

Concise Club Insights

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Happy Holidays!

It is hard to believe 2025 is coming to a close. As the season of giving continues, this issue is truly a gift to you! It focuses on food and beverage—an area that challenges nearly every club, yet holds the key to an elevated member experience. I hope the insights in this issue (and Ep 03 of *The Notable Exchange* Podcast!) provide helpful insights as you navigate your own F&B complexities.

Wishing you joyous blessings this holiday season,



Jackie Carpenter, MS, CCM
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Introduction



Notable is a printable resource

This publication is designed to be easy to share with management teams and board members whether in print or uploaded to a private board or staff portal. Simply click the button below and ensure the print settings are at 100% scale (avoid "Scale to Fit" settings to maintain the intended layout).

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01

Anticipation over Customization: The New Standard in Club F&B

The private club dining experience has evolved. Customization once defined exceptional service, but today's members expect something more intuitive: anticipation. The best clubs don't just respond to requests—they recognize needs before they're voiced. It's the server who notices a member's pace and adjusts accordingly, the bartender who begins preparing the preferred drink before it's ordered, or the kitchen team that isn't rattled when a familiar "off-menu" request comes through.

Anticipation isn't achieved by stored data points alone—it requires human skill. Training, observation, communication and consistency create the kind of hospitality that feels effortless to the member and intentional behind the scenes. This is an investment. But it pays dividends in trust, loyalty and team retention. As Will Guidara shared in his book, *Unreasonable Hospitality*, the magic happens when teams look for the small, human cues that turn service into a story others want to tell—because true hospitality is built on noticing.

Anticipation also extends to capital planning. Just as clubs prioritize course renovations or pool upgrades, kitchens require the same strategic foresight. According to Carrie Eyler of Boelter Companies, "Investing in high performance equipment like combi or speed ovens isn't just about efficiency—it's about meeting member expectations without compromise and truly being able to do more with less by leveraging innovation."

The best clubs strike a balance between consistency and delight. They deliver consistent excellence while finding ways to thrill members unexpectedly.

- Consistency builds confidence. Members should know what they'll receive—and trust it will be excellent every time.
- Identity distinguishes experience. Clubs that lean into their brand with tasteful logos, signature dishes and rotating specialty items create memorable experiences.
- Surprise and delight. A pop-up tasting in the pro shop, complimentary sunglasses on the patio when the sun is shining bright, custom wool blankets when there's crisp air outside can elevate the ordinary into the extraordinary.

According to *Technomic* (September 2025), the foodservice industry is projected to reach \$1.2 trillion in food and nonalcoholic beverage sales by 2026. In July 2025 *Cognition* reported the top 10% of households now drive 50% of consumption—and those are your members. This is not the time to treat F&B as a support function. It's time to elevate it as a strategic pillar of the member experience.

Clubs that anticipate—not just accommodate—will be the ones that set the benchmark for excellence. (*Listen to Ep. 03 of The Notable Exchange where Carrie Eyler and Jackie Carpenter dig deeper into the private club F&B experience.*)

Resource: Carrie Eyler, [Boelter](#) | CEyler@boelter.com

LISTEN TO EP 03 OF THE NOTABLE EXCHANGE

02

Food and Beverage Realities

In a recent webinar, Chris Barron and Bryan LaBlue of Club Benchmarking shared key insights from their new F&B Whitepaper, which examines how food and beverage operations shape overall club financial performance. Drawing on nearly 15 years of research, they emphasized the importance of avoiding what they call the “F&B Trap”—the belief that an F&B loss signals inefficiency or poor oversight. In reality, this misconception reflects a lack of data-driven understanding of the private club business model.

Club Benchmarking data shows that **financial outcomes in F&B are driven far more by strategic decisions than by operational efficiency**. Key takeaways from the webinar include:

- Clubs subsidized F&B in 2024 at a rate four times higher than in 2010 and twice as high as pre-pandemic levels.
- **Pursuing a breakeven F&B department does not lead to long-term financial strength.**
- Dining minimums reflect an outdated mindset. As expectations for club dining have expanded, minimums are often seen as punitive “taxation.” Clubs without F&B minimums consistently achieve better financial results than those with them.
- Banquet revenue is declining as clubs rely less on banquets and more on capital income and long-term investment.
- More clubs are prioritizing member focused events over external banquets, which often strain the operation due to multiple dining venues running simultaneously, parking and restroom pressures and disruptions to the member experience.
- Just as golf course maintenance requires top-tier buildings and equipment, club kitchens must be equipped with high-quality, well-maintained tools to deliver an exceptional dining experience.
- Golf requires a significantly larger subsidy than F&B, yet it is rarely questioned by boards or committees. While golf may attract members initially, F&B is the amenity every member and family consistently use.

“In a private club, a focus on efficiency ignores a critical factor—the member experience,” Barron concluded. “Clubs are not restaurants, and **F&B is not a profit center. It is an amenity subsidized by membership dues**, just like golf, the pool, tennis and other offerings.”

Resource: Chris Barron [Club Benchmarking](#) | cbarron@clubbenchmarking.com

03

Turning Feedback into Trust

Clubs are feedback rich environments yet far too often, information gathered from member insight falls short of driving meaningful action. Members complete surveys, discussions are held, results are reviewed, and then business as usual returns. When a member offers feedback and never hears back, it signals that their input didn't matter. Over time, that silence does more damage than a single poor experience ever could.

According to Michelle Cocita of Strategic Club Solutions, the problem isn't a lack of input; it's a lack of follow through. Trust isn't built when members offer their opinions; trust is established when those opinions lead to visible progress. Feedback strengthens engagement and loyalty when it is paired with timely, intentional action.

Without a shared process for interpreting and responding to input, feedback often slips through the cracks. Clarity and collaboration (across departments and across leadership) prevent feedback from stagnating and instead turn it into alignment.

