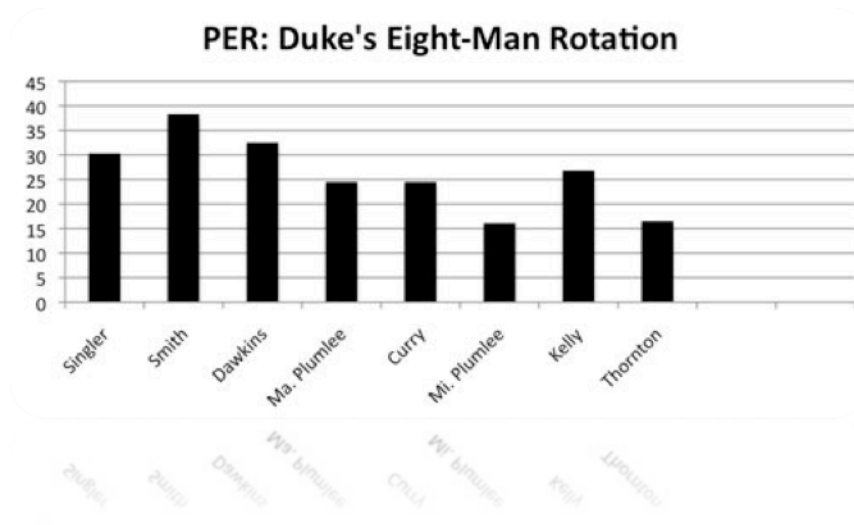


The 8 Man Rotation: A Look at Sports and HR



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Foreword

“What morons would write about HR in terms of team spectator sports for an audience known to be 69 percent female with an average age of 47? Not to mention it being somewhat anti-Semitic. When we don’t know a touchback from an in-field fly, what’s the point? Happily, the authors are all such great writers that maybe, just maybe, it doesn’t matter.”

- Bill Kutik, technology columnist for *Human Resource Executive* and www.HREOnline.com

“Human Resources professionals have no athletic prowess. They are the arbiters of work/life balance programs but are so crunched for time that they consume boxes of donuts and drink gallons of coffee for breakfast. They promote wellness programs while shoving polish sausages down their throats for lunch. And they deal with stress in the office by drinking beer as if it’s going out of style.

It’s a known fact that if you can run more than fifteen feet without having a heart attack, you are destined for another career path beyond HR. Maybe sales. Maybe marketing.

But it makes total sense that *this* group of HR bloggers was motivated to get together and write about sports. There’s an old saying. “Those who can, do; those who can’t, work in Human Resources and blog.”

Basketball. Football. Motivation. Coaching. There isn’t another group of bloggers more qualified to write about sports without actually playing sports. And for that, I’m proud of them.

So good job, guys! Go team! Yeah! Whatever.”

- Laurie Ruettimann, TheCynicalGirl.com

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The 8 Man Rotation. In basketball parlance, it refers to the five starters and three players off the bench who play the primary amount of minutes during a game. Given that most basketball rosters contain 12 or more players, the coach has decided that the combination of these 8 players provides the team with the best opportunity to win. Team chemistry and production are at its maximum.

The keys to success with an 8 man rotation and sports is not much different than the keys to success in human resource management. As co-contributor Steve Boese writes, “Where else but in big-time sports can you see the effects of talent assessment, recruiting, leadership, and employee engagement played out, in public, under the spotlight, every day of the year? What players to draft, which ones to develop, which ones to cut loose, and how to build the right mix of personalities and talent to achieve team goals are the primary concern of all sports franchises.”

Steve’s quote could just as easily be, “What employees to hire, which ones to develop, which ones to cut loose, and how to build the right mix of personalities and talent to achieve team goals are the primary concern of all managers.”

This volume contains 40 posts on Sports and HR from the authors of the HR Capitalist, Rehaul.com, Fistful of Talent, The Tim Sackett Project, and True Faith HR. We hope it is the first of what becomes a yearly edition published each January.

CHAPTER 2

HR Planning and Strategy

In the current purview of organizations, HR is integrated fully and plays a key role in helping organizations reach its strategic objectives. Similarly, HR Planning involves the flow of people into, through, and out of the organization.

What can HR managers learn about strategy and planning from the world of sports?

Ultimate Team Rankings - HR Style

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2009



Every year ESPN ranks the franchises in the four major United States professional sports leagues, (NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL) according to how much the franchises ***Gives back to the fans in exchange for all the time, money and emotion the fans invest in them.***

You can see the results here - ESPN [Ultimate Team Rankings](#), (the Los Angeles Angels of MLB led the rankings).

To me what is most interesting about these rankings is the criteria that are used:

Bang For The Buck : Wins during the past three years (regular season plus postseason) per revenues directly from fans, adjusted for league schedules.

Fan Relations : Openness and consideration toward fans by players, coaches and management.

Ownership : Honesty and loyalty to core players and local community.

Affordability : Price of tickets, parking and concessions.

Stadium Experience : Quality of arena and game-day promotions as well as friendliness of environment.

Players : Effort on the field and likability off it.

Coaching : Strength of on-field leadership.

Title Track : Championships already won or expected in the lifetime of current fans
What if you, as a Human Resources professional, applied those same criteria to your organization? Instead 'fans' think about the categories as they relate to your employees and candidates.

Bang For The Buck : Pretty simple, revenues per employee. A standard HR metric, but are you consistently measuring it? And not just in total, but also in the context of initiatives like downsizing, merging, or expanding. In your recruiting efforts are you carefully evaluating the cost and return of your ATS, job board advertising, specialty advertising, etc. If have dived in to the world of 'social recruiting' do you have any idea how it is paying off?

Fan Relations : Openness and consideration toward ~~fans~~ employees by executives and management. Are you truly an 'open' organization? Your executives may claim they have an open door to employees but do the employees truly believe that is the case? What steps have you taken to demonstrate open communication and consideration towards employees, particularly if your organization has gone through reductions in force, or will be doing so soon?

Ownership : Honesty and loyalty to core ~~players~~ employees and local community. Do the company owners make it a priority to give back to the community? Do you have some kind of company sponsored volunteer day, giving employees time off in exchange for volunteer activities? Does ownership do more than just claim to be community minded?

Affordability : Price of ~~tickets, parking and concessions~~ total compensation awarded to employees. Let's spin this one to your overall compensation package. I know these last two years have been brutal for comp budgets, but even still your organization's compensation package needs to be competitive to continue to engage and retain the best of your employees. Even in a recession, these employees could jump. If as in the case of many organizations, and the cash element of your total compensation is still under downward pressure, are you enhancing or emphasizing other elements of the total package that are of benefit to the staff?

Stadium Experience : Quality of ~~arena~~ facilities and ~~game~~ work day ~~promotions~~ conditions as well as friendliness of environment. Take a honest look around your offices and facilities. Are they the best you can make them? When employees drive up to the facility what is the first thing they see? Make sure the grounds are kept up, the parking lots well-lit and please don't allow the clan of smokers to huddle around the main entrance. Inside, start with the simple,

low-cost elements. Are the bathrooms and kitchen or break areas super-clean? Make sure folks have easy access to a refrigerator and freezer, and keep the coffee high quality and as low cost to the staff as possible.

Players : Effort on the field and likability off it. I will spin this one a bit, more toward the employment brand and the image that the company has in the local, national, or global community. What are your employees saying about the company both in internal communications and forums, and externally on blogs and social networks. How about candidates and their experience and view of your organization? All these elements play into the idea of 'likability', which is not usually thought about as an organizational feature.

Coaching : Strength of on-field leadership. This certainly is a awkward one for HR, the frank assessment of the organization's leadership, but certainly a necessary component for a high functioning organization. HR can take the lead in identifying gaps in leadership capabilities and implement strategies to address these issues. Doing right by employees often means ensuring company leadership is truly able to carry out the company's strategic objectives. Succession planning programs also play strongly into HR's ability to support and improve the ongoing leadership capabilities of the organization.

Title Track : Championships already won or expected in the lifetime of current fans employees Are you a market leader in your industry/region/niche? Have you been recognized as a 'great place to work' or a 'Top Employer' by any national or local organizations? What do the employees think about the short and long term prospects for success? Are the companies best days behind you, (like the Cleveland Browns, or New York Knicks). This is critical in sports, as we often see many excellent and experienced players that have their pick of teams to play for choosing the ones that are perceived to be championship contenders. Simply stated, the best want to play with the best, and position themselves for success. Do you have the kind of environment that attracts the best talent available? And if not, what can you do in HR to try and reverse the tide and get back on top?



FYI - The team that came out on the bottom of the ESPN Ultimate Team Rankings was the Los Angeles Clippers of the NBA. Sort of amusing that the best and worst team in the ratings play in the same city. Perhaps the HR department of the Clippers can try and initiate some

executive exchange or cross-organizational meetings to try and learn a few things from the Angels.

So what do you think? Is your organization is more like the top teams in the survey like the Angels, Pittsburgh Steelers or Detroit Red Wings? Or sometimes do you feel more like the Clippers, Detroit Lions, or Cincinnati Bengals? The kind of teams the general public associates with losing, scandal, and inept management.

If you liked this article (and you must have if you have hung this long), be sure to check out the August 28, 2009 [HR Happy Hour Show - 'Sports and HR'](#). We will be taking sports, HR, and where the two worlds collide.

The Him

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 10, 2009

I am working on a little research project examining the career paths of college basketball coaches,. My love of college basketball began on a cold January day in the mid-1970s, when my parents took me to a game at Jenison Fieldhouse on the campus of Michigan State University. MSU was playing Iowa, and Terry Furlow, MSU's best player, was unstoppable, scoring 50 points (a MSU record that still stands to this day). I was hooked. I implored my parents to get season tickets and in 1977-1978, and 1978-1979, I was able to regularly watch Earvin Johnson use his magic to ultimately win a national championship.

I attended MSU from 1985-1989 and quickly joined the Spartan Spirit (the precursor to today's Izzone). Once again, it was a joy to watch the skill of Scott Skiles, one of the best players ever to put on a Spartan uniform. And, I have been extremely fortunate to have seen all five Final Four appearances of the MSU/Tom Izzo era, including the national championship, in person (thanks calibadger!). Speaking of which...

I continue to watch Spartan basketball, and am constantly amazed at what Tom Izzo has done with the MSU program. In April 2000, Michigan State coach Tom Izzo was on top of the basketball world. Flanked by Assistant coaches Mike Garland, Brian Gregory, and Stan Heath, Izzo's Spartans won the Men's Basketball NCAA Championship. These assistants can be seen as akin to senior management in the roles they carry out, from assuming head coaching duties when a coach is fired, falls ill or is ejected from the game, recruiting, to focusing on a particular aspect of the game, such as defense. This top management team had continued success returning to the Final Four in 2001. Spurred by this success, the assistant coaches decided to strike out on their own as other universities sought to emulate what Izzo accomplished in East Lansing. Stan Heath left for Kent State at the end of 2002 season, and Brian Gregory and Mike Garland left for Dayton/Cleveland State, respectively, in 2003. I began to wonder what impact that change would have?

Most studies of top management teams focus on what happens when the CEO leaves, or there is wholesale change, but there is little work being conducted on what happens when key top management players leave, while the CEO remains intact.

As new assistant coaches enter and former assistant coaches depart, will the team become more similar or dissimilar as a result of the change? Further, what will be the impact of these changes on performance? Will new assistant coaches quickly be subsumed into the head coach's style of play, or will the new assistant coach(es) provide wrinkles that might enhance (or detract) from team success? What will the impact of the previous assistant or head coaching experience have on performance?

Ceremony

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 9, 2009

A central tenet of major sports is *deception*. In baseball, for example, the catcher and pitcher exchange signs so they are on the same page in attempting to fool the batter on what pitch will be thrown. First and third base coaches create elaborate signs they send to the runner in attempting to fool the defense regarding whether a stolen base will occur.

In football, both the offense and the defense are in a constant battle to deceive each other. Will the defense disguise its coverage or call a blitz? Will the offense call a running play or a pass? Will they line up for a field goal and kick it, or run a fake?

A common theme at the 2009 SHRM National Conference was *trust and transparency*. Jack Welch emphasized it as a critical component of HR in his comments in the opening general session. Bill Cawood, in his session, referenced a cosmetics company that had trust as its mantra, but was continually checking bags and purses for potential theft.

As HR practitioners, where does the line between transparency and deception exist? Do your employees have faith that you are looking out for their best interest? the company's best interests?

- Are realistic job previews given to potential employees, so that expectations aren't dashed when they are hired?
- Does the organization have an open or closed pay policy?
- Is the merit pay program communicated and the objectives understood by all participating in it?
- Are organizational policies, rules, procedures handled in a fair and impartial manner?

Where is the line between what should be transparent and what should be hidden, and do employees feel deceived by the latter?

CHAPTER 3

Staffing and Career Considerations

How does an organization find a pool of qualified applicant and subsequently choose the appropriate candidate. Examples abound from the NFL and NBA drafts to free agent decisions.

What can HR managers learn about staffing from the world of sports?

Michael Jordan and the Art of Getting the Interview (and raining fire on those who doubt you)...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

The economy sucks and there are about 400 candidates in play for every open position. Let's face it, you need to pull out all the stops, because AT BEST the company doing the hiring is only going to phone screen somewhere between 5 and 15 candidates for the open position. That means you have to find a way to cut through the clutter.



