



# BOWL • • PINION

by Jim Goodwin

The editorial opinions expressed here are offered to provoke thought on important and sometimes controversial or provocative issues.

Agree or disagree, we'd like to hear from you:

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## WHO'S THE CUSTOMER?

**In Orlando next month, USBC should adopt a pro-business mindset for success**

Last month, I used this space to express the opinion that it might be a mistake for the United States Bowling Congress to re-start the practice of rejecting honor scores, even if it's under the premise of "maintaining integrity" under the banner of 'Sport Bowling'.

In that op-ed, I talked about a youth bowler who was denied approval of a 299 and 300 game in a certified Sport Bowling league because the rules office alleged that the proprietor failed to apply proper oiling patterns on the lane when the scores were bowled.

I spoke with that bowling center owner a few days ago, and he told me he plans to challenge the ruling through possible legal action. All he wants is the details of the decision-making process and indisputable proof from USBC that he alone was at fault and that he violated the rules. All the bowler wants is her award and recognition for her achievement.

In examining the facts of that case, I suggested that the new USBC should examine their operating procedures and decide who their customer is. Is USBC's primary customer the USBC member, or the bowling center owner, manager and employees?

A good friend challenged my premise that USBC would be better served by thinking of the bowling center owner or manager as its primary customer. He may have been simply testing my resolve, but his question caused me to give this is-

sue some second thoughts:

### Who owns the playground?

Bowling is a game, and the game is played in venues called bowling centers. Much of 'organized' bowling, such as leagues and tournaments, is governed by USBC - not owned, governed. Can the game be played without USBC? Of course, it's called 'open play'. Can USBC operate its membership club without bowling centers? Absolutely not.

Who needs who more? Bowling center owners and managers need USBC and its network of local volunteers to oversee what is now less than 50% of their business, the league and tournament customer. USBC needs bowling centers and volunteers who are customers of those centers to conduct 100% of their certified league business.

### How does McDonalds do it?

Think of it this way - let's say you are the CEO of McDonalds. How do you serve the person who eats your hamburgers? The simply answer is by taking care of the people who own and manage store franchises, who in turn serve the customer. McDonalds advertises its product extensively, provides extensive training and benefits for its employees, and creates a culture of service that in turn creates customer satisfaction and retention. It's a process that is not difficult to understand, and it is standard practice in thousands of successful companies.

Southwest Airlines is another good example. In this post 9-11 world where airlines are struggling to survive, Southwest is still turning a profit, just like

they have every year since they started flying in 1971. Why? Because they have created a culture of success centered around their employees. Southwest hires good people, trains them extensively, relies on them, and allows them to serve the customer.

This is not brain surgery, and with a little focus, effort, and resolve, USBC can do what other organizations have done to find success. A governing body doesn't have to act like a government bureaucracy.

From a couple of brief conversations and from what I've read about USBC President Mike Carroll, he is very 'pro-business', and I believe he knows that the attitudes and procedures at bowling headquarters must change for USBC to become successful. He has said as much many times.

Many changes have already been implemented, but it will take more than just procedural modifications. They must create a 'culture' of success, and as Carroll and CEO Roger Dalkin have already stated, it must include developing a good relationship with bowling center owners, managers and employees, and their volunteers. USBC should think of these centers as the 'stores' that sell their product and service, just like McDonald's stores sell hamburgers and service.

### Concerns

In the past, the culture that existed in Greendale was often adversarial with bowling centers, which made no sense. These people are their sales representatives! If they can find a way to make their volunteers

and bowling center owners, managers and employees believe in their product, the result will be increased sales and increased membership for USBC. A concern is that many of the people responsible for the 'bad culture' of the past are now responsible to create a 'good culture'. It's a lot easier to create a new mindset than it is to change one that has existed for years, or even decades.

Another concern is that USBC has stated that increasing membership is not a goal. How can a membership organization that has lost almost 70% of its membership in the past 25 years not have the goal to increase it? I think what they are saying is that if they improve their product and service, membership will eventually increase on its own, but just because you haven't achieved the goal of getting more members, or at least stopped losing them, doesn't mean you drop the goal.

When USBC conducts its first annual meeting next month in Orlando, I hope they will make it crystal clear to their employees and volunteers that USBC is a **business**, and that bowling centers and the local volunteers are the customers; and what businesses must do to be successful is find new and better ways to please the customer. If they can do that, then USBC members, who are customers of those bowling centers, will buy their product, and bowling will be, as we say here in Texas, 'back in the saddle again'.

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