

Case Study

**What Golf Clubs Can Learn from the
Team New Zealand Experience**

July 2017



Introduction

Not too long ago Team New Zealand were looking to close their doors and the dream of bringing the America's Cup back to New Zealand seemed over. Today the cup is housed in Auckland, and we are looking forward to the defence in 4 years time.

Looking back at where Team New Zealand were, and what they have achieved can teach those running golf clubs how to move from a position of weakness into a position of strength.



"Out of San Francisco we had a pretty brutal debrief. We came up with 20 points. They were pretty brutal. That really set up our road map"

Grant Dalton

"Sitting in the lunch room looking around and thinking I am the sailing team. That was brutal"

Glenn Ashby

Team New Zealand had the Champagne on ice and were all prepared to celebrate in San Francisco in 2013. The premature preparations left the country stunned, and the challenge fell one race short of achieving its goal. After coming back to New Zealand, the recriminations started. The team sat down and started an intensive debrief. If another challenge was going to be launched they needed to know what went wrong and where they stood.

Many people charged with running golf clubs know the club is not where they want and need to be. However, these same clubs tend to take steps on looking at the future without understanding where the club stands now. By looking at all aspects of the club a true view of the club will become clear. The insight into the club would include financial, governance, participation, and how the club fits into the community issues. As Grant Dalton laid out, this is not a fun process, but it is needed to set the future of the club.

"We knew we couldn't outspend them... we had to out think them"

Grant Dalton

"Throw the ball away as far as you can and run after it really hard"

Glenn Ashby

After the review, it became apparent to Team New Zealand that they did not have the money to combat the other challengers and defender that they would end up facing. Realising the financial weakness led them to finding other ways around the problem. They had to out think them. This they did and how effective it was! When you discover a weakness you can start finding ways around them. Money was always going to be an issue, especially with the fallout from the review.

Once the review process was complete then a philosophy of being open to anything and everything was implemented. The no restriction policy enabled those involved to come up with ideas that other design groups would have thrown out because it wasn't the way things were done. The fresh thinking meant that new ways of solving old problems gave Team New Zealand a distinct edge. Just because things have always been one way does not mean that it is the most productive or right way. Any of the other syndicates could have come up with pedal power or an "X-Box" controller system, but they didn't. Golf Clubs should not be afraid to look at the way it conducts itself and question why we are doing things this way? By looking at your club intensely you will find your weaknesses, but then you can start working on the clubs 'out thinking them' campaign. People running clubs should not let current thinking restrict the clubs potential.

"Investing in knowing we had to be different, and we had to hone the right people who could think differently and know what they were doing"

Grant Dalton

"It's the people we work with"

Glenn Ashby - when being asked why he stayed with Team New Zealand when he could have gone to another team for more money.

"We've got a great bunch of guys on board with Glenn and Blair, so many people who have won Olympic medals and performed to such high levels throughout their careers, have all brought their skills to the table. The management just let us deal with the job at hand."

Peter Burling

Team New Zealand had to make many tough decisions regarding personnel once the 2013 campaign finished. The first people they decided they needed were the design team. They were the people who were going to take the vision thinking outside the box and come up with a boat that they felt would win them the cup. Because of the new way the boat was going to be configured, a number of the previous crew were no longer necessary. As Glenn Ashby noted when looking back on the situation "Change isn't easy and smooth." It is important to have the correct people in positions that their talents are harnessed properly.

Making decisions on current staff, board, or committee members is difficult, and can get very emotional. It is crucial you have the right people in positions that their talents can be best harnessed. The culture in Team New Zealand meant that incredibly talented people were able to be retained by the team for a lot less than what other teams were willing to pay. Having the correct culture within the club will make it easier to bring highly talented people to your golf club and they will contribute and stay engaged if the culture aligns with their beliefs.

"We were by ourselves back in New Zealand just heads down working away quietly at what we thought we could possibly achieve from a sailing perspective. I haven't done any sort of sailing in my career without hanging onto any sort of rope or tiller. To be controlling the gymb and wing with an X Box type controller definitely takes a bit more than a couple of days to get used to. You have to teach yourself new skills, you have to look outside the box"

Glenn Ashby

"It's about catching opportunities"

Matteo De Nora

Since Team New Zealand committed to a development programme that had not been conducted before on these types of boats, then those sailing them needed to learn a new set of skills. Winners of Olympic medals in cycling had to learn about sailing, while the sailors had to learn about the technology that was on board the boat. Up until the last race the team were talking about developing and learning more about the package that they had on the water.

Continual development and learning is crucial within any organisation to create ongoing opportunities to develop and excel. Within the golf club frame work there are many options for continual learning available, and many of them are free. There are resources like the Governance 101 series on the Sport NZ website, as well as the Club Capability Managers from New Zealand Golf. The Club Capability Managers are specialising in the four areas where New Zealand Golf feels there is a need for knowledge. These areas are Club Leadership, Financial Strength, Membership and Participation, and Delivering High Quality Experiences. They are more than willing to help with creating further opportunities for clubs to develop.

"I've had to do a bit of planning in the background"

Grant Dalton - talking about organising for Team New Zealand to come home.

"We know we want to go back to the future. We have several weeks to concentrate on what we want to do. We will discuss this with the team, technicians, challengers, and everybody will be part of the decision"

Matteo De Nora

While Team New Zealand did not want to get too far ahead of themselves, they had to be aware of what would happen if they won, or lost in the cup final. The process does not stop just because the goal looks like it will be reached. Clubs would be wanting to keep the highly skilled people that have been on the project. Recognition of their work will go a long way to keeping them within the club for the next venture that will come up. Maybe it will be a major project, or a period of consolidation after the completion of the current project, either way the plan and path needs to be in place so there isn't a stop to the development of the club or the people involved.

Conclusion

Team New Zealand's victory in the Americas Cup took a different path that proved to be successful. By understanding where Team New Zealand stood after 2013 they were able to work out a path forward. They understood what went wrong and made some very tough decisions, especially around who they were going to keep on the team. Realising they had a major weakness when it came to funding meant they were able to focus on what they could do and what they could control. Many golf clubs today are struggling with

funding, but thinking outside the box and being different in their attitude can result in turning the club around and being successful. Also remember that red socks work as well!