Like Public Enemy once said, you need to use ANY MEANS NECESSARY to cut through the clutter. That includes Googling the person you think can help you (recruiter, HR pro, hiring manager), finding online bio information and comparing and contrasting your background and skills to something that matters to the person in charge.

Want an example? Here's how a guy leveraged my sizable digital footprint against me this week, evoking the ghost of Sam Bowie vs. Michael Jordan:

September 15, 2009

Dear Mr. Dunn:

Go back 25 years. It's 1984. You have the second overall pick in the NBA draft. Who do you take? Sam Bowie (other candidates) or Michael Jordan (me)? I don't say this to appear arrogant or cocky, but you won't find someone more dedicated to becoming the best trainer for DAXKO anywhere.

I have the sheepskin (bachelor's degree in Communications from Florida State), I have the experience (12 years in the media, one year in corporate communications and two years in customer service) and really enjoy speaking in front of groups. I also delight in seeing people's reactions when something I've taught them clicks. The lightbulb coming on puts a smile on my face.

I'm proficient with multiple operating systems (Windows and OSX) as well as other technologies (social media, video and audio editing software.) I'm not satisfied until I know a technology inside and out. I also delight in sharing my knowledge with those who desire to learn. And I know that SaaS is more than just an attitude.

All I want is a chance. A chance to prove that you're smarter than Stu Inman was in 1984.

That's it. I know you're in Ottawa right now, so I'll end this message here. Thank you for reading. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely, _____

For those of you who don't know, [Sam Bowie was a college basketball star at Kentucky whom the Portland Trailblazers drafted in front of Michael Jordan in the 1984 draft.](#) As it turns out, Bowie never reached the potential everyone thought he had (broken shins have a way of slowing your progress) and Michael Jordan, who was drafted after Bowie - well, he became the best player in the history of the galaxy. Stu Inman was the Blazers executive who made the call. The results have always been in the back of fans' minds in Portland, even the young ones [like this HR blogger you might know.](#)

So the candidate researches me, personalizes the message and guess what? Regardless of fit on paper, he's going to get face time for no other reason than he cared enough to be creative. That interests the hell out of me as a fit for my company, and if you're so cynical that you wouldn't interview someone who took the time to research you, then you're a Zombie.

By the way, did anyone see the acceptance speech by Jordan at the Basketball Hall of Fame this week? He was calling out everyone who ever thought he wasn't good enough to play. He actually brought the coach who cut him in 9th grade to the Hall of Fame ceremony, and then took the opportunity to tell him "you were wrong".

That's passion probably worth exploring in another post. For now, learn from the master candidate above.

Personalize the message and get through the clutter.

Want a Great Manager? 5 Reasons To Stay Away From the Stars and Hire a Scrub....

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 11, 2009

Stop me when you figure out the pattern in the following names:

- **Joe Torre**
- **Tony Larussa**
- **Phil Jackson**
- **Pat Riley**



Figured it out yet? They're all great coaches - you're right. More importantly, they were all mediocre players, at least on the level in which they ultimately became coaching icons.

Why's this on my mind? How about the fact that [the Minnesota Timberwolves \(NBA, pro hoops\) are reported to be bringing in Laker legend, Kurt Rambis, as their next head coach.](#) Need a primer on Rambis? Click here to remember that he was a safety glasses wearing, no jump shot, hustle freak on the great Laker teams that featured Magic Johnson and Kareem. He wore **safety glasses** people. That's all you need to know to love this hire. Like the Rock once said, he knew his role and shut his mouth.

If you've been in the talent game, you know that the best widget-maker is widely reported to be the best widget-maker manager. Stars are often thought to have the best skills to become effective managers, so they usually get first dibs on the promotion. It rarely works out - stars have special skills, and tend to get frustrated when the masses can't do what they did - whether it's make more widgets, close more sales and yes - hit the jumper off the double baseline screen with amazing consistency.

Role players, on the other hand, often make terrific coaches - and managers. With that in mind, here are 5 reasons why you should hire a role player for your next manager opening (I'll call the role player you seek "Rambis" for the remainder of this post) rather than a star:

1. **Rambis knows how hard the game is.** As a result, he's patient with all the circumstances around him. Don't have money for a new break room? Rambis is OK - he's not used to the new stuff anyway.



2. **Because he knows how hard the game is, Rambis is a better coach.** He's patient and been humbled before, which means he'll spend more time with the role players on your team and maximize their effort.

3. **Rambis will never sell your company out.** You didn't have to give him the shot, but you did. In return, that spells loyalty from Rambis toward your organization.

4. **You look smart when you win with Rambis.** Others promoted a star to their last manager vacancy and aren't doing any better than you're doing with Rambis. You look like Bill Belichick as a result - a smart evaluator of talent.

5. **Rambis is the underdog.** He'll outwork the others, which goes a loooooong way.

Whatever the makeup of your Rambis, you'll smile every time you see his safety glasses, the old car he won't trade in because he's practical, or whatever image reminds you that he's Rambis.

So, the next time you're going to promote someone to a manager spot, don't choose the Magic Johnson of your organization. Choose your Kurt Rambis...

Sometimes Mediocrity Won't Cut It

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 14, 2010

There is a [small discussion going on](#) about how some people choose mediocrity for their careers. I started to leave a comment but realized that I'd love to separate it out from the other issues addressed in that post. Let's get some laser focus in on this thing and let some of my super smart readers take a shot at this issue. I'll go over where I stand on this issue to start off.

You want to choose mediocrity? Cool with me. Do me a favor though? Just identify yourself at the door. It will make my job much easier in the end because I will place you in a position that has a higher tolerance for mediocrity. For some positions, doing your job and going home is adequate. For some positions, it isn't adequate but you can tolerate it because you pay them less, it is less consequential (but not inconsequential) or whatever. For some positions, mediocrity won't cut it. Period. End of sentence. No exceptions.

Nobody wants a mediocre doctor. Or a mediocre airplane pilot. Or a mediocre lawyer. And while I am certain that there are some mediocre folks in every one of those fields, my feeling is that reputable firms aim to avoid a pattern of mediocrity. After all, if too many of your patients die, too many planes fall from the sky or too many cases are lost, you won't have to worry about a career path. It will just have ended itself.

(Just a quick note here: There is a difference between being mediocre and being ranked lower within your organization. I think the worst doctor at the Mayo Clinic is unlikely to be a mediocre doctor. Similarly, [the guy warming the bench on the worst NBA team in the league](#) can still beat 99% of the world in basketball. If you've ever seen my physical response to forced ranking performance management systems, now you know why.)

If you choose mediocrity, you are choosing career limitation. For some, there is peace with that decision. For others, there is outrage that you have to be limited because you chose what you chose. I don't care what you pick. Unless I want to hire you. Then I care just enough to figure out where to put you.

Here's a clue if you've chosen mediocrity and you don't like the consequences: deal with it or change your game. Because you have no choice. Mediocre people placed in positions where mediocrity can't be tolerated are eaten alive.

Even typically ancillary positions within an organization can have their tolerance for average work be impacted. How do mediocre recruiters find rockstar talent? It is dumb luck if they get any. If you don't pay bills on time and your supply line seizes up, it doesn't matter if you have that rockstar ops manager. So the more your organization is relied upon by others either in life or death situations, those that impact livelihoods, or those that serve society, your tolerance for mediocrity goes down to nothing. Unless you're the government of course.

What are your thoughts on this?

Builder or Custodian

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 1, 2010

In the world of big-time college athletics success on the field or court often results in ancillary benefits to the institution in the form of increased donations, an uptick in applications for admission, and in the case of so-called 'Cinderella' type schools that have not been traditionally strong, a surge in awareness and name recognition for the school to a wider audience.

In the college 'money' sports of (American) football and Men's Basketball, a successful season or two, or a deep run in championship competition can be a springboard of opportunity for coaches at these smaller schools to make the jump to a larger school (and substantially raise their compensation), and can also create exposure for players at these small schools that perhaps might lead to a shot at professional contracts in the NFL or



NBA.

Not unlike many industries or even geographies, there is a kind of hierarchy in college athletics; schools 'know' their place in the hierarchy by virtue of their level of competition, the conference and peer institutions that they choose to organize and affiliate with, and this hierarchy guides and influences the players they can recruit, and the quality and experience of the coaches they can employ. Schools (and fans, alumni, students, etc.) all know their 'place' in the hierarchy, and while there is occasionally some institutions that 'climb' the ladder to higher levels of affiliation and competition, most of the upward mobility is personal, e.g., a successful coach at a lower level of competition gets a similar job at a bigger, top-flight school.

Last spring Butler University, a liberal-arts school with less than 5,000 students made a remarkable run to the Championship game of Men's College Basketball, only to lose by two points to perennial power Duke, 61-59. Butler's coach Brad Stevens, was purported to be a candidate for several 'bigger' jobs (he stayed), and star player Gordon Hayward was seen as a potential NBA star (he left, and now plays for the Utah Jazz). The movement of coaches and players from these small school successes is not really news anymore, and not terribly interesting (even to me).

But another piece of employee transition news from Butler caught my attention over the weekend - the [surprise resignation of Butler's President Bobby Fong](#) to take the over the same position at even smaller [Ursinus College](#) (I had to look it up too), a school of about 1,700 students located in Collegeville, Pennsylvania. Fong has been President of Butler for 10 years, a period that has been marked by rising enrollments, a successful \$150M fundraising campaign, and capped off last spring by the exciting run to the Men's Basketball Final Four and the Championship game.

If Fong were a player or coach on the basketball team, we'd expect his next move to be 'up'; to take over at a big school like Michigan or South Carolina. But to drop down to a tiny, off the map school like Ursinus? In sports, this would be considered a step back, a career hiccup, or even the first step on the road to obscurity. But look a bit closer and we see that what matters to Fong is the job he will be doing, not necessarily who he will be doing it for. After 10 years of building up Butler, Fong wanted to start all over again the process in an environment where he would have that opportunity. The money quote from Fong - **“You always want to be able to help an institution improve, and I tend to be a builder. I am not a custodian.”**

Super line, and one that reveals much about Fong as a leader, and that can also help anyone better understand and assess potential career moves. Sometimes moving 'up' only means you get a nicer office to sit in while you simply look after things and try not to screw up. Sometimes you have to take a step 'down' in order to keep building.

Good luck at Ursinus President Fong, and if you make the Final Four again, I will demand an NCAA investigation.

Resigning in protest

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 10, 2010



The story of the [Jet Blue Flight Attendant](#) that resigned from his position as the great [Mary Albert](#) would describe - In dramatic fashion, has been all over the news the last two days.

Cursing out a plane full of passengers, activating the emergency slides, grabbing a couple of beers, and making a run for it makes for a fantastic story.

Lots of folks have fantasized about marching in to the boss' office and firing off a pointed screed or diatribe and proudly walking out into a glorious future of happiness and success (or in the case of our friend from Jet Blue, possible jail time).

Sure, the flight attendant was fed up, had to deal with what sounds like an incredibly annoying and entitled passenger, took a shot to the head from said passenger's luggage, and seemingly just snapped. It happens. Usually not as cool and newsworthy as this episode, but it happens.

People get fed up and quit their jobs every day.

But I wonder about other scenarios that might make employees resign in protest. These could be sub-standard working conditions, a hostile work environment, or even inept management. I mean really inept.

The kind of management that would welcome back to the organization a notorious ex-employee. A person in whose tenure as a high ranking and highly paid member of upper management left a history of failure, poor leadership, shattered public relations, and just for good measure was [sued by another former employee for sexual harassment](#), dragging the organization through a public and embarrassing court case.

This just in - The New York Knicks to [bring Isiah Thomas back](#) to the organization as a consultant.

Yes, the Isiah Thomas that in four plus years as Knicks GM and Coach led the team to exactly one playoff appearance and made a series of colossally bad personnel decisions resulting in the team being burdened with a slew of bad contracts for under performing and below average talent.

And did I mention the [sexual harassment lawsuit](#)? Ok, just checking.

If you were an employee of the Knicks, and your leadership openly welcomed Thomas back into the fold after his legacy of failure and embarrassing behavior what would you think? Could you take it any longer? Would you feel compelled to head for the emergency exit, grab a beer, pull the slide, and make a run for it?

Could your management make such a colossally bad hire that it would make you resign in protest?

Ex-Employee or Proud Alumni? The Difference Matters...

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 21, 2010



The Ultimate Recruit.

This past summer the sports world was consumed with the '[Decision](#)', i.e., the process where the greatest basketball player in the NBA (until Kevin Durant surpasses him), LeBron James, would reveal the NBA team he would sign a free-agent contract with. And with one stroke of the pen, he would transform a team to immediate championship contender status. This was a high-stakes, high-profile, once in a generation recruiting challenge for the various teams involved in the process. Get this one right, and your reputation, status, and swagger would be forever changed - instead of being just another faceless executive suit, you'd be known as the guy who bagged LeBron, and quite possibly altered the trajectory of the entire organization. Several big-market, big-money teams were in the mix; the Chicago Bulls and New York Knicks, in particular, were both thought to have a good chance to sign LeBron.

So, you're the recruiting pro who has to land LeBron, or for your industry whoever is the closest approximation to a talent like LeBron. You have a few problems right off the bat as some levers you'd pull with other candidates won't work on this one. He's rich, and he will continue to rake in huge off the court dough no matter where he goes. All your competitors are willing and able to offer similar comp packages. So you can't win on money. Location probably doesn't mean all that much either, after 7 years in Cleveland, pretty much anywhere is

an improvement. No, you have to get deeper into the candidate's mind on this one, get to the motivations and aspirations.

