

The Elephant in the Room

In the “Making Bridge More Welcoming” session at the SCBA Chairman’s Consultation in November 2019, on a show of hands in the group, every person raised their hand when asked if there was a grumpy member at their club. Such people are stopping people from joining clubs, losing existing members and changing behaviours of existing members (for example, the writer always plays N/S in one club to avoid one unpleasant player).

One participant asked the million dollar question about how clubs should deal with such members. A few clubs had suspended such people and a smaller number had rescinded memberships.

There are the following suggested approaches:

1. Directors state at the beginning of their sessions that bad behaviour will not be condoned, referring to the above code of conduct.
2. Directors tell players that they (director) should be called if there is any bad behaviour. The default position should be that if someone complains about behaviour, that complaint is valid and the person subject to the complaint needs to adjust their behaviour. The complaint should be logged in a “complaints log”.
3. The complaints log should be reviewed regularly by the committee and any themes dealt with; escalating from warning (verbal/written) to suspension to rescission of membership.
4. It appears that all clubs know who the offenders are but accept their behaviour. That acceptance is a huge deterrent to new and potential members from joining the club.
5. Committees should ask themselves the question: is retaining one grumpy member worth the cost of losing multiple potential or existing members?
6. The “Pastoral Carer” should add to the complaints log the names of individuals cited for the reason for reduced/zero attendance by existing members.
7. Clubs should consider their constitutions and rules about how complaints are dealt with and disciplinary process for bad behaviour. One club requires 10 complaints for a disciplinary – which makes it almost impossible for there to be a complaint – people would rather play elsewhere.

To have further items added to this list, please email the editor, by clicking [here](#).