

Committee Restructure Restores Volunteer Enthusiasm

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Three years ago, Coogee Beach Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) decided to completely restructure the way their club was run.

They cut three positions from the board, introduced an immediate past president mentoring program and created role profiles for each job within the Club.

The end goal was to avoid volunteer burnout, engage their rapidly growing member base and maximise the potential of their new Integrated Community Facility.

Coogee Beach SLSC President Nick Neal drove the change, recognising an opportunity to avoid the pitfalls of traditional Club Management Structure and restore the solid foundations the Club was built upon.

"I could see where the club was going, and they needed someone who could sit back with perspective and help create a strategic approach for bringing it into the future successfully," he said.

Prior to the restructure, the Club had a problem with distribution of responsibilities. Volunteers in senior management roles were getting discouraged, losing enthusiasm and burning out quickly.

The main problems arose from a sudden increase in the Club's membership base which increased pressure on Committee members.

Initially the Club tried creating new positions on the board each time a new job needed to be done.

"The board grew to 13 people with the directors still trying to run everything in the club by themselves," said Nick.

"People were doing odd jobs all over the place, it just didn't work."

Instead, Coogee Beach SLSC split all Club roles into either 'wet' or 'dry' sides of the business.

'Wet' being beach operations and 'dry' being club operations.

Each side of the business has a Vice President (VP), three Directors under each VP and a team of officers under each Director, totalling over 60 committee roles.

While 60 may seem like too many, it is important to remember that Coogee Beach SLSC has a membership base of over 1,200 and requires roles like age-group managers, competitions coordinators, lifesaving captains and training officers in addition to normal club management.

"The intent was still to have a management committee at a board level, but also to have each director have a sub-committee of their own working on issues in their specific departments before it goes to the relevant committee meeting," said Nick.

"Once issues have already been worked through by sub-committees, they can go to the Board meeting for a final decision, or the sub-committees can resolve it on their own.

"The whole restructure is really about finding out what the members want, and then having those ideas and criticisms go through each level all the way to the top."

Nick also developed the idea of nominating members with relevant skillsets and giving them specific responsibilities, instead of filling positions as they came up.