A Recruit's Influences & The Power of Alums.

You have to figure out what influences the star, and perhaps more importantly, who influences the star. I caught this little tidbit on [SI.com](#) yesterday regarding the recruitment of King James:

LeBron James was out dining with friend and former Knicks great Charles Oakley at at Miami's Prime One Twelve following his preseason game Monday night. Oakley is close to James and urged him not to play for the Knicks. He went as far as saying in June, "I can't tell him to go to New York. New York treated me bad."

Ouch. A bit of education for the non hard-core NBA fans out there. Charles Oakley played for the New York Knicks for 10 seasons out of a 19-year career, retiring for good from the NBA in 2003. He was traded from the Knicks in 1998, after earning upwards of \$15,000,000 in salary over the 10 seasons he spent with the club. He was a durable, reliable, and fiesty player.

A team player. A fan favorite. The kind of guy who in retirement should really have become a brand ambassador, an alumni contact that the organization could tap from time to time, perhaps in situations just like this one, when the best player in the league is available and (at least on the surface), considering joining your team.

But instead of extolling the virtues of New York, the '[World's Most Famous Arena](#)', and the potential of multiple convertible rides down the [Canyon of Heroes](#), Oakley went out of his way to advise his pal LeBron to stay away from the Knicks, since they 'treated him bad'. The SI.com piece doesn't specifically list Oakley's grievances, but quite honestly it doesn't matter. What matters is a well-known, seemingly influential, and well-connected former employee of the organization negatively impacted the most important recruiting initiative the team has had in decades. What matters is that the Knicks executives in charge of the recruiting process either didn't know or didn't care that Oakley has an axe to grind with the team, or that he has a close relationship with LeBron.

Ultimately, LeBron chose to 'take his talents to South Beach' and sign with the Miami Heat, and while it is impossible to know how much (if at all), Oakley's bashing of the Knicks influenced LeBron, it can be certain that it could not have helped. Perhaps instead of focusing all their energy on recruiting James, the Knicks talent pros should have spent just a little bit of time showing some love to Oakley.

It is pretty trendy right now to be worried about organizational online reputation and to be closely monitoring blog posts, tweets, and LinkedIn status updates about your employment

brand. But it still seems that the big time, big money, and game changing decisions are more likely to be influenced by connected players in the VIP lounge at upscale restaurants. Who may or may not be sitting with one of your former executives and enjoying the Kobe beef.

Stop Interviewing – Now!

BY TIM SACKETT

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 2, 2010

I'm a big fan of Dan and Chip Heath the co-authors of "[Made to Stick](#)", in the June 2009 edition of Fast Company they penned an article regarding the downfall of trusting interviews to make hiring decisions – [Hold The Interview: Why it may be wiser to hire people without meeting them](#). What I like most about the brothers is their propensity to use data in making a point, which turns a sometimes absurd premise into a very logical argument. In this article the Heath's point out that in 1979 the University of Texas Medical School had a rating system that relied on an interview in deciding which med school applicants to accept into their program. That year the school interviewed the Top 800 applicants and then admitted the top 350. Unexpectedly, the Texas legislature required the school to admit an additional 50 students. The problem was at this point the only students left were in the bottom 100 of their applicants

Here's where it gets fun. No one at the school was aware who were the top and who were these bottom kids – over time the data showed no difference in these students – not only in academics, but also professionally through their clinical. Both groups performed equally well through school and into residency. **"The interview is correlated with nothing other than, well, the ability to interview."**

Ok, I hear you – *"this is only one example Tim!"* *"We're HR Pros, we're trained to interview"*

Let's continue – What the Heath's are really trying to get us is the concept of Past Performance is the best Predictor of Future Performance. Interviewing someone – even with a great set of behavioral interview questions and the best trained interview – really only measures someone ability to communicate really well and if they can prepare for an interview (which in some cases might be a good measure). Would a baseball GM really select players in the draft based on an interview, or would they look at the past statistics? Would the Republican Candidate for President rely on a single conversation on his ranch to select his running mate? (Oh, wait, sorry that did happen – but again he lost – should have looked at past performance I guess!)

In tough economic times, in environments where cost cutting is essential, it is critical for HR Pros to be able to show the data behind why one of those cost cuts cannot be our pre-employment testing and assessments. These are tools that go beyond the interview and are statistically proven scientific methods. If you have someone in your organization who still wants to do it "by their gut" because they have "great intuition" – run, don't walk, run – to either another company or if you're in that position to change, do it quickly and precisely – hiring is not an art.

Just remember – Portland Trail Blazers ignored statistics in 1984 with the 2nd overall pick in the NBA draft to take a big tall kid named Sam Bowie...leaving on the draft board Michael Jordan to be picked #3 by the Chicago Bulls. Guess Sam was a pretty good interviewee!

Dreams Never End...

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 2, 2009

Having just returned from the [2009 SHRM Annual Conference](#) in New Orleans, I will have a few blog posts in the upcoming days highlighting my thoughts from the 5 days in NOLA. However, I will start off my inaugural post discussing an event that just preceded the SHRM Conference - the NBA draft.

With a background in HRM, I find the NBA and NFL drafts to be quite fascinating. As a fan of the Milwaukee Bucks (ugh!) and the Green Bay Packers, I have a vested interest in how "my team" selects its future employees. In almost no other industry does an employer have the opportunity to measure and assess a future hire quite like a major sports team. Players are poked and prodded through a variety of mental and physical tests. General Managers pore through hundreds of hours of game tape (can one imagine Proctor and Gamble calling Pfizer for performance footage?). Family, friends, colleagues, coaches, peers are all interviewed. Virtually anything measured can and will be measured.

One should expect, given this background, that the success rate of the draft should be incredibly high, particularly given the amount of money involved with such a choice. Every top 5 pick should be an All-Pro or All-Star selection, right? Yet, history is littered with misses - Tony Mandarich, Ryan Leaf, Michael Olowakandi, Joe Smith, Alex Smith, Tim Couch, just to name a few. Similarly, future all-stars are repeatedly passed over (Terrell Davis - 7th round pick, Mike Piazza - 62nd round, Kurt Warner - undrafted)

One [study](#) has found that heavier players do not help NFL teams win more. Another [study](#) shows that the NFL combine has no correlation with NFL success.

Is this an opportunity for SHRM to enter the fray and assist these general managers with their hiring decisions? If the NFL and NBA can't get it right, what hope do HR Managers have with much less information at their fingertips?

CHAPTER 4

Training and Development

Once a set of candidates have been hired, any particular shortcomings must be addressed. Similarly, managers must decide if poor performing employees can be rehabilitated

What can HR managers learn about training and development from the world of sports?

Greg Oden And Training Management Follies

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 10, 2009



In 2007, through a combination of having a poor record and some luck, the NBA's Portland Trail Blazers had the number one pick in the draft that year. Now if you aren't familiar with the draft, it is basically the first step in acquiring the rights of new, young players to play on your team.

The Blazers, with much fanfare, selected Center Greg Oden of THE Ohio State University. He came highly touted as one of the top center prospects of this decade and was a force to be reckoned with due to his size and skill (especially on the defensive end).

And as soon as the fanfare ended, the groans began as he went down with an injury that sidelined him for his first year.

This year, the excitement built up again and after an up and down half season, people are already calling him a bust. The guy is four months into a long NBA career and you've already made that determination? He's a trainee right now!

The HR person inside of me perks up here though. This happens all of the time in corporate America and this is a great example of it reasons why it is such a short coming of the organization, not the employee. Here's why:

- **You need to create the opportunity to succeed** – A center doesn't bring the basketball up the court so he must be passed to by someone in order to score or grab rebounds to score. If nobody passes to him, he rarely gets the opportunity to succeed. If your marketing department doesn't produce leads for your sales department to sell to, you can't hammer on the sales department forever.
- **You need to allow for failure** – A lot of failure, especially if the game is difficult. Oden is going to drop the ball and get called for a lot of stupid fouls. Organizations need to be prepared to lose business (or games) because of training. Better organizations will lose less because others around the trainee can pick up slack and still keep business.
- **Practice, get in the game, then practice again** – People just assume that you do this training camp and a player is ready to go. Same thing goes for many training programs: they don't have constant feedback loops. They expect you to take most of the training information and put it to use. There is a reason why Oden is improving every month: as he gets more game time and more practice, he becomes a better player (sometimes by leaps and bounds).
- **Build confidence** – The worst thing you can do as a trainer is pull a person out of the game at the first sign of trouble, Again, this goes back to allowing for failure. People get stronger through it. So when you have a person struggling on their task, let them try to figure it out before you bail them out. The best thing you can do is demonstrate confidence that the employee will be able to figure it all out.

Most importantly, when you have a high potential employee, you need to give them the room to grow and improve. Someone who has a high work IQ doesn't need to be told that they screwed up, they need to build skills that can help them overcome screw ups and polish their game.

What If HR Got A Mulligan? Would We Do Something Different?

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 16, 2009

A Golf Story

I love and hate playing the game of golf. There is something inherently peaceful about walking around a carefully landscaped course and there is something inherently vengeful and ridiculous about trying to get a small white ball into a cup 300 yards away. When I lived a bit closer to my dad, we'd play quite a bit in the season.

Now there is something in golf called a mulligan. After you take a terrible shot, you are told to take your mulligan and try again. With the pressure off and the mistake made, I've typically done considerably better after my mulligans. I remember one memorable shot as I was lined up to go over the water hazard and on to the green. I lined up, took my shot, topped the ball and it rolled into the pond. I went down to the pond, grabbed my ball, took it back to the spot and shot again, this time hitting the downhill side of the green several yards away from the hole.

A Work Story

I believe [HR is in a tough place](#) and in need of innovation and reinvention. I also know that change doesn't come from people who talk about it but from people who execute and initiate. And when you have ingrained systems with a stake in keeping the status quo, execution is the most difficult thing in the world. Think I am joking? Just ask President Obama (or, if your politics prefer, President Reagan).

HR's situation is the same. We've progressed down a path decreased relevance and stature in organizations. The people who worked the staffing functions in the olden days would be ashamed at some of the disconnects between HR and the organization. The need for change is bigger than ever but the ability to change is seen as less possible due to those ingrained systems driving organizations today.

What Does That Mean?

HR needs a mulligan. Or we need to at least explore the possibility of what we would do if we had a mulligan. That's what Talent Camp (being organized by the great Susan Burns) is all about. A dozen or so diverse minds coming together to tackle that question. We've got practitioners, recruiters, consultants and technologists all thinking about these issues. For a couple of days, we are going to focus on thinking about it and brainstorming frameworks, solutions and answering bigger questions than we can do ourselves.

The Challenge For Me

I consider this a personal development exercise for myself and I've rarely done much personal development in the past five years. For me, doing this blog, talking to people about talent and technology and going to conferences? That's the easy part. Being deeply introspective, strategic and thoughtful about future direction? That's still something I am working on making a more natural part of my daily routine.

The Challenge For Us

I really envision this process to produce action. Whether that means a written manifesto, framework, specific action points or bringing other key influencers to the table, I am game. If we can be renewed and changed in our processes and our actions going forward, that would be a big step in the right direction too.

Team Chemistry - It Can Go to Hell Quickly, Even for the Best Teams...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 20, 2010

Kids - mark my words. You're going to get old, look up and realize you were once part of a great team. You didn't know you were on a great team at the time because you were young and dumb. You thought it would always be like that. You were wrong.



I know. I'm a ray of sunshine.

Why are you no longer part of that great team? Because one of the following factors conspired to tear it all apart:

1. The world changed and, as a result, the team had to change,
2. The stars of the team got upset at each other over transgressions - real or imagined, or
3. You were clueless to how much that team rocked, left the company and then figured it out a decade later.

There's a word for all three examples - humanity. If you get a chance, check out the documentary [Once Brothers](#) on ESPN, which puts the humanity of teams on display for all who watch. Here's the rundown of the movie [from Slam Online](#):

"Before there was Yao Ming, Dirk Nowitzki and Manu Ginobili, there was Vlade Divac and Drazen Petrovic.

Those two teammates from the Yugoslavian national team paved the way for international players to play in the NBA.

In the upcoming ESPN [30 For 30](#) documentary entitled *Once Brothers*, Drazen and Divac's basketball success, close relationship and the eventual tragic death of Petrovic are all on full display.

Told through the eyes of Divac, the main focus is the relationship between himself and Petrovic. We follow the two players from the rise of their careers in Yugoslavia, to their early success in the NBA, to the war within their home country that tears them apart and to finally, the tragic death of Petrovic.

Mainly, this is Divac's story about how he deals with all of these things, most particularly the division that comes between him (a Serbian) and all of the Croatians that were once his teammates on the Yugoslavian national team."

The lesson in *Once Brothers* that transcends sports is pretty simple. Great teams and great friendships are fragile. The world can mess it up (war, corporate restructuring), but more often than not, individuals make decisions based on incomplete information, emotions and other factors that collude to separate great friends - and break the teams they're on. My example? I once was a part of a great National HR team. We rocked the house of a Fortune 500 for 4 years, and I had an unbelievable SVP of HR and 6 other strong field VPs of HR running sections of the company in the field like me. It was a dream team. Then, the world got in the way. The company went through a down cycle, had to restructure and our SVP got mistreated in the process - by one of my former peers who was elevated to a spot of authority based on her geographical location - a byproduct of the restructuring.

