

TANDEM CLUB PARTNERS

PERSPECTIVE

Red Flag Rhetoric

The phrase “perception is reality” has echoed up and down the hallways of many clubs and has even slyly infiltrated continuing education sessions at conferences in a variety of industries, including the industry of club management. This phrase was begat from the early 2000s topic of personal brand management, which is something every professional in any sort of public or semi-public position, has been doing for years; essentially managing what others think of them. However, this phrase to simply show that we need some degree of personal public relations has worked its way into a verbal crutch for the faint of heart to pull out when they can’t think of anything else to say in the face of conflict or battling untruths.

Leaders that routinely use the phrase “perception is reality”, and I’ve known one or two, are leaders of which to be wary. Why? Those that choose perception over fact are simply not deserving to be in positions of leadership that make decisions that impact people...plain and simple. Yes, we all want to be perceived in a certain way, but at the end of the day, our duty as leaders making decisions that impact livelihoods of employees or members’ financial investment in their club or community through initiation fees and real estate purchases should be to do so based on facts and not perception. Leaders leaning on “perception is reality” do so out of fear of standing up to those that are emotional and erratic. Not to be too harsh, but saying “perception is reality” is a symptom of being afraid of conflict, uneducated on the topic at hand or just too lazy to put in the time to defend a position in a calm and knowledgeable manner. You can perceive a cactus to be a rock, but that does not make it so...the cactus is a cactus.

Fact-based governance is essential to a club’s success and fact-based governance cannot be executed amidst leaders that truly believe perception trumps all. Surveys are incredible tools to gauge member thoughts, opinions and perceptions and can be presented in a data-centric manner. However, if members perceive that the board is not carefully monitoring the Club’s business affairs appropriately, as an example, this is a perception issue that is most likely a symptom of a lack of data-driven communication. However, it does not mean their perception is reality. It simply means more communication with supporting data is needed and that a long-term communication plan is called for.

Careful not to lean on, or even use at all, the phrase “perception is reality”, for perception can change with wind direction, while facts and data drive decisions and support actions.