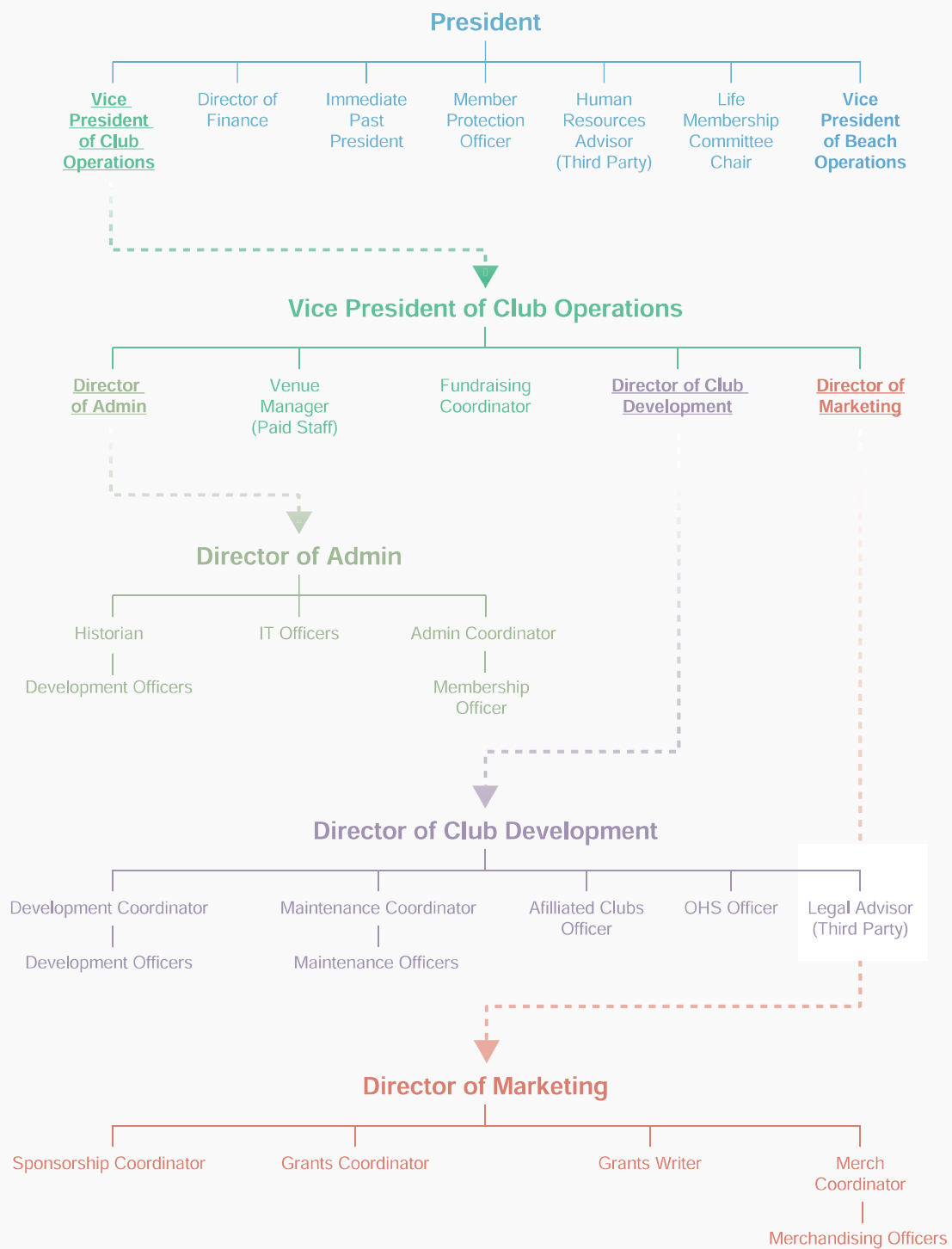
"We looked at what each person did for us at the club and then broke down their role into its core elements and said right, that's what you're responsible for," said Nick.

"It took us nearly two years to get the role profiles fully developed to a standard we were happy with, and we worked with the people in those jobs to set fair expectations.

"By simplifying and defining leadership roles, we reduced pressure on our volunteers and also the conflict that arose from leaders with different goals for the Club's future."

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Coogee Beach Surf Life Saving Club





At the beginning of the restructure, Coogee Beach SLSC's Board still met monthly. Three years on, they meet quarterly.

"Naturally there are some things that need Board endorsement, like finance and sponsorships, but the Club has really got it down now so that the sub-committees can make the decisions themselves without waiting for approval at the board level," said Nick.

The restructure has also been beneficial to the Club Culture by breaking down the stigma between the board and members, and in opening up opportunities to utilise their Integrated Community Facility.

"The reorganisation was also about breaking down those communication barriers and cliquey social groups that tend to form when the same senior club members make the decision for years at a time," said Nick.

"It happens in every club, but you need to have your management team be approachable, open minded and adaptable to change.

"We are a club, but we are really trying to be more of a community hub that represents the common goal of building better lives."

In Nick's view, the success of an organisational restructure depends on:

1. Having a clear vision for your club's future, and setting and meeting goals
2. Getting the right people in the role
3. Giving volunteers a clear role profile with set expectations and boundaries
4. Creating open lines of communication all the way up the chain
5. Not expecting volunteers to give you more hours than they can manage
6. Taking feedback and using it to improve upon current operations
7. Becoming inclusive of your community
8. Providing members with conflict resolution strategies

While overall the restructure has been extremely successful, Nick admits there are still a few teething problems.

"People are still learning to let go and just steer the ship in the right direction," he said.

"It's something that takes time.

"The best thing that's come out of it is that it's not a burden now to take on a role and be expected to do everything yourself. There's a support network and sub-committees to help you sort everything out."