The restructuring and the resulting mistreatment was all it took to take down the team. The

get the hell out of dodge - 1 by 1. POOF! A great team, gone. Humanity and imperfection - 1. KD's Dream Team - 0.

Great teams are fragile. It sucks, but it's true. If you're on one, enjoy it. It won't last forever, and you likely won't get the magic back again anytime soon.

CHAPTER 5

Performance and Talent Management

How do you measure talent and performance? How do you decide where to spend your talent dollars? Does it get you the return you are looking for? Do you really have to spend 10,000 hours, as Malcolm Gladwell suggests, to become an expert?

What can HR managers learn about training and development from the world of sports?

Moneyball, the NBA, and Putting Your Peeps In a Place to Succeed...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 17, 2009

Most of us assume we've done enough for our organizations related to putting our talent in a place where it can be successful. We found the best talent for what we could afford, recruited and signed them, gave them the tools and even did a half-day orientation. What more could they need to succeed?

Uh... Well, as it turns out, your "on the job training" strategy might leave a little bit to be desired.

KOBE BRYANT ADVISORY SYSTEM



A look at the chance of a Kobe flare-up or threat of a trade.
Current level: Guarded

SEVERE: 'So long L.A.'
HIGH: 'I'll go play on Pluto'
ELEVATED: 'I ain't talking'
GUARDED: 'My job is to play basketball'
LOW: 'I'm a Laker for life'

More organizations are turning to intense data mining to understand what individuals on their teams make the best decisions, as well as what circumstances need to be in place to enable great performance and solid decision-making. It'll be awhile before this makes it to you at ACME Inc., but take a look below at the lengths the Houston Rockets will go in order to control Kobe Bryant:

Remember Moneyball? That was about new ways of valuing talent in professional sports and identifying undervalued assets through the "new talent math". The new Moneyball isn't about acquiring talent, it's about gaining a competitive advantage via data for the talent once it's acquired.

More on the new form of Moneyball in the NBA from [Michael Lewis at the New York Times](#):



"People often say that Kobe Bryant has no weaknesses to his game, but that's not really true. Before the game, Shane Battier was given his special package of information. "He's the only player we give it to," Morey says. "We can give him this fire hose of data and let him sift. Most players are like golfers. You don't want them swinging while they're thinking." The data essentially broke down the floor into many discrete zones and calculated the odds of Bryant making shots from different places on the court, under different degrees of defensive pressure, in different relationships to other players - how well he scored off screens, off pick-and-rolls, off catch-and-shoots and so on. Battier learns a lot from studying the data on the superstars he is usually assigned to guard. For instance, the numbers show him that Allen Iverson is one of the most efficient scorers in the N.B.A. when he goes to his right; when he goes to his left he kills his team. The Golden State Warriors forward Stephen Jackson is an even stranger case. "Steve Jackson," Battier says, "is statistically better going to his right, but he loves to go to his left - and goes to his left almost twice as often." The San Antonio Spurs' Manu Ginóbili is a statistical freak: he has no imbalance



whatsoever in his game -- there is no one way to play him that is better than another. He is equally efficient both off the dribble and off the pass, going left and right and from any spot on the floor. Bryant isn't like that. He is better at pretty much everything than everyone else, but there are places on the court, and starting points for his shot, that render him less likely to help his team. When he drives to the basket, he is exactly as likely to go to his left as to his right, but when he goes to his left, he is less effective. When he shoots directly after receiving a pass, he is more efficient than when he shoots after dribbling. He's deadly if he gets into the lane and also if he gets to the baseline; between the two, less so. "The absolute worst thing to do," Battier says, "is to foul him." It isn't that Bryant is an especially good free-throw shooter but that, as Morey puts it, "the foul is the worst result of a defensive play." One way the Rockets can see which teams think about the game as they do is by identifying those that "try dramatically not to foul." The ideal outcome, from the Rockets' statistical point of view, is for Bryant to dribble left and pull up for an 18-foot jump shot; force that to happen often enough and you have to be satisfied with your night. "If he has 40 points on 40 shots, I can live with that," Battier says. "My job is not to keep him from scoring points but to make him as inefficient as possible." The court doesn't have little squares all over it to tell him what percentage Bryant is likely to shoot from any given spot, but it might as well.

The reason the Rockets insist that Battier guard Bryant is his gift for encouraging him into his zones of lowest efficiency. The effect of doing this is astonishing: Bryant doesn't merely help his team less when Battier guards him than when someone else does. When Bryant is in the game and Battier is on him, the Lakers' offense is worse than if the N.B.A.'s best player had taken the night off."

It's pretty impressive, and all done in the name of providing Battier an edge in his head-to-head with Kobe. Like I said at the jump, it will be awhile before this approach makes it to you and me, but from a development perspective, what data can you provide your talent to make better decisions in head-to-head interaction with competitors, as well as the decisions they make about their own career development? What about the daily decisions they make in what to work on?

Until you and I have a plan, we're really just doing the workplace equivalent of hoping that Kobe misses a lot of shots on his own - without thinking about what WE can do to influence the performance outcome.

And that's humbling...

Love Your Workplace Grinders - "Ed's Doing the Dantley on the Jones Account"

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 21, 2008



Basketball season is almost here, and that means from time to time I'll be riffing on the connection between talent in the workplace and the NBA. Some of you will love it, some of you will unsubscribe in response to it (don't go! work through it! feel the burn), and at least one guy will comment because of it (Lance from [Rehaul.com](#), a Trailblazers fan..). I gotta be me, so I'm dancing with [the lady that got me this far...](#)

Please stick around. I promise to always have a talent/HR/workplace connection to my NBA posts.

Today's connection - the "grinders" in your workplace. The grinders are the folks who, on the surface, aren't as talented, gifted, well-liked, attractive, connected or socially aware as your top talent. But here's the scoop - they show up every day, work their *** off, and often times, through sheer effort and competitiveness, come close to performing as well as your star, and occasionally outperform the star.

They grind it out. Mama said knock you out, so they show up with their helmet on, hop in the test crash car you call a company, and take the licking and keep on ticking.

In basketball, the equivalent of a grinder comes in many flavors. One flavor is the guy/gal who can score, but has to get points from the free throw line because they don't jump well or aren't superquick. So they drive the ball to the basket, create contact, and go to the free throw line, usually after taking a beating.

In hoops, they call that doing the "Dantley". That's Adrian Dantley, who knew his role and how to get his.

From the esteemed [Basketbawful](#):

"The Dantley" (thuh dant'-lee) *noun*. Describes those performances in which a player scores



a significant number of points and more than half of those points come from the foul line.

Usage example: *Kobe Bryant had a Dantley in Game 1 of the Lakers' second round playoff series against the Jazz: 38 points on 8 field goals and 21 (out of 23) freethrows.*

Word history: Bob Ryan invented the term (as noted in David Halberstam's [Playing for Keeps: Michael Jordan and the World He Made](#)) to describe how Adrian Dantley was able to ignite many of his famous scoring explosions from the foul line. Dantley scored 23177 over his 18-year ABA/NBA career, and 8351 of those points -- roughly 36 percent of them -- came from the charity stripe. He led the NBA in free throws four times (and was the league scoring champion during two of those seasons) and currently ranks [sixth all-time in that category](#). He shares the record (with Wilt Chamberlain) for most free throws made in a regular-season NBA game (28). Dude straight up knew how to draw fouls. It helped that he could bulldoze his way to the basket with his giant ass (see below).

We love to talk about the superstars, the rockstars. Take the time to say thanks to your grinders this week, and show them some love by dropping the following in a meeting this week - "Ed's doing the Dantley on the Jones account". Once they figure out the term means that you think they're outworking everyone, they'll wear it like a badge of pride.

The Cubs - Getting Rich Via a Workplace Culture of Losing...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 3, 2008



Cubs Fans - How's it going?

By the time you read this, [the Cubs are on the ropes](#) - either down 0-2 or tied 1-1 in their series with the Dodgers, headed to LA in a "best of 5" game series.

And Cubs fans across the nation just threw up in their mouth a little bit.

Take a look at the enclosed pictures, and you'll find some of the icons who represent the culture of the Cubs, otherwise known as the CURSE.

[Bartman.](#)

The [cat at Shea Stadium.](#)



I've taken the liberty of adding one to the mix -[Manny Ramirez](#).



How unfair is it to Cubs fans everywhere that the promise of a championship will, in all likelihood, be ended by a malcontent from Boston that the [Red Sox actually paid the Dodgers to take off their hands?](#)

Manny goes yard, Cubs lose. That's just wrong.

Seriously, where else in business do you find a franchise that prints money off a culture of being the lovable loser? Nowhere - because sports is the only place that losing, if sustained long enough, actually becomes a positive part of the brand. It's been a 100 years (1908, right?) since the Cubs won a championship, and at this time the franchise is currently valued as the 5th most valuable team in baseball, [with a sticker price of \\$642 million](#).

Only in sports. Can you imagine the following?

-**Southwest Airlines** fails to turn around planes on time, has the most expensive tickets in the business, and experiences the most canceled flights due to fleet issues. Still, because the flight attendants sing (not take me out to the ballgame) and crack jokes, they're still the most profitable airline.

-Traces of acid in **Bud Light** cans routinely burn the throats of beer drinkers, but since Bud's got great commercials (brand image), they're successful anyway (note - if your throat is sore Bobby Joe, relax - this is a hypothetical).

Can you imagine either of those scenarios happening? No, because the market wouldn't allow it. Business is Darwinian, while sports has "history" that builds identity - even if you're losing. If you want a workplace that builds culture based on losing, look to the Cubs. Unfortunately, it looks like the guy who helped rid Boston of the curse will be the same guy to put the dagger in the backs of Cubs fans.

His name's Manny Ramirez, and like a few of your employees, he doesn't care what you think. Because of that, he also doesn't feel a lot of pressure, which makes him pretty dangerous - whether he's in the lunchroom or batting 3rd in a short series.

To Win the Talent Game in the Olympics, Does It Help to be A Communist?

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 21, 2008

What's the best way to grow talent? Invest heavily in training? Go out and acquire the best when you need it? Cool succession planning software?

Not corporate talent - ***Olympic Talent...***

With the Chinese doing well in the Olympics and our memory of the USSR and East German machines still fresh, many are pointing [to the presence of a nationalized sports program as a key to establishing Olympic superiority](#). Bela Karolyi came out at the Olympics and pointed to missing teeth among the Chinese gymnasts as proof of a "win at all costs" attitude, as well as the potential superiority of a nationalized sports system, where kids get plucked at a young age and turned into specialists.



As it turns out, medal count almost always comes down to population and GDP, although GDP could be partially replaced by a hat tip to Lenin or Marx. From [the Financial Times](#) in the UK:

"Every country is at it. China has spent a fortune on its quest to win the most gold medals at Beijing. The UK is likely to spend more than \$1bn on elite sports in the run-up to [the London games](#) in 2012. Just like military planners, Australia's Olympic Committee, a sporting power, is demanding more money to keep up with emerging threats.

It might be worth it to sustain Aussie sporting pride – if there were any evidence that it is possible to buy Olympic gold medals. In fact, almost all Olympic success can be explained using only five factors: population, gross domestic product per capita, home advantage, the use of an elite sport system to identify talent, and a country's system of government. Tired of Olympic failure? Install a communist regime.

The first two factors are by far the most important: more people means more exceptional sporting talent; higher national income means leisure time to spend on fencing or handball; and at the Olympics, home advantage allows the hosts to field a larger team.

What nations can do is target sports that no one else plays. South Korea wins a lot of medals for archery, Germany always wins the team dressage, and while US and Russian athletes both win a lot of medals, it is surprisingly rare for them to share an Olympic podium.

Interesting analysis, and it makes sense for the business world as well. Looking to develop a new piece of software? Take this lesson and do it with a technology/geographic center combination that will allow you to get talent. Nothing worse than chasing a total of five developers, working in a retired technology, in a metro area with 3 million people.

For the record, I'm saying that the US has three of the five factors in place. Population, GDP, and an elite sporting system that ID's talent in the USOC. For the communist players that have been the yin to our yang (USSR, East Germany and now China), they replace the GDP with the system of government, effectively nationalizing the whole operation.

People lose sight of the fact that we have the elite system in place in the USOC, just like the Chinese do with the nationalized system.

The primary difference? Our government doesn't force the kids into specialized schools away from their families, like the Chinese do.

In the USA - we let the **parents** do that... It's all about choice here... :)

Go USA!!

The Errant Pursuit Of Quantification

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JANUARY 7, 2010

Quantification has been on my mind. The question comes up in sales conversations, compensation discussions, product development processes and marketing messages. Heck, it even comes up when you're putting together a resume or when you're explaining to your parents why you're fine making a little less money for a better job.

I find this search for quantification boring and missing the mark. Here's my problem: **numbers have severe limitations**. There's another issue too: **numbers give this false sense of security** in judgment. If you are analytical, you can rely on the numbers for too many of your answers. It limits you or allows you to be lazy. If you have a decision to make and the numbers go one way, it is easy to point to that and say yes, do that. When it goes wrong, it is easier to justify the mistake to colleagues when you go with the numbers. It is easier to justify that approach with investors. But here's what I know, not everything important can be measured.

