

Q How do you find the right interim GM and ensure his or her success?

Filling a management gap can be a time of high anxiety for membership and particularly for staff. There is uncertainty around what is happening and how it will affect them, their roles and sustainability. When considering an interim general manager, the board must decide if this short-term placement will outweigh the disruption that someone could create within the organization.

Interim general managers may include semi-retired GMs who periodically choose to tackle such a post for two to three months or professional managers who are in between opportunities. The best executive search firms will understand and substantiate why these individuals are available.

From the onset, the club and board need to understand the value, if any, of this short-term hire. Are there areas that might under-perform due to lack of control? Are there quality control assurance systems in place that might slip? What field intelligence is being lost? Are there unique circumstances that require attention?

The answers to these questions need to be in the context of whether the “liability” in these areas is high. For example, if a club has a high performing management team or is closed for the season, is there any value in bringing in an interim GM?

One of the most valuable aspects of having an interim GM, for both the board and the consultant, is having eyes and ears on the ground during the transition.

The astute board or consultant might decide not to place an interim manager to see who internally rises to the occasion or who fumbles the ball. Who disconnects from their goals and objective? Who stumbles? Who reaches out? Who makes an impact? Is there a staff member who rises as a leader who isn't in a leadership position? These are very powerful insights to learn about your organization and at no cost.

If the board feels an interim general manager is necessary, it must decide if this role will be a “custodian” or a “change agent.” A custodian might be the right fit if you need someone to be the face of the club to both the membership and the staff. Their primary function is to report to the board on the state of the club and simply “steady the rudder.” On the other hand, the board might want a change agent to make any necessary and often times, difficult changes that are required and sustainable. Situationally, the interim GM can go into an organization and



make changes that may be damaging for a long-term placement—realignment of staff, changing tough policies, or terminating the “sacred cow” that really needed to go. This can benefit the new GM who will not have to start their tenure making unfavorable though necessary changes.

Once an interim GM is in place, they must be given clear direction and objectives. There should be weekly and formal lines of reporting that can keep both the consulting firm and the board informed. This is important to ensure that the board is compliant with their fiduciary responsibilities and it empowers the consulting firm to develop a strong pool of talent based on the interim GM's observations.

It is also important to note that short-term placement searches can be more difficult because of the urgency to fill the role and most candidates are looking for permanent positions. The interim manager might only be a short-term solution, but raise his or her hand for the permanent role. Boards and committees wrongfully may default to hiring this individual to expedite filling this gap in leadership. The board owes a comprehensive search process to identify the best talent for their membership available.



Dan Denehy is president of DENEHY Club Thinking Partners, an executive search and management-consulting firm that has positively influenced the member/guest experience at more than 200 clubs and resorts on more than 400 projects. He can be reached at dan@denehyctp.com or learn more at www.denehyctp.com.

