

A photograph of a baseball player in a white pinstriped uniform with the number 5 on the back, holding a bat and preparing to swing. The scene is set in a stadium at dusk or dawn, with stadium lights visible in the background.

Baseball Leadership: A Lesson in Individual and Team Performance

One of my sons loves baseball. As I was watching one of his games recently, it occurred to me that a successful business is a lot like a successful baseball team. Perhaps it was a side effect of baseball in early March not being played in Florida, but it seemed to me that the hallmarks of an effective baseball team were the very things we work to develop in our leadership teams.

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Baseball is both an individual and team sport. The team is made up of individuals that, for the team to be successful, must successfully perform their own individual

tasks. No one can help the third baseman field a hard shot up the line and make a timely and accurate throw to first. No less important are the team aspects of the game. For example, on a bunt each defensive player has a role to play, including communication of vital information to other players.

The manager/coach also has an important role to play regarding strategy, but he cannot execute the strategic plan. He needs a team to do it. As for “superstar” employees, they can’t do it on their own either. Think about the pitcher and the rest of the team. Pitching is all important, but without good defense behind them or poor hitting, wins are hard to come by. A team of stars not working together has no better chance for success than a group of less skilled players working together as one. It is one of the beautiful things about the game.

In our businesses, it takes both exemplary individual performance and teamwork to reach peak performance. Whether we are a player or a coach, we have an important role to play in winning the game. Our performance determines the organization’s ability to reach its goals. Individually, we have to start with the right mindset and dedication. With these, much of the balance of ingredients for success will come. Our mindset should be to envision success rather than hardship.

In baseball players, hard work builds strength, stamina and skills; and in business professionals it builds knowledge, skills, and integrity. These three feed our dedication to go the extra mile to delight our customer, create a permanent solution, improve the process, or develop our own team. Through these, we develop the strength and courage to excel as a team. By contrast, it is a sad sight to see a baseball team pointing fingers after a loss, and no less sad to see the same in the conference or boardroom. Yet, this is commonplace in the business world.

The silos that exist within organizations typically develop over time, and often are built by leadership through direct or indirect incentives. When they are dismantled through value- or product-oriented organizational changes and individuals deciding to act as a team, the team members are aligned with the organization’s goals and can communicate more effectively.

As managers and coaches, our roles are to develop the strategy and the team to execute the strategy. Our organization will win or lose based on the total team performance, so strategy has to be right on, as does the ability of our team members to pull together to deliver the results desired. Our role includes individual and team development, and the all important decision when to substitute. Some have no issue with this; others agonize over it. Emotions do not excuse us from the task, though.

We have to have the fortitude for development. Our team should learn from the mistakes they make, but eventually we may need to make the call to the bullpen. After all, our responsibility is to whole team rather than an individual. So, the next baseball game you have the opportunity to watch, think about how you and your team stacks up to the teamwork and alignment you see.



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Dave Pate is an experienced business leader with previous roles in plant management, planning and lean operations. He currently serves as Vice President, introducing new clients to TBM, cultivating long-term growth with current clients and on-boarding new clients.