Player Worth Is More Than A Set Of Numbers

Here's my handy sports analogy because it works: if you only followed the NBA by watching box scores and knowing the salaries of the players, you would be confused. For example, you'd see that the top salaries were paid to players that scored the most points. As you got further down the list though, the impact of a player's scoring became less and less of a factor in determining their salary. Meanwhile, you'd see guys pop up on the list who were way down in scoring and had maybe only a couple more rebounds, blocks or steals per game than many of their contemporaries.

It happened everywhere: in every front office, in every city and on every team. Somehow these people were valuable but the numbers didn't support it. Was everyone in the NBA that bad at evaluating talent?

The Rest Of The Story...

Offense in the NBA is important but so is defense. Unfortunately defense is incredibly hard to quantify in relation to impact. Sure, you had rebounding and block leaders but even those raw statistics didn't capture what a great defensive player can do to change a game.



Don't mess with this guy.

Take one of my favorite guys from the Blazers named Buck Williams. On paper at least, his extra talent may have impacted 4-6 possessions of a 200 possession game. Why was he a bigger factor than that? Four things that can't be quantified but were critical:

1. Pulling down more rebounds on defense meant that the wing players could run out the court and get fast break opportunities they couldn't have received if they had to stay in and help rebound.
2. It made playing man to man defense much easier. If your guy got around you, you knew help was behind to assist. It allowed your other players to play more aggressively on the ball.
3. Simply contesting a rebound impacts the flow of the game. When you fight for the ball on a rebound, you can disrupt the other team's flow because they have to adjust for the extra time it will take to field the ball.
4. He kept other players away from the basket and when they came close, he was able to contest shots. While an uncontested shot within ten feet may be a gimme, a contested shot had a substantial impact on scoring.

One of the other guys that was good at this was Mark Eaton of the hated Utah Jazz. He seemed to be omnipresent within eight to ten feet of the basket and made inside scoring difficult for any team. His blocking prowess was good but was only two blocks above what other centers were doing in the league. His defensive presence impacted game plans and allowed the Jazz to be a better team than they deserved to be despite fairly average career numbers outside of blocks.

Neither one of these guys are in the basketball hall of fame. Neither are guys like Alvin Robertson, Dennis Johnson, Michael Cooper, Horace Grant and Maurice Cheeks. They probably won't ever be since that is often a numbers game too. But they made an indelible impact on their teams.

Not Everything That's Important Can Be Quantified

Not to get too philosophical on you but if you're married, what's your ROI? What's the break even mark for helping your grandma clean out her gutters? Unless you're crass enough to marry for money or help family members for a slice of inheritance, I am guessing numbers didn't cross your mind. There is great value there that adds to your life in ways that don't show up on your bank statement or resume.

Even though we internally realize that many important things can't be quantified, we still mindlessly pursue quantifying until we find our answer. Why is that? We certainly can't trash the idea of ROI (we still do rely on money to run our businesses) but we can also focus on important parts of our business that don't show up on spreadsheets, don't have a profit margin and won't show up in EBITDA.

You have to find the Buck Williams' and Mark Eaton's of your company and recognize them. Their individual stats may not show it but I guarantee that everyone around them is inexplicably better because they are around. The focus on quantification and supposed fairness has pushed these people out of organizations in some cases.

Are you willing to make that same mistake? Are you going to allow your spreadsheet to dictate a talent evaluation process that really requires deeper investigation than just a cursory glance at numbers?

Three Ways You Can Fill An Empty Passion Bucket

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED APRIL 6, 2009

A few years ago, I listened to a lot of political talk radio. In an age when a bunch of my peers were listening to podcasts and that sort of thing, I was trying to dial in the static on the AM radio. I stopped listening to political talk radio because it is terrible. Now I listen to sports talk radio. It is still terrible but I feel better listening to it because I am not laughing at real problems anymore.

Anyway, I am a big fan of Dan Patrick's sports talk radio show and he had on Rick Neuheisel, the football coach fans in the Pac-10 love to hate, and he said something about having his passion bucket full before playing USC. Basically, your passion bucket is the measure of passion you have for something and to play USC and be successful, that has to be full because you aren't going to be as talented as they are most years.

But let's say you're in a crappy job, with crappy hours and you're uninspired. Your passion bucket is empty. And if you can't just switch jobs when you're bored or unhappy because some blogger says you should (damn reality!), you don't have to be miserable and passionless. Here are three choices you can make right now to start filling your bucket:

I. Love The One You're With

So you're at a crappy job and the economy stinks and all you can think about is how you've submitted a million resumes and nobody is calling you. Or you're unemployed and you're in the same situation. Find ways to strive and thrive in your environment and make the best of your current opportunity. That means enrich yourself, be a superstar and work hard when it seems impossible to do so. Network and become friends with likeminded colleagues. Every time you think negatively about your current position, think about two things you like about it. It feels impossible but that's only because you are making it that way. Making the best of your current situation will help make you more passionate about it.

2. Plan And Make Your Next Move

You want out of your current job but instead of thinking rationally, you just start blanketing your resume everywhere within a 50 mile radius. Or you quit and decide you'd rather work at a coffee shop than your current employer. The problem that many people encounter is that this doesn't seem to fix the problem. They are still unhappy only now they now have a new job and they can't do the same thing again. Planning your next move (including determining whether you want to continue in your field) and preparing yourself (including schooling) can usually be done with a lot less stress while you hold your current position. ^ Making plans about your future as a teacher or accountant, going to school can help you stay passionate when you can feel like your current stop is a temporary one.

3. Find Inspiration Outside Of Work

I know some of us in HR love to think that work is the center of your life but the third option is, at least in my opinion, the easiest way to become passionate again. I don't know what you like to do but I love to do a lot of things: guitars, hiking, basketball, cooking, reading, writing and spending time with my family and friends. I have friends that mentor high schoolers or volunteer for a church or play softball with friends. And while work may not be the most inspirational or passion inspiring activity, you can always go back to those activities and refill your passion bucket. Unlike work, you may have more control over your situation there as well.

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How do you keep your passion bucket full during less than inspiring times?

How To Win Over Adversaries And Be A Superstar

BY LANCE HAUN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MARCH 17, 2009

I've been thinking a bit about competition and adversaries. Laurie over at PunkRockHR [picked my brain](#) about it a little bit. The article on CFO about how [we shouldn't trust HR](#) made me think a little bit more about it. And then Kris over at HR Capitalist [posted about the CFO article](#) (and referenced the [Fast Company article](#) as well).

First of all, about the CFO article: I couldn't care less. The professor criticizing HR is an HR professor. People like him are out to get a name for themselves but when you sit and think about it for a couple seconds, you realize he must be part of the problem. Somebody who is responsible for the education of HR people is bashing the preparedness and usefulness of HR people? Seems kind of funny.

I was talking with a student last week about entering the HR field and he mentioned his school didn't have many (or any) classes specific to HR. That's not surprising. Very few colleges offer specific classroom education that helps people wanting to enter the field. Post-secondary education is a major issue in the HR field but that is a major subject in and of itself.

Adversaries Are Always There

The issue is that adversaries (and really, competitors for the dollars and attention that HR gets) are always going to exist. There are people that want to take you down a notch. There are people that want your budget money or that want to empire build. And these highly publicized criticisms come all of the time.

As Laurie and Kris say, you should own that you're great and just be that. There is something to be said for that too. One of the ways to get on the nerves of adversaries is to simply perform day in and day out and be great. It is the cold dagger approach.

I don't have a problem with that approach necessarily but sometimes you need more.

Sometimes you need that touchdown dance, statement dunk or a little “pause and look” on the home run ball. And look at where I am going with this post...

The Unnecessary Sports Analogy

So let's say you've got two comparable players in the NBA with Brandon Roy and Vince Carter. Brandon Roy knows he is great and is loved by his teams and his fans. Humble and talented, I don't think too many people who work with him have bad things to say. Then you have Vince Carter who, while statistically similar to Roy's game, gets talked about a little different. Why is that?

Carter is a little more flashy. He doesn't do anything in basketball very ugly. He has a smooth game. It just looks better. Roy will work hard and play scrappy but he isn't going to look as good doing it. Especially at the beginning of the season, he didn't have the attitude of “I am going to get the ball at the end of the game and I am going to make you pay.” He didn't get the kind of respect from the referees that Carter gets.

Brandon Roy got pushed around more than anyone with his level of talent because he wanted to let his work speak for itself. The thing that is transforming him into a superstar player is that he is getting that attitude that not only is he good enough to play with the best, he is good enough to deserve the same treatment and respect from opposing players, coaches and referees. He's gotten that respect because he has demanded it through words, actions and adding a little flash to his game. And HR shouldn't be afraid to add a little to their game as well.

Let Your Inner Competitor Out

Not all of your adversaries are going to hand you their respect just because you're smart and you work hard. You should be able to stand up to them and demand their respect. If that means adding a little bit of zing to your part of the agenda at your management meeting, than do it. If that means aligning yourself with all of your adversary's allies, than do it.

Why? These are the ways people and their departments get respect in the corporate world. In my book, there is nothing wrong with putting down a statement dunk in the middle of a corporate meeting on two conditions:

1. You are actually good
2. You are doing it for respect, not for show

Obviously, this is a gut check on your part. If you're no good or you are just doing it to get in the face of your adversary, your actions will be completely transparent and you will be called out. But if you do it right, it will be...well, a slam dunk.

Quick - Send in the 'B' Team

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 17, 2010

Last week there was a fantastic story in the world of sports, and one that most people, even the most ardent sports fans in the US probably missed.

[USA defeats Turkey to capture World Basketball](#)



[Championship.](#)

I am not talking about the [HR Capitalist](#), I know he was [on top of the story](#).

Take a look at some of the [not-so-thinly veiled references](#) to this collection of American players as the 'second team', 'junior varsity', or 'guys who know their roles'.

Sure, this team lacked the star power and ability from more widely known performers like LeBron (who could not be bothered to take his talent to Turkey), Dwayne Wade, and Kobe Bryant. For the record, the recovering from injury Bryant gets a pass from me as he carried that Laker team to the NBA title this past spring.

Heading in to the World Championship tournament there was a palpable air of concern from USA Basketball officials and fans that this 'B' Team would not be able to win the tournament, to re-confirm (at least temporarily), US dominance of international basketball, and perhaps most importantly, to secure the automatic qualification to the next Olympic competition in 2012.

One of the classic dilemmas the US has faced in International tournaments is the reluctance of many star NBA players to commit to the national team, that normally has to play in qualifying and World Championship tournaments in the summer, the 'vacation' season for the NBA.

Guys like Kobe have dragged themselves through 100 games or more from October - June, asking them to commit to two weeks playing in a rickety gym in Serbia in August is not that easy a sell.

For this, and other reasons (primarily the LeBron free agent circus), the USA built a new team for the World Championships, consisting primarily of younger and emerging NBA stars, with a few more experienced, veteran players sprinkled in to the mix. But clearly, this team was perceived as not the USA's 'best' team, just the best one that the country could manage. While chock-full of talented players (and admittedly one 'A' player, the remarkable Kevin Durant), this group was certainly not assured a gold medal, the days of the US just trotting out any 5 NBA players and expecting to win on the International stage are long passed. Plus, this tournament was to be played in Turkey, giving the hard-working, chain-smoking, flopping Turks a significant home court advantage.

This team then, had several built-in excuses should they have failed to win. They were after all, the 'B' team. They were mostly young, and had little experience in major international competition. No one was really paying attention back in the US. The finals of the World Championship took place the first Sunday of the new NFL season. But with the inspiring play of Durant, the Lakers Lamar Odom, and contributions from many of the younger players, the US team won the tournament in impressive fashion. Based on this performance, Durant certainly, and some of the others potentially will crack the 'A' team roster for the 2012 Olympics.

What does this all mean to the rest of us, and the real world of work?

Maybe nothing.

But it could be a reminder that developing depth of talent sometimes requires sending in the 'B' team.

Even in important, high pressure, and high stakes environments.

Truth is, people know even if they don't want to admit it, when they are on the 'B' team. In basketball the only way to make it to the 'A' team is to play your way in, you can't do it just in practice, or in low stakes contests. Want to see if any of your 'B' players have what it takes? Then you just might have to put them in the game.

The Wisdom of Jeff Van Gundy - Part III

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 10, 2010



He is at it again!

The great [Jeff Van Gundy](#), former NBA head coach for the New York Knicks and the Houston Rockets and current TV analyst, who has been the subject of not [one](#), but [two](#) posts here on the blog, gave us more sage wisdom to chew on during the telecast of Game 3 of the NBA Finals between the Boston Celtics and the Los Angeles Lakers this past Tuesday night.

During a timeout the camera cut to a shot of the Lakers team huddle, and we saw the team's star and best player Kobe Bryant emphatically and forcefully giving instructions to several of his teammates. Bryant had the rapt attention of the other players, and while the audio did not pick up what he was actually saying, it was clear from facial expressions and body language that he was delivering a tough message. Perhaps a message that the other players were uncomfortable hearing.

Observing this activity in the huddle, JVG shared with us this gem:

You don't want your best player to be your best liked player.

Think about that one. When the best player is also the leader of the team, that often means having to get in the other player's faces, to make sure that the effort and passion is there, and also to simply instruct and coach. When the best player takes on those responsibilities, and stops worrying about being 'liked' all the time, chances are overall team performance will improve.

Being the 'best' carries with it another level of commitment not only to personal excellence, but to doing the kinds of things that can impact the performance of the other players on the team. In basketball that may mean sharp criticism, aggressive play in team practices ([Michael Jordan](#) was notorious for this), and putting in extra time in the weight room or doing additional running or sprints.

