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The Hidden Opportunity in Being Overlooked: What A-Level Talent Can Teach Us About Leadership in Clubs

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Some of the most valuable leadership lessons don't come from workshops or certifications. They emerge from real-life conversations — the candid, unfiltered exchanges you only get with professionals who've been in the trenches.

I recall one such moment during a CMAA World Conference roundtable years ago. Around the table sat GMs, assistant managers, and seasoned executives, openly discussing the challenges of career advancement.

One rising club professional shared his story. For months, he had gone above and beyond: building rapport with members, mentoring teammates, and stepping in wherever needed. When a leadership role opened at his club, he thought he'd earned a chance. But the position went to an outside hire — someone with an impressive résumé but little knowledge of the club's culture or daily dynamics.



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It was a disappointment. Yet what followed was one of the most compelling frameworks for understanding leadership potential I've ever heard.

A veteran GM explained that professionals in any organization often fall into three categories:

- **C-level performers** meet minimum expectations. They don't seek advancement and aren't typically considered for it.
- **B-level performers** often ascend to management roles but lead from a place of control and insecurity. They tend to surround themselves with people who won't challenge them, which stifles innovation and growth.
- **A-level performers** stand apart. They lift others, anticipate needs, collaborate generously, and consistently deliver results. They're not just prepared to lead — they're capable of transforming organizations.



Here's the irony: A-level performers are not always promoted first. But in time, their value becomes impossible to overlook. Clubs that recognize and invest in these individuals position themselves for long-term success.

For Candidates:

If you're an emerging leader, don't let a temporary setback discourage you. Stay focused. Keep showing up, stay curious, and find mentors who will challenge and support your growth. The right opportunity — and the right club — is likely closer than you think.

For Club Leaders and Boards:

If you're in a position to influence hiring and promotions, be the leader who recognizes and nurtures talent. Surround yourself with people who challenge your thinking. Promote those who care deeply and perform consistently. Your club will thrive, and your legacy will speak for itself.

At DENEHY Club Thinking Partners, we help clubs identify and attract A-level talent while also coaching rising professionals to step confidently into leadership.

We're not just a search and consulting firm. We're your thinking partners.

