gain the ability to coach "on the field". Most great professional sports managers and coaches were once players first. And, many were not the best players, but people who developed an understanding of the game from the "ground up".

5. **Be vigilant and persistent on changes you initiate.** Is this new idea or process the "thing of the week" in the staff's minds or do they know you will not relent? It can be difficult. Don't give up! When it comes to implementing positive changes or setting high standards, let the staff know they can't outlast you or wear you down. Many times staffs, just like children, will perform or behave well until you relax on your principles and then go back to doing it their way.

6. **If you don't know how, or can't, then learn how!** There is no shame in admitting you don't know something or admitting you don't have experience in something. There is however a problem with an unwillingness to learn, work at or participate in the business until you can! Nobody knows everything. But are you willing to learn or is it "beneath you"? The successful people I know in this industry (not the ones who say they are, but who *really* are) can walk into any club anywhere and start "working" any job, any title and in any market. The confidence and competence of these people is not only inspiring and infectious, but comforting, in our business environment of constant change. These unaffected and unflappable people remain one of our constants.

7. **Ideas are not action, theory is not execution.** There is a lot of good, and not-so-good advice floating around out there, but the difference between the "wanabees", and the really successful is generally *execution*. How well can you implement? How well can you deliver? And, can you turn this action into measurable, quantifiable results? When you start thinking you have an "original" idea, take a minute and consider that most good ideas are stolen. If you begin thinking you are really original, go type your idea into a search engine. Case closed. That doesn't mean you can't borrow ideas from practically everywhere! Many of them can



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be adapted to your business. But, remember, if it's going to work, most of the time it's because you *made* it work, not because the idea moved the mountain.

8. **There is no substitute for experience!** The actual performing, day-in and day-out of real front line skills will provide you more results than any seminar or guru can offer. Remember, true confidence comes from the immutable feelings and evidence that *you can do it*. Saying you can do it, but not doing it, is ego-centric and simply implies you read it in a book somewhere. Many very important aspects of this business are simply just not taught in any school or seminar. Things have to be "experienced" to be learned. These "experiences" may not always be pleasant or fun. They are lessons never forgotten, and many times they can't be explained to those without the same experiences.

Finally, go and seek out "experiences" and learning opportunities outside of our industry, so you can become increasingly valuable and versatile. Lifelong learning is a popular concept these days, but one rarely practiced. Lifelong learning-by-experience is virtually priceless! Go now and "Walk the Walk". Your customers, members, staff and you will be the better for it!

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