

Membership Satisfaction - What Does Success Really Look Like?



As the evenings draw in and the days get shorter, we find ourselves settling back into the familiar rhythm of autumn. The kids are back in school, the summer buzz is fading, and there's a collective sigh of relief as routines return. However, for many club managers and committees, this season marks the beginning of a busy and often chaotic stretch.

Members are squeezing in the last competitive rounds of the playing season, trying to make the most of dwindling daylight hours. The timesheet pressure is real. Meanwhile, committees return from their summer break—hopefully refreshed—and ready to tackle the to-do lists that were meant to be cleared months ago. Some are preparing for their “retirement,” while others are deep in planning mode for 2026. AGMs, EGMs, year-end audits, and financial wrap-ups all converge into one hectic period.

But amidst all this activity, one question often goes unasked: What does a successful year actually look like?

The Ryder Cup vs. Club Reality

In elite sport, success is often binary. The Ryder Cup, for example, offers a clear outcome: win or lose. The scoreboard tells the story, and the result is definitive. There's a trophy, a celebration, and a legacy etched in history, although this one was pretty close in the end!

But in the world of private clubs, success is far more nuanced. There is no final whistle, no podium finish, and no single metric that defines victory. Clubs don't win or lose in a single moment—they evolve, adapt, and respond to the needs of their members over time. So how do we define success in an environment where the scoreboard is invisible?

The Illusion of “Alright”

Most clubs we speak to offer a familiar response:

“We've done alright.”

“We're roughly on budget—fingers crossed.”

After juggling finances, surviving AGM season, and hoping for a subscription increase that covers the essentials (or at least what members will tolerate), it's easy to feel like you've made it through. But is that really success?

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Redefining Success: It's About the Experience

At Club Benchmarking EMEA, we've long advocated for a shift in focus—from survival to satisfaction. The membership experience, and in many cases the visitor experience, should be at the heart of how clubs measure success. After all, they're the reason we're here.

So how do you know if you've delivered a great experience?

You ask.

- What did our members and visitors think?
- What did we do well?
- Where can we improve?

With an average of 900 members in UK and Irish clubs, it's nearly impossible to gather meaningful feedback by chatting at the bar or standing on the first tee. While many GMs feel they know their membership, anecdotal feedback from a vocal minority can skew the narrative.

Stop Running the Club for the 10%

Every club has that 10%—the ones who would still complain even if everything were free. Too often, decisions are made to appease this group, simply because they're the loudest.

But what about the other 90%?

The happy members. The ones who quietly enjoy the club, support its direction, and want to see it thrive. Imagine making decisions based on their views—not just the ones who shout the loudest.

This is where membership satisfaction surveys become essential. They help clubs:

- Understand the full spectrum of member sentiment
- Identify areas for improvement
- Make informed decisions for the future
- Develop and support staff with clear feedback

Sometimes, it feels easier not to ask. Or to assume you already know. But that opens the door for others to shape the story—often inaccurately.

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Data-Driven Success

Having reliable, consistent feedback each year enables clubs to:

- Learn and improve
- Anticipate member needs
- Build a stronger, more responsive team
- Set clear goals for the year ahead

It also helps boards and committees move beyond anecdote and assumption, toward evidence-based leadership. When you know what members value, you can invest wisely, communicate clearly, and lead confidently.

Final Thoughts

So, What Does Success Really Look Like?

Success isn't just surviving another year. It's not just balancing the books or avoiding conflict. True success is delivering a great experience—consistently, inclusively, and intentionally. So as you prepare for AGMs, budgets, and planning for 2026, take a moment to ask:

- Did we deliver a great experience this year?
- Are we making decisions for the majority—or just the minority?

Because in the end, success in clubs isn't defined by a scoreboard. It's defined by the collective experience of your members—and the legacy you're building for the future.

To learn more please [Click Here](#) for our brochure or contact us on the details below.



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