In the workplace the same kind of rules can apply. When the 'best' or most respected employee consistently sends the right message, displays a high level of integrity, actively supports and coaches the newer members of the team, and essentially models the kind of behaviors that indicate the expected 'way we do things', then the other members of the team, and the overall organization can improve, and can win.

It doesn't really work in the converse, a sports team can almost never be led by the last guy on the bench. He or she may understand the key leadership skills, but without that respect or standing that comes with actually excelling on the court or field then it is less likely the team will choose to follow.

In basketball, there are dozens of 'best' players, but there are only a precious few great players.

Inside organizations that same ratio probably applies. Every group has their best performer, but only a few make an impact on the team and the organization in the broader sense.

And you don't necessarily get there by being liked all the time

The Story of Garrett Jones

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON APRIL 10, 2010

The Minnesota Twins have a well-deserved reputation as an organization that knows how to judge talent, to select, train, and consistently produce a steady stream of high quality players. This organizational capability to find and develop so-called 'home-grown' talent is critical for a team like the Twins, who historically have had significantly lower salary budgets than many of their rivals like the Yankees and Red Sox.

Some of the top players that have been brought through the Twins system past American league Most Valuable Players [Joe Mauer](#) and [Justin Morneau](#), as well as pitching great [Johan Santana](#) (now currently playing for the Mets). By consistently making smart draft choices, having a consistent philosophical approach that is embedded throughout all levels of the organization, and by actually providing real opportunity for these home-grown players at the major league level, the Twins are contenders for the division and league title most years. They are in a way a kind of baseball version of the NBA's Utah Jazz, my friend the [HR Capitalist's favorite team](#).

With that background, I want to share a bit of the story of [Garrett Jones](#), an outfielder now playing in the major league for the Pittsburgh Pirates, (a team I took a shot at recently). Fans of the Pirates certainly, know some of Jones' story. A player with 10-plus seasons toiling at various levels of baseball's minor league system, never really getting much of a chance to see if he had what it took to succeed in the big leagues. In fact, Jones was in the minor leagues for so long, a little known baseball rule called the 6-year free agent rule, granted him his release from the club that owned his contract late in 2008 and allowed him to sign with the Pirates organization.

The club that 'owned' Jones for the 6-plus years?

The Twins.

One of the primary reasons Jones never got much of a chance with the Twins (about 30 games in 2007), was the presence of the star Morneau, who played the same position as Jones, as was one of the games best players. To be fair, Jones' minor league career did have some down points as well, so the Twins could also be forgiven for having some doubts about his upside.

Jones began the 2009 season once again in the minor leagues, but about halfway through the season, he was called up to the Pirates and proceeded to have an outstanding second half. Jones hit 21 home runs and batted nearly .300. For a perennial losing team like the Pirates, this performance was likely the highlight of the (sorry) season. This year in the new season's first three games, Jones has already hit three home runs.

The point of all this to me is that even organizations that pride themselves as great evaluators and developers of talent sometimes get one wrong. Jones was plying his trade for the organization for many years, in fact for so long league rules allowed him to break away, and the Twins for whatever reason did not or could not give Jones the chance to prove himself at the highest level, helping both the team's fortunes, as well as improving Jones' career prospects. Professional sports, and the individual performance of the players themselves, are so closely monitored, scrutinized, and evaluated, that these kind of talent 'misses' are relatively rare. Performance in sports is so measurable and public, that players possessing major league talent usually do end up in the major leagues. Maybe Jones simply needed a change of scenery to really display his true ability, but in the end, at almost 30 years old, he is much the same player the Twins did not give much of a chance to.

Think of it, someone spends more than six years working for the organization, their performance, development, and potential on display in the most visible manner possible, and yet the organization (universally regarded as great talent evaluators) allows the player to leave, only to see him star for another team.

Maybe the Twins did not think Jones had the 'look' of a major leaguer or the talent ahead of him in the organization was clearly superior, whatever the reason his talents were not recognized. But finally getting his chance with another team, he is turning in to a star. I wonder if you look at the people in your organization right now, could you find similar untapped potential?

Are there people toiling away, solid performers, but not stars, maybe because they have not been given a big challenge, a lead role, or a big stage?

Will they eventually leave and hit the big time with one of your competitors?

Nah, you are a great talent evaluator, I am sure you have everyone pegged just right.

The Cradle of Coaches, or Celebrating your Ex-employees

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 24, 2009

In American college athletics it is not uncommon for coaches to have some success at smaller programs at lesser-known schools, then move out and up to higher paying, more prestigious jobs at so-called 'major' universities, like Ohio State, Notre Dame, or Florida. It does seem that almost every year one of these highly lucrative positions is filled in this way.



One of these smaller programs is the [Miami University of Ohio](#). Miami of Ohio is known as the '[Cradle of Coaches](#)', based on the numerous legendary coaches that worked there, and then went on to have remarkable success at larger, more well-known universities as well as in professional football. Just some of the coaches that have Miami roots are Woody Hayes, Bo Schembechler, Ara Parseghian, and Jim Tressel.



The interesting thing is that Miami is not the only smaller program to have had this experience, but by embracing it, and celebrating the achievements of former coaches once they have left Miami, they have created a kind of sustainable competitive advantage for talent compared to their most likely competitors for coaching talent.

Any candidate for an opening at Miami would absolutely know of this rich history of successful coaches moving on from Miami to the highest echelon of the profession. And for a highly competitive field like collegiate coaching this is a huge selling point. Come and coach here at Miami, and we can help you on your path to becoming the next National Coach of the Year at whatever 'big' school you go to next. They take advantage of this legacy by fully embracing it, in fact they are planning to erect statues of many of the legends that built the 'Cradle of Coaches' history.

How many 'regular' organizations do you know that celebrate the achievements of ex-employees in such an explicit manner? Think of organizations that typically recruit new graduates or early career professionals. A compelling factor for the best talent among them might very well be, 'What can I do next with the experience I gain here?' For smaller companies, or ones in the non-profit or educational sector that can't usually compete evenly on salary and benefits, this may be one source of advantage that can be exploited.

Instead of limiting your pitch to the potential career paths within your organization, what about highlighting some of the success stories of people who left and then went on to achieve success in other places, or as entrepreneurs? Instead of just having current employee testimonials on your corporate job site, why not try and include interviews with some of your most famous alumni who would be willing to talk about how their experience with your organization set them up for long-term professional success?

Who is the most successful ex-employee from your organization right now?

Are you using that story to your best advantage?

Free Agent Nation

BY TIM SACKETT

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 21, 2010



I don't think many people, basketball fans or not, were able to get away from the LeBron James saga that took place recently. Whether you agree with LeBron going to Miami and leaving Cleveland, it definitely raises a ton of questions and discussion topics. After witnessing the non-stop coverage over the past few days I have only one question: Is it good for the business (the NBA) for workers/players to get together and make these types of deals? Here are some of my thoughts:

- On a one-off basis, probably not a bad thing – if it becomes 3, 4 or more you'll have many sides wanting to control this – most notably the players own union (let's face it, the union doesn't want players accepting lower pay!).
- How would we (employers) react to this if it happened in our everyday life? Oh wait, it does – it's called Capitalism. A lawyer can decide to go to work wherever they can find work – and guess what the 3 top lawyers could decide to all go into work with each other. We call that smart business.
- Are we really worried this will become the norm in sports – players meeting with each other and deciding where to play? Few thoughts on this subject: 1. This has been the case since they were young kids – anyone been around travel youth sports in the last 10 years!?! 2. When it comes to money – not every person is going to be willing to take less money – again Capitalism rules. 3. Not every player is going to want to share the limelight and not be “The” player for that team – Ego's baby!
- Do we have to have parity in professional sports to be successful? That's the thought, right? You can't have a super-power team, because then it hurts all the other teams. Wait a second before you jump on this bandwagon – sports is about David vs. Goliath - we love to see underdogs win and Goliath go down. We also love to have a team to

hate – a villain. That’s drama and what we love about sports – if every team was equal – it wouldn’t necessarily make it better – it would just make them more equal.

So, is all of this good for the NBA? Yes. In the end, the entire nation was talking about NBA Basketball in a time of year when very few talk about it at all. There is anticipation and excitement for the upcoming season. Many will watch and buy tickets to see if anyone can takedown LeBron’s superpower team. It’s all good for business.

Now, do I want my accounting staff to come to me and tell me they’ve decided to takeover Sales?! Probably not, but heck – if they can do a better job than my sales team – the sales team better watch out! It’s hard to come with an example in the business world where this is a real issue, because market forces (compensation, work environment, great projects, geography, etc.) usually even any type of this behavior out eventually. As a company I might be able to theoretically attract the top 30 Java Developers in the world to my company – but what’s going to keep all 30 there long-term? Compensation? Maybe for a while – but eventually ROI is going to kick me in the financials. Work Environment? Ok, we got the Wii, and pinball, and you can bring your dog and your kids to work – but again it’s only a matter a time when #5 isn’t going to like #12’s dog and then the dynasty is over. Great work? Ask Google and Apple about this, someone is always going to have a better project or next big thing.

My opinion – don’t worry about a Free Agent Nation – embrace it – go after the best talent you can get and hang on to them as long as you can. Then, start all over again...

Sunrise

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 17, 2009

As a fan of all things “The Sports Guy,” I recently picked up Bill Simmons new book, [“The Book of Basketball”](#) which details his fascination with the NBA. One of the early chapters focuses on “The Secret” of basketball, which Simmons learned from Isiah Thomas at a topless pool in Vegas.

What is "the Secret?"

According to Isiah, “The secret of basketball is that it’s *not* about basketball.”

Isiah details the impact of creating the right team in *The Franchise* by Cameron Stauth:

“It’s not about physical skills. Goes far beyond that. When I first came here, McCloskey took a lot of heat for drafting a small guy. But he knew that the only way our team would rise to the top would be by mental skills, not size or talent. He knew the only way we would acquire those skills was by watching the Celtics and Lakers, because those were the teams winning year in and year out. I also looked at Seattle, who won one year, and Houston, who got to the Finals one year. They both self-destructed the next year. So how come? I read Pat Riley’s book *Show Time* and he talks about “the disease of more.” A team wins it one year and the next year every player wants more minutes, more money, more shots. And it kills them. Our team has been up at the Championship level four years now. We could have easily self-destructed. So I read what Riley was saying, and I learned. I didn’t want what happened to Seattle and Houston to happen to us. But it’s hard not to be selfish. The art of winning is complicated by statistics, which for us becomes money. Well, you gotta fight that, find a way around it. And, I think we have. If we win this, we’ll be the first team in history to win it without a single player averaging 20 points. First team. Ever. We got 12 guys who are totally committed to winning. Every night we found a different person to win it for us.”

For years, the Detroit Pistons struggled to beat the Celtics and Lakers until Jack McCloskey, Pistons GM, made a controversial in-season trade of Adrian Dantley for Mark Aguirre. Simmons writes “Maybe Dantley was a better player than Aguirre, but Aguirre was a better fit for the 1989 Pistons. If they didn’t make that deal, they wouldn’t have won the championship. It was a people trade, not a basketball trade.”

Simmons identified three characteristics about successful teams that went *beyond talent*:

1. They won because they liked each other, knew their roles, ignored statistics, and valued winning over everything else.
2. They won because their players sacrificed to make everyone else happy

3. They won as long as everyone remained on the same page

Team Chemistry

Clearly, Simmons feels chemistry is crucial to the success of the team.

A recent [SHRM poll](#) “*Interviewing Do’s and Don’ts for Job Seekers*,” finds that a majority of HR professionals use chemistry as a major determinant in the hiring decision.

“A closer look shows that 15 percent of HR professionals polled say “chemistry” is 75 percent of the final hire decision while 39 percent of those polled report chemistry is 50 percent of the final decision.”

The Questions

How does one determine that chemistry? Can one easily find those willing to know their role and value team success over their own self-serving interests, particularly in a job interview?

CHAPTER 6

Total Compensation

Imagine waking up in the morning, opening up a copy of USA Today, and suddenly seeing your salary listed there for millions to see. Professional athletes face that scenario every year.

Imagine being the executive who offered that athlete that striking salary. Your decision will be scrutinized and debated in coffee shops and online message boards around the country.

What can HR managers learn about total compensation from the world of sports?

Those Who Play Sports Make More Money Than Couch Potatoes...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 18, 2008

There's always been a school of thought that playing sports as you grow up has value. Regardless of your skill level, the thinking goes that, via sports, you learn valuable lessons about persistence, competition and how to be a good teammate. [Lee wrote about it over at Fistful of Talent earlier this week](#). I agree with those thoughts, but would stop short of saying that sports are the only way to learn those lessons.

Apparently, being active in sports may also be valuable when you're all grown up. From [the Wall Street Journal](#) (hat tip to Capitalist reader Christopher):



"Playing sports at least once a month may have as big an impact on your long-run earnings as an additional year of schooling.

That's the conclusion of a [study](#) published by the [Centre for Economic Policy Research](#) that explores the relationship between leisure sports and labor market outcomes. Its author, [Michael Lechner](#) of the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland, takes a rigorous look at how the decision to play sports influences one's wages years down the road. Using survey data that followed the lives of thousands of Germans from 1984 to 2006, the German Socio-Economic Panel study, Mr. Lechner found that sports-playing adults saw a boost in income of about 1,200 euros per year over 16 years when compared to their less active

peers. That translates into a 5-10% rate of return on sports activities, roughly equal to the benefit of an extra year's worth of education.