According to Cocita, turning feedback into trust begins with a disciplined Feedback-to-Action Cycle: collect intentionally, understand collectively, act promptly, communicate visibly and reassess continuously. "Even small, noticeable improvements (menu tweaks, operational adjustments, or quick facility refreshes) signal responsiveness and build credibility," she explained. Most importantly, communicating back to members completes the loop that many clubs overlook. A simple "You said, we heard, we did" approach reinforces transparency, even when the answer is "not now." Over time, this rhythm strengthens culture, elevates the member experience and boosts retention. "Consistent communication is the bridge between feedback and trust—and trust is the foundation of a thriving club," concluded Cocita.

Resource: Michelle Cocita [Strategic Club Solutions](#) | michelle@strategicclubsolutions.com

04

Onboarding Managers: The Challenge for Clubs

One of the most pressing challenges in private clubs today isn't finding talent—it's developing it. As Lindsay Zubek of the Plum Leadership Group observes, many new managers step into their roles with strong operational knowledge and a genuine desire to succeed. They know the members, the culture and the standards. What they **often lack is preparation for the transition from doing the work to leading others** who do the work. They are trained on systems, policies and standards, but not on the leadership skills that drive team performance.

The result is a predictable strain. While there may be good intentions, clubs are busy hubs of activity so clubs end up paying for a management role that is still in its learning curve, while teams navigate uncertainty and members notice inconsistencies. This transition is common, not unique. A standout server becomes a dining room manager. A trusted golf attendant moves into an assistant professional role. The promotion is earned—but not necessarily supported. **A new role requires a new mindset, new tools and the right kind of support.** Without structure and coaching, clubs risk losing momentum, damaging the culture and, too often, they drive away the very employees they are trying to keep.

“The first 90 days are foundational,” Zubek emphasizes. “That’s when confidence, trust and credibility are established—for the manager and for the team learning how to follow them.” When onboarding is intentional and leadership-focused, new managers step into their roles with clarity. They communicate more effectively and operate more consistently. Teams are better able to align and employees, as well as members, benefit from a more cohesive experience.

Alternatively, waiting to address leadership gaps until problems surface or allowing newly promoted individuals to “figure it out” leads to a reactive cycle of correcting mistakes rather than preventing them. It negatively impacts the culture, turnover and the bottom line.

Leadership onboarding is not extra training; it is the foundation for success. When clubs equip new managers with communication frameworks, coaching practices and clear expectations from the beginning, departments run more smoothly, retention improves and the member experience is enhanced. In a time when talent is hard to find and harder to keep, building **a structured, intentional onboarding experience isn't a luxury. It's a strategic investment**—and one that pays dividends every single day.

Take the free 5-minute leadership and management assessment - [Click Here.](#)

Resource: Lindsay Zubek [Plum Leadership Group](#) | lindsay@plumleadershipgroup.com

DOWNLOAD A NEW MANAGER CHECKLIST

05

F&B Survey Findings Worth Noting

GGA Partners, in collaboration with the National Club Association, recently released the 2025 Club Board Perspectives survey to identify how board members balance satisfaction, purpose and profits in food and beverage. The results reveal how private club boards are reevaluating their F&B strategies to adjust rising costs and evolving member expectations.

Interesting findings from the study are below:

- › Boards report higher satisfaction (81%) with F&B than members typically do, suggesting a perception gap that can shape budget decisions, staffing models and investments in ways that may not align with member priorities.
- › Even clubs that do not have a philosophy of subsidizing food and beverage find challenges in breaking even. Fifty-seven percent of respondents subsidize their F&B departments, 34% are self-sustaining and only 9% generate a profit.
- › The most widely supported strategies for improving efficiency include greater use of technology (63%), reducing operating hours (45%), and offering grab-and-go options (37%).

Resource: [GGA Partners](#)

[READ THE FULL REPORT HERE](#)

Quick Notes

Modern Kitchens, Elevated Experiences

Clubs across the country are investing in modern, elevated kitchen spaces designed to improve flow, efficiency and creativity—key ingredients in strengthening culinary programs and enhancing the member experience. A recent *Club + Resort Business* article highlights several clubs that have completely transformed their operations through strategic kitchen renovations. As year-round usage grows and expectations rise, expanded space, smarter workflows and state-of-the-art equipment with advanced technology are no longer luxuries; they're essential to meeting the demands of today's members.

Resource: [Club + Resort Business](#)

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Time to Consider a Racquets Committee Retreat?

Planning to elevate your racquets department in 2026? Hosting a Racquet Committee Retreat might be a great place to start. Much like a board retreat, this dedicated session equips committee members with the context, education and clarity they need to effectively guide the club's racquets program in the year ahead. "Job descriptions, events, org charts and pay models are all rapidly changing in the world of racquets," said Len Simard USTA Master Professional with Kopplin, Kuebler and Wallace. "How can we expect our members to appropriately guide our programs when there has been so much recent change? A retreat bridges the gap."

Resource: Len Simard, [Kopplin, Kuebler & Wallace](#) | len@kkandw.com

A Year-End Culture Check

Passion Graham, CEO of Passionate Productions, offers an important reminder as 2025 comes to a close: employees don't quit jobs—they quit bosses and bad environments. Your culture is your competitive advantage, not only for retaining people but for attracting them. In a recent issue of *BoardRoom* Magazine, she wrote, "Culture is the unseen current that carries your team toward—or away from—excellence. It's the heartbeat of your organization, shaped by the values you live by, the energy you bring and the standards you uphold. It's not what's written on the wall; it's what is felt in the halls." End the year by reflecting, refocusing and asking the powerful question: *What is it like to work at this club?*

Resource: Passion Graham, [Passionate Productions, LLC](#)