

# WHEN GENERAL MANAGERS STRUGGLE: WHAT HIGH-PERFORMING BOARDS DO FIRST

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Every year, as budgets and priorities take shape, some Boards notice a familiar concern. The General Manager is struggling but not failing. Not in crisis, but losing momentum. Communication slows. Decisions feel reactive. Staff morale shifts. The organization starts to drift.

What happens next shapes the club's long-term stability and culture.

Start With Board Alignment, Not GM Correction

When performance weakens, Boards often rush to restate the GM's objectives. The intention is good, but the sequence is wrong. You cannot expect the GM to move with clarity if the Board itself is not aligned.

This is where many situations break down.

Different Board members carry different views of success. Committees follow their own interpretations. The GM gets direction that changes depending on who they speak to.

A strong Board doesn't ignore this.

A strong Board names it.

## **Leadership Maturity: Acknowledging the Source of Ambiguity**

High-performing Boards recognize when their own alignment has slipped. They reflect on their role as leaders. They see that the Board, individual members, and management may be out of sync. They accept shared responsibility for the lack of clarity instead of placing the burden solely on the GM.



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As Ray Dalio says, “getting in sync is the most important and challenging human element of leadership.”

This is not a criticism of the Board. It is a mature act of leadership.

A Board can communicate this directly and professionally:

**“We recognize that our direction has not been fully aligned. We are working to clarify our priorities and will communicate them in a unified way moving forward.”**

This restores trust.

It signals shared accountability.

It creates the conditions for the GM to reset and perform.

## **Realignment Before Evaluation**

Once the Board aligns, expectations become clear and achievable. Only then can the GM be evaluated in a fair and meaningful way.

This is where DENEHY Club Thinking Partners supports Boards most effectively.

We help Boards align expectations, confirm shared priorities, and communicate with one voice. When alignment is restored, the GM can return to leading instead of reacting.

## **Board Action Plan**

To regain clarity and strengthen leadership, take these five steps:

### **1. Confirm Alignment as a Board – Get in Sync**

Hold an Executive Session. Identify where expectations differ. Resolve alignment before any discussion about the GM.

### **2. Communicate With One Voice**

Designate one Board Officer as the primary point of contact for the GM. All guidance flows through that role.



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## 3. Reaffirm Strategic Priorities in Writing

Agree on three to five priorities for the year. Share them with the GM and senior leadership. Keep them stable and visible.

## 4. Hold Structured Check-Ins

Meet monthly with the GM to review progress and resource needs. Keep conversations strategic. A 15-minute President-GM "Touch Base" focused on key deliverables is a best-practice anchor of performance management.

## 5. Conduct a Fair Annual Evaluation

Base reviews on the agreed-upon priorities. Build five to seven mutually agreed-upon quantitative and qualitative goals at the start of the cycle. Define the methodology and measures of success. This prevents shifting expectations.

## Your Takeaway

A struggling GM is not always the problem.

Often, it is the signal that the Board must realign before expecting clarity from the GM.

## You lead best when you:

- Look inward first
- Align before directing
- Communicate with one voice
- Support and evaluate with consistency

## Your next step sets the tone for the entire club.

**DENEHY Club Thinking Partners guides Boards through this alignment process so the GM can succeed and the club can move forward with confidence.**

