

CEO for the Canadian Society of Club Managers, and Jeff Calderwood, the CEO of the National Golf Course Owners Association of Canada, took on added responsibility as Executive Director of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association.

As each new CEO or executive director settles into their respectful roles, I had the opportunity to interview both Applebaum and Thistle. Both were pleasant and very open to new ideas, and most importantly, both wanted to take time to listen and learn from their members and industry executives. They are well aware of the enormous challenges ahead, but appear ready for the tasks.

Each CEO can't make intelligent investments within their organization unless they understand how the whole industry and economy is changing. They need to understand that change in the industry may seem obvious, but such knowledge is not always easy to come by. Associations and companies misread clues and arrive at false conclusions all the time. A number of years ago Golf Canada lost over five million dollars with three failed membership programs. Let's hope they have learned their lesson.

Each association is different but at the same time all have similar challenges. First, financial: find ways to increase revenue, manage costs and most importantly, stay in business. Secondly: servicing membership to ensure each member sees value and a direct return on their investment in their association membership.

We have all heard golfers and owners/general managers at golf clubs say there is no value in a Golf Canada membership anymore. When it comes time to pay annual dues, golf professionals, owners and superintendents always question the value of their association membership. To add to the problem, many belong to more than one association!

All our golf associations need to embrace change and make it happen. Keith Pelley, the Canadian-born chief executive of the PGA European tour, has seen the writing on the wall, and has made appealing to a new generation a big priority.

In an interview with the BBC this summer, he said the tour is looking to include a six-hole format with a shot clock and music at some events.

"If you are not prepared to change, you are not prepared to be innovative," Pelley said. "If you are not prepared to take chances, then I do believe that the sport will fall behind."

There are many dissenters within the golf industry and golf's reform movement must convince an old guard that likes golf the old-fashioned way: hard, stuffy and exclusive. Many of these types currently sit on golf associations' board of directors, and are the people the new management teams must try to change.

Out of all the golf associations, I believe Golf Canada probably has the most challenges. They have lost considerable sums of money for many years, membership is declining and they have high overhead and expenses. Running tour events is not the same as in past years and their membership program needs to really have value.

Seriously, the majority of private club members really don't care about their membership as their annual due appears on one line of a monthly statement. However, to grow the association numbers, Golf Canada has to attract the majority of golfers who are public players. Any membership program will have to be so attractive that it is a "no-brainer" for a public player and have sufficient incentives included.

For PGA Canada, Kevin Thistle who loves challenges, has inherited a few with this association. First, the image and role of the golf professional has been tarnished over the years and this must change. Zone relationships must improve so national and regional zones are working together and not against each other. And last but not least, the issue of apathy within the membership.

When you are a member of an association, you need to get involved and get excited about being a member, and the association must ensure members have a vested interest. I know first-hand, the zones have a hard time getting members out to support the various programs, buying shows, and educational seminars, and even attend the annual AGMs. Not only does the association have to make changes, improve communications, develop a marketing plan etc., members also have to change their attitude and start taking an interest and be proud to be a member of PGA Canada and zones.

For the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association, they have been without an executive director for some time and some in the industry speculate that it is due to financial concerns.

This fall it was announced Jeff Calderwood, the CEO of the National Golf Course Owners Association, would take on the added role of executive director of this association. Reaction to this announcement is mixed. We have received a number of calls and spoken with people during our recent

Golf Industry Expo show and it appears not all superintendents are happy with this appointment.

One superintendent said: "His taking the position to head both organizations is a clear conflict of interest and really stems from the CGSA having no ability to support the structure they created out of a desire of self-importance."

Another stated: "Many of us report to the golf course owner and Calderwood works for them. How much support are we really going to have with this set-up?"

Finally, a few believe Calderwood is just going to leverage the golf course superintendents with programs that benefit the owners.

Unlike the other golf associations, there are a few other turf associations in Canada that are open to memberships for superintendents. It will be interesting to see how the current membership in the CGSA reacts and if the NGCOA will be able to show value and support.

Looking forward 20 years, the passing of the baby boomers will pose a serious challenge to the sport's vitality. To keep it healthy, golf needs to think outside the box and react to the changing way society views our game. All the governing bodies must provide strong leadership, value for each member, and most importantly, members must support their association so that whatever changes occur, we all face them together in the years ahead.