It turns out, according to Mr. Lechner's calculations, that only about one-fifth of that increase comes as a result of better health. Some of that unexplained component could be chalked up to social networking benefits. In fact, the sports-playing men in Mr. Lechner's study reported a significantly higher level of "social functioning" than did the less active men. The fact that the German survey followed people over time allowed Mr. Lechner to compare people with the same amount of sports activity in their past. So former high school athletes were only compared with others with a similar amount of experience."

Interesting to see some science behind this, and more interesting to note it's about participation in sports as an adult, not the lessons learned as a child. They even control, in the study, to compare adults who had similar activity levels as a child. So they're comparing the child sports prodigies with each other.

Me? I'm still hooping like Jim Carrey in Cable Guy. Making friends and influencing others just like him. We usually play prison rules over at the Y - you should stop by next week.

The Free-Agent Machine

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 6, 2010



The teams in the National Basketball Association, (NBA), operate under the constraint of a 'salary cap'. Essentially, each team has the same maximum dollar amount that they are permitted to spend on player salaries (with a few exceptions/caveats). The idea behind the salary cap is two-fold: it gives the team owners some predictability and control over the largest piece of their cost structure (player salaries), while also (at least theoretically), contributing towards increased competitive balance across the league since no team can simply load up on all the best, highest-paid players.

But recent NBA history, with teams like the Lakers, Celtics, and a few years ago, the Bulls all enjoying extended periods of high performance while operating under the same salary cap constraints suggests that management, coaching, talent evaluation, and support staffs (all not subject to a salary cap by the way), all have a significant impact on overall success. Said differently, each team can only acquire about \$55 million of 'talent', but the resources, support, development, and motivation of that talent may matter just as much to winning games and championships.

The NBA, in addition to the team salary cap, also has an official start to 'free agent' season, the date from which players that have completed their contracts are free to change teams. This period started on July 1. On televised analysis and commentary of where the most highly sought after free agents would sign ([LeBron James](#), [Chris Bosh](#), [Dwyane Wade](#), etc), much of the discussion centers around salary cap considerations, as each team only has so much

available budget to spend (which varies based on the amount the team already has committed to other players). [ESPN](#) on its SportsCenter shows has NBA experts manipulate giant touchscreen displays with the ability to 'slide' free agents to potential destination teams, while calculating the salary cap implications dynamically. It is a pretty cool technology, especially when you see middle-aged former NBA coaches and executives occasionally struggle to master its nuances.

But what the [free-agent machine](#) can't do of course, is evaluate any of the scores of other things that go a long way to determining team success. A player's 'fit' into the system of play, the relationship they may have with the coach, how the 'left-over' players will adjust to the new big name signee, and whether or not a player's past success on his former team will be transferable to the new team. And perhaps most importantly whether or not the relationship the player developed with his former teammates was a much larger contributor to his individual success than anyone realized - let's see how [Amare Stoudemire](#) fares without Steve Nash to work with. I think some of the same considerations have to be taken into account in the 'real' world of organizations where most of us operate. When a 'free-agent' joins the team, often for a better opportunity manifested in more pay, more prestigious title, or a chance to play on a winning team, the simple fact that they scored the big contract, landed the big title, etc. are no guarantee that the 'fit' will be right and that past demonstrated success will continue in the future in the new environment.

When free-agents jump to a new team, everything changes for them, the route they take to the office, the people they talk with every day, the basic systems and processes to find information, and hundreds of other things that you or they probably never thought about. The organization may look at bringing in new talent from the perspective of budget, filling in key skills, or enhancing the organization's reputation, but in the short-term the new team member does not care about any of that.

They have to first get through the mundane details that matter - where can I get coffee in the morning, who do I speak to when I am confused, and just why do I have to request permission to do some of the things that at my old place I did all by myself for the last 5 years?

It is easy to move players around on a cool touchscreen LCD display to make sure the numbers add up.

It is not easy to make sure everything else adds up.

For Labor Day - An Employee Success Story

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 4, 2009

Note : - On the cusp of Labor Day weekend, and with news of yet another increase in the US unemployment rate, this story of success, both for the employee and the organization I thought would be a refreshing change from the depressing employment news.



This past Saturday night I attended the [Rochester Redwings](#) (AAA Baseball) game. It was as always a fantastic night, Redwings baseball is great family entertainment, and the organization really knows how to put customers first.

During and after the game the Redwings took time to recognize the service and achievements of their General Manager, Dan Mason, who was celebrating his 20-year anniversary of employment with the club. The image on the right is a commemorative poster that was handed out to fans entering the game. Certainly a wonderful accomplishment and it is apparent the continued success of the club has much to do with his leadership.

What I found interesting in the brief remarks Mr. Mason made during the on-field ceremony was the appreciation and respect with which he spoke of the team's President (his boss) and many of the former employees and managers of the team he had worked with in the last 20 years.

Mr. Mason made a specific point to mention not just how well he had personally been treated during his time with the team, but also how well the organization had treated his entire family. A strong impression was that the team had really embraced the Mr. Mason **and** his family and that a deep mutual appreciation and respect had developed.

In minor-league sports, there is a strong undercurrent for players, managers, and executives of a 'move up or move out' mentality. Players are putting in their time, honing their skills to try and reach the major leagues, the ultimate goal for all of them. Front-office staff and management as well are frequently just biding their time in long hour, low pay positions, getting important experience in the sports business that they hope to leverage later in their careers.

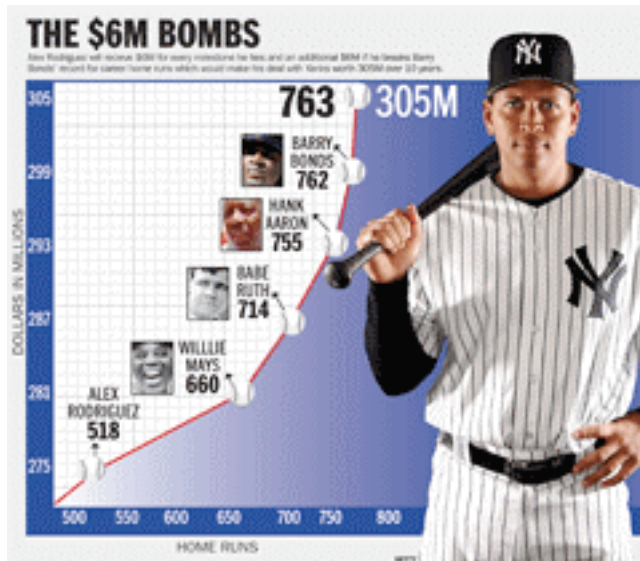
A successful executive like Mr. Mason surely must have had many opportunities to move on, perhaps to a larger market, possibly to a major league team. The fact that he has stayed with the Redwings to me is a testament to the ability of an organization, even a small one with limited resources, can engage and attract talented employees. How do the Redwings do this? Through a combination of genuine care for the well-being of the staff and their families, a clear focus on the organization's mission and goals, and a culture that emphasizes fun, experimentation, and excitement. Perhaps Mr. Mason could have left years ago, but for various reasons he has not, and a minor-league franchise like the Redwings has been able to retain major league talent.

What are some other ways that you have seen successful small organizations find, attract, and retain 'big-time' talent?

Long-term deals - Are they for jocks only?

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 27, 2009



Source - nydailynews.com

If you work for company in the United States, and are not a member of a Union, it is quite likely your employment agreement is know as 'Employment at-will'. What is Employment at-will? From LegalDictionary.com we find:

Traditionally, U.S. employers have possessed the right to discharge their employees at will for any reason, be it good or bad. The "at-will" category encompasses all employees who are not protected by express employment contracts that state that they may be fired only for good cause. "Good cause" requirements are typically a part of collective bargaining agreements negotiated by employee unions; nonunion workers rarely have this form of protection.

But you know what category of worker in the US frequently gets the protection and security of guaranteed employment contracts?

Professional athletes.

These top professional athletes in sports like baseball and basketball can sometime agree to contracts upwards of five years, and the very best can command staggering compensation:

Alex Rodriguez of the Yankees recently agreed to a 10-year deal that may pay him up to \$305M.

Not bad.

A-Rod is a top player, an all-time great, and it makes sense for the Yankees to lock up his services for essentially the remainder of his pro career. A-Rod can't decide on his own to jump ship and join the Red Sox next season.

But most organizations do not have the same assurances and control over their stars and top performers. Almost all of your top players are working under Employment-at-will arrangements. The best java developer, marketing analyst, or senior accountant can pack up their desks and march out tomorrow, maybe even to one of your competitors.

Almost all companies are willing to take the chance that great talent will leave in exchange for the ability to adjust staffing levels, downsize, and have total flexibility in workforce deployment.

However, if the latest economic data is to be believed, the long downturn is showing signs of ending, and leaders will soon be faced with more challenges.

A recent article in [Forbes](#) reports that over half of senior executives surveyed are extremely concerned about key employee retention once the recession ends:

65% reported they were highly or very highly concerned that high-potential talent and leadership would leave once the economy turns. And 52% of surveyed executives predicted an increase in voluntary turnover at their companies once the recession ends, four times the number expecting a decrease

The Forbes piece goes on to offer many familiar strategies to help retain high performers: increased engagement efforts, modifying compensation plans, and holding executives responsible for retention. Good ideas, but the article makes no mention of the strategy used in pro sports to ensure the best available talent won't simply walk out the door for a better deal somewhere else.

Contracts.

Why shouldn't the organization offer two or three-year deals to 'lock up' the very top tier of performers?

The organization can get the benefit of knowing (for at least a couple of years) that this critical talent will remain with your firm, and the employee gets at least some near term job security, even more important after the job losses of the last two years.

Of course these contracts limit the organization's flexibility to change course, and downsize, but if they are given to just the top tier of performers, then those are the last ones you would let go anyway, right?

And I don't want to hear about any 'double-standard' complaints, A-Rod has a 10 year \$300M contract because he is a star, Nick Swisher 'only' plays under a 5 year \$26M deal because he's a role player. Nick understands he's no A-Rod, and somehow he manages to show up at work every day and do his job.

So what do you think, time to 'lock-up' some of your star players?

King James' New Compensation Package

BY TIM SACKETT

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED MAY 18, 2010



Many of you might have missed 2010's most impactful recruitment of any individual in any industry - one of those once in lifetime events - kind of like the Yankees getting Babe Ruth - or Toyota getting their hands on Fritz Henderson - or the Portland Trailblazers getting Sam Bowie in the 1984 NBA Draft (oh wait, they could have gotten Jordan...). What we are talking about is life changing - like cats and dogs living together, this has the potential to change our entire American culture.

Now for those who aren't avid FOT readers, you might have missed this big news, but with the Cleveland Cavaliers melting down in the NBA's Eastern Conference Semifinals, LeBron (King) James became a free agent and this, folks, is a once in a life time event for a handful of NBA franchises who will attempt to recruit him to their city. Of course, you have the favorites - New York (large media market, tons of cap room) - Chicago (kind of like New York, but smaller and nicer) - Cleveland (kind of like Chicago, but not) - all can pay him a "King's Ransom," and he'll make more than he'll ever be able to spend in a lifetime... but probably not more than his entourage can spend in a lifetime. It really is a quest for him to become the world's first Billion dollar athlete.

From a recruitment standpoint, LeBron is really going to have to weigh the full package being offered - the fringe benefits, the extras, the icing on top of the cake. Because, of course, it's not

just about the cash comp only. And this, my friends, is why I think The King will most definitely choose New York. Why? One reason - free strippers. From the NBC Sports.com's Rick Chandler, who discovered the secret weapon for the New York Knicks... an [NYC Strip Club Offering LeBron Free LapDances to Join the Knicks:](#)

Sure, LeBron James is getting wooed by million-dollar offers from major corporations to make the move to NYC, but does money really talk the way Strippers walk? With the Knicks in talks to convert LeBron James into a New Yorker, offers are pouring in across the city from businesses which support this move, but the most recent offer may have just sealed the deal.

SCORES, the legendary NYC Gentlemen's Club has announced today that they will offer James the following if he signs with the Knicks:

- * A lifetime pass to receive free lap dances;*
- * A dedicated "LeBron James Day" where each girl will wear his jersey when stepping onto stage, in lieu of their robe;*
- * A lifetime pass for complimentary dinners at Robert's Restaurant.*

And don't you underestimate the power of free lifetime lap dances in the decision making process of a 25 year old male - with about 50 of his closest friends, family, agents, agent's assistants, security detail, personal chef, accountant, shoe shiner, etc. hanging around wanting something to do between the 3 hours of basketball he plays about 97 times per year. Any good HR/Comp Pro knows how to build an enticing compensation strategy to motivate and attract the best talent - and I have to hand it to New York, the New York Knicks and Scores for their creativity and completeness in coming up with their compensation design to recruit LeBron. Excellent Job New York - You've done it again!

CHAPTER 7

Employee and Labor Relations

As of the publication date of this document, the NFL has locked out its players. Ten players have subsequently been arrested since the lockout began. Another star NFL, Brandon Marshall was stabbed with the alleged assailant, his wife (and you think you have employee relations problems at your company).

Meanwhile, a looming NBA lockout has already caused the cancellation of one of the authors' favorite events, the 2011 NBA Summer League.

