

## VIEWPOINT

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# Has the Lady Captain's ROLE LOST ITS HALO?

It was once such an honour to even be asked by your golf club to be the figurehead of the ladies' section, but in these modern times, it appears interest in the job is waning

**L**ast month I attended the AGM of the ladies' section at my home club, West Essex, a meeting which traditionally involves the official handover to the new Lady Captain and her committee.

One by one, the Lady Captain and new members of the committee were proposed and seconded, but then silence fell because there was no Lady Vice Captain. Of course, this wasn't a shock as our new Lady Captain had gone through every name in the golf club diary, spending the last few months almost pleading with some lady members to seriously consider taking on the role.

Every golf club is different; some will have a waiting list as long as your arm of women who are itching to hold the reigns of officialdom, but I suspect many are more likely to be in the same position as West Essex or having to drag previous Lady Captains out of the woodwork and recycle them, and in some cases, two or three times over. Oh how times have changed. It used to be such an honour just to be asked, yet now, and in growing numbers, the common response appears to be: "Thanks, but no thanks."

If traditional private members' clubs want to continue to run their ladies' section in the same way, finding a new Lady Captain year after year is likely to be an ongoing problem. Nowadays, life offers too much away from the golf club for most women of any age to have the time, commitment or energy to support and serve as Lady Captain on a voluntary basis, especially if they are expected to lead by example. Who needs that extra stress and expense? As one former Lady Captain explained, "One minute you are just a member and the next minute people think you should know the answer to everything!"

However, let's not forget that women have a lot to offer golf clubs. They might not have the same numbers as men but some now sit on club councils, are Club Captains and Sue Ford is at least one woman that I'm aware of who is the President at Sand Martins Golf Club in Wokingham, Berkshire. This shows the great divide is narrowing, and if ladies' committees start to disband and all sections' affairs come under one united umbrella, is that not such a bad thing, providing women retain fair representation?

In the meantime, if your ladies' section is dwindling and you have to coerce members to do jobs, then bear in mind all the social changes and consider running your section differently so an involvement for any member is a more attractive proposition, rather than saying: "We've always done it like that," and sticking with it. Women often demonstrate a lack of willingness to change, but beware - if you continue to do the same thing, expect the same results!

One forward-thinking golf club that wasn't frightened of change and seized the opportunity to capitalise on the growing number of working women golfers is Easthampstead Ladies, an independent club which plays at the Downshire golf course in Berkshire. Out of 44 lady members, 25 play regularly and most are businesswomen.

Over a gradual period of time, the main competition day including the 'big days' and club championship was moved from a Thursday to the weekend and Thursdays have since become the alternate playing day.

Ishbel Thomson, Treasurer at Easthampstead Ladies said: "There was, of course, reluctance at first from some established members, but with foresight the change was accepted."

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Admittedly, this club has a fairly small section to worry about, but it was the right move at the right time for the Berkshire club as Ishbel confirmed: "The section is continuing to grow, the majority of new members are working ladies and the good news is that we have five players with a handicap of 10 or below."

Easthampstead Ladies has also set an example of the scope of attracting working women to either sit on committee, or become Lady Captain, a post that has been successfully held there by a different working woman for the last six years. More importantly, this set-up dispels any expectation that you have to be around all the time.

In the case of my club West Essex, just a few days after our AGM, one member decided to step up to the plate to become Lady Vice Captain. I just hope she will have somebody to support her in a year's time. **W&G**