What can HR managers learn about employee and labor relations from the world of sports?

Email Signatures and Sneakers: The Perfect Place for Employees to Wear Their Cause...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 10, 2010



In case you missed it, NBA rising Megastar Kevin Durant wrote "1972" on his sneakers before the quarterfinal of World Championships with Russia this week.

Not down with what that means? What's it got to do with HR? Check out the former [via Yahoo Sports](#) and I'll cover the HR angle after the jump:

"Really, anyone who has ever laced up his sneakers for an NBA game -- whatever their background, home country, rooting interest, or age -- should at least have a passing knowledge of [the controversial finish to the gold-medal men's basketball game in the 1972 Munich Olympics](#).

But when you actually see the best player on the 2010 Team USA men's team reference a game that happened 16 years before he was born by writing "1972" on his sneakers -- in a game against Russia played 38 years ago *to the day* that then-USSR beat the USA on a disputed series of calls -- well, this is just beyond cool.

That's what [Kevin Durant\(notes\)](#) did Thursday. He wore "1972" on his shoes while [dropping 33 points in his team's 89-79 victory over a game Russian squad](#). The fact that a 21-year-old superstar is referencing that medal-less ([by choice](#)) 1972 team in such an understated way? And not in a showy, jingoistic stance; but in (to use a term familiar to those who were around for the years leading up to the dissolution) a show of solidarity with that 1972 team? Fantastic."

Let's cover what's important first. Durant goes by the handle "KD", which I think is ultra-cool.

Sounds great doesn't it? SB, TS, LH, KD - which one you are you going to migrate to? The answer is obvious to me...

The fact that a kid is referencing the history of the game is cool and shows why Durant is likely to be the NBA's top star in 2 years. Mad skills plus humility/respect for others ultimately will elevate him to that level. How can you not have Durant at the top of your list? Holding 1972 against the Ruskies? His moms was probably 10 at the time. Priceless.

Now for the HR angle. What's the equivalent of writing a message or cause on your sneakers in the workplace? It's hard to write on dress shoes, so the most visible avenue becomes.. You guessed it - the email signature.

Why don't we see more employees trying to represent causes important to them via email signatures? You can say it's against policy, but let's face it - it's the wild wild west out there, and someone has to complain before it would have to come down.

For added effect, consider the following:

1. If an employee has passion, it's likely to be a cause that many consider to be worthy.
2. The cause may have a connection with a polarizing topic - like lower taxes or the environment. So if it's worthy, it might cause some division...
3. The employees most likely to be passionate are more likely to be your best employees (they've got passion to care).
4. If they're repping a cause and you make them take down the message, you risk a PR nightmare. If they keep it up and you fire them, it's really a nightmare.

At the end of the day, you want employees like Kevin Durant.

I'm shocked more employees don't use their ~~sneakers~~ email signatures to send messages related to what they believe in. Regardless of what our Darth Vader policies say.

They're Luke Skywalker, you're Vader. If they forced you to fire them, they'd find another Death Star.

Go USA. Go Kevin Durant. Never, NEVER hold a press conference called the decision.

You've already shown you're better than that...

Brett Favre and the Packers - Bringing New Meaning to the terms, "Golden Parachute" and "Severance Pay"...

BY KRIS DUNN

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 4, 2008



Does this sound like your company?

- **Superstar retires**, rides into sunset after tearful goodbyes and multiple farewell parties...
- **Company executes succession plan**, put successor in leadership role...
- **Superstar balks** three months later, says he wants to come back into previous role...
- **Company says "no thanks"**, we've got our successor in place - enjoy retirement....
- **Superstar says he's coming back one way or the other**, starts the process to return to the working world, if not with previous company, with someone else...
- **Company blinks** at 11th hour - **offers superstar "golden parachute" professional services contract and severance of \$20-25 Million**, attempts to lock superstar in with included non-compete so he can't go elsewhere....

Of course, it doesn't sound like your company, because it's the NFL. But there are still valuable lessons to learn from the madness. Here are some notes [from Yahoo Sports](#) on the offer the Packers made to Favre to sit home, stay retired, not mess up their succession plan, and not compete with them...

"Brett Favre's reinstatement to the NFL was held up again Friday as the three-time MVP mulled getting paid not to play through a marketing deal with the Green Bay Packers that could resolve the standoff over his retirement.

The potential agreement, worth a reported \$20 million over 10 years, might end Favre's bid to return just months after retiring. It also would likely keep him from reporting to Packers training camp and a team that is not planning to start him at quarterback for the first time since 1992.

After talking to Packers president and CEO Mark Murphy about the marketing deal Wednesday, Favre confirmed he was considering it to ESPN on Thursday."

Wow - only in America. I took the negative emails in stride when I said that Brett Favre was [now messing up a succession plan near you](#), but the world kind of came around to the fact that Favre was flip-flopping more than a political candidate after the Woodstock pictures showed up on CNN. Now, the Packers are flip-flopping all over the place.

What can you learn from this for your "regular" workplace? Here are some of my thoughts; I'm sure you have some of your own.

1. If you've got a Superstar executive who's retiring, and you don't want them to compete elsewhere, lock them up early - the Packers are saying the marketing PR deal has been on the table for awhile - really? Would Favre have turned down \$20 Million two weeks after he retired? Companies do it with CEOs all the time by drifting them into a board seat, making them a paid consultant, etc. If you have any concerns, lock the individual down early.

2. If you are trying to move a succession plan along and need to make space for a successor, find a position for the incumbent elsewhere in the organization - Not an option for the Packers, but many companies who are anxious to get on with a succession plan will make room for the incumbent elsewhere in the organization. Who hasn't seen the press release showing an EVP of Global Sales being moved laterally to a strategy or product management position. Again, not an option for the Packers, but for the corporate America players, there's always a way.

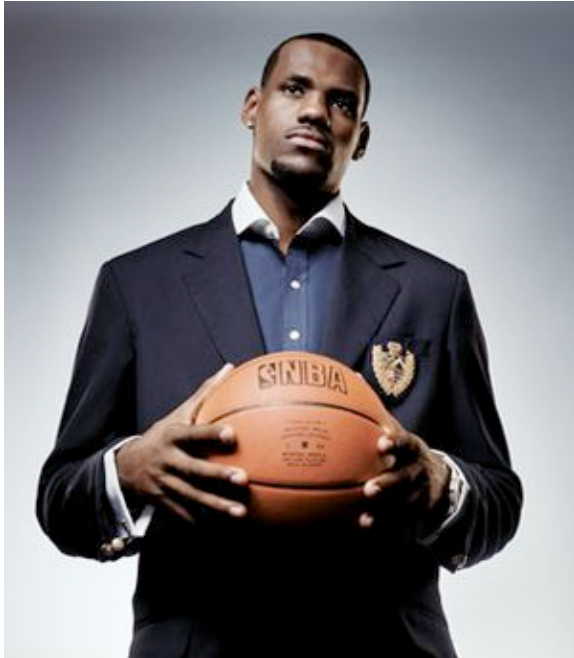
3. Be decisive - Put all the options on the table and execute quickly. Favre's an American icon, but the flip flopping and the "stand behind the plan/man" stance of the Packers was winning the PR war. Then they flip and offer to pay him \$20 million the weekend he's supposed to report. Now, you've lost all that public goodwill by the sloppiness of timing. If that was an option, it could have been positioned more effectively early on in the process. Now you've got everybody confused about who actually is right. Nice work.

By the time you read this, Favre's already reported to camp, has been traded or is warming up his jokes for the rubber chicken circuit as part of the \$20 Million dollar deal. Regardless of the outcome, the circus has been entertaining to watch....

The LeBron Effect: Downsizing at a Company Near You

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AUGUST 4, 2010



Hey, did you hear the news about [LeBron](#)? In case you missed it 'The Chosen One' made '[The Decision](#)' to leave his team of seven years, the Cleveland Cavaliers, to join Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh, and nine guys that look like [Tim Sackett](#) on the Miami Heat.

This was huge news in the world of sports. Having the generally regarded best player in the league, (James), flanked by one of the top five (Wade), and top ten (Bosh), players in the game sets the Heat up for the next five years or so, and most observers expect the dynamic trio to produce a string of championships.

The Heat fans, caught up in the excitement and anticipation for a fantastic year, quickly snatched up all the available season tickets for the upcoming 2010-2011 season, making a ticket to a Heat game, pretty much the hottest thing going on South Beach.

Awesome times for the Heat franchise, the players, their fans, and the team employees. The best player, the King, joins the club, all the tickets are sold, merchandise is flying off the shelves,

and everybody is dying to be courtside this year to see James, Wade, and Bosh beat the Knicks by 40 points.

Yep, good news all around. Except of course if your job as a Heat employee was to sell season and corporate tickets. You know, the tickets that were all bought up in about five minutes after 'The Decision' was announced. The tickets that just a few months ago you were beating the bushes, working the CRM system, and dreaming up two-for-one and 'free tacos if we score 100 points' schemes to try and move sales. If that was your job, better start looking for a new gig since - ['With Heat season tickets sold out, team fires season sales staff'](#).

You read that right, soon after the monumental good fortune of landing James (and Bosh), riding a wave of unparalleled interest and excitement, and selling all of their available season tickets, the Heat helped share the good fortune around the organization by sacking about 30 of their sales staff. While this mass firing could be interpreted as being kind of cold and a bit heartless, when you consider reality that the Heat **'can sell tickets without really trying'**. One fired staffer noted - **"They let us go because there was really nothing left to do anymore."**

In reality, the firing of the season ticket sales staff is representative of any major external force that can without warning irreparably change one's value and position in an organization. It could be a merger with another company, the sudden divestiture of a division or a product line, or the implementation of a technology solution making you and your skills suddenly expendable.

Should the Heat have done more to try and retain these workers? Should they have developed the employees beyond their narrowly defined roles as 'season ticket sellers', and into more diverse 'entertainment consultants?' Maybe.

But if you only bring one thing to the table, even if that one thing is today critical to the success of the organization, that does not mean it will **always** be a critical skill. Maybe these sales employees got complacent, and in their traditional view, selling season tickets was an absolutely essential organizational function - **top line baby!** No matter how bad things would get for the organization, people that drive the top line would be the safest, right?

And it would have been. Until, of course, the King came to town, and did their jobs for them, and better than them. Without even trying.

Staff Meetings and Broken Jaws

BY STEVE BOESE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED OCTOBER 25, 2009



The head coach of the National Football League's Oakland Raiders team, Tom Cable, was relieved that the prosecutor in California's Napa County [declined to pursue charges](#) that Cable allegedly assaulted Assistant Coach Randy Hanson in a meeting this past August.

If you are not familiar with the case the basic events that are not disputed are as follows:

On August 4, 2009 - Cable (the boss effectively), held a meeting with Hanson and three other assistant coaches, John Marshall, Lionel Washington, and Willie Brown.

During the meeting there was some kind of argument and altercation between Cable and Hanson.

The following day Hanson was seen at a hospital and diagnosed with a broken jaw.

What is disputed is the precise nature of the altercation, and whether or not Cable actually assaulted Hanson. At least according to the prosecutor, there were enough inconsistencies in Hanson's version of events that pursuing criminal charges was not warranted.

But the prosecutors did note that the other coaches in the meeting claimed that Cable became angry and rushed toward Hanson, but Washington stepped between the two. Cable then ran into Washington, who bumped into Hanson and knocked him out of his chair. The witnesses also told authorities that Cable then grabbed Hanson by the shirt but never struck or threatened him.

Ok, so maybe 'rushing' someone, knocking them out of a chair, and grabbing them by the shirt separately or together don't rise to the level of criminal assault, but I am pretty sure they fail any standard of what is appropriate workplace conduct.

So certainly the Raiders have suspended Cable, perhaps even terminated him, right? I mean you can't go around 'rushing' and grabbing the shirts of subordinates can you?

Apparently, if you work for the Raiders you can. No disciplinary action has been taken on Cable by the team or the NFL (although the league has not ruled it out taking some action). He might get fired anyway for performance reasons, as of this writing the Raiders are 2-4 and rank near the bottom of the league in most important statistical categories.

And Hanson?

He was placed on essentially what amounts to paid leave while this gets sorted out.

Five employees go to a staff meeting, one leaves with a broken jaw and he is the only one to suffer any adverse effect in the workplace.

Ladies and gentlemen, your 2009 Oakland Raiders!

Would You Work With Tiger Woods?

BY TIM SACKETT

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED APRIL 6, 2010



There has been so much media attention around Tiger coming back to professional golf to play in the Master's this week. Most of the attention is on whether or not his wife will be there, how Tiger will handle the pressure of media crush, or what the reaction from the fans will be like... What I have found most interesting though was a small article from Comcast Sports, [Finding the 2 Players in Tiger's group at Augusta](#) that delved into those other professional golfers who must now play side-by-side with Tiger in his first tournament since his scandal. From the article:

How will they decide who plays with Woods?

``With great care," said Colin Montgomerie, who is not eligible for the Masters this year.

``You'd almost have to ask for volunteers. There's a number of players that will be looking at the draw sheet - I believe it comes out on Tuesday afternoon - and will be delighted if they are not playing with Tiger on this occasion."

So who gets him? Perhaps the better question is who wants him?

``I would say it would be a tough pairing, to tell you the truth," said 49-year-old Kenny Perry, who lost in a playoff last year. ``I'm old enough to maybe handle that. Maybe you need some hillbilly like me to do that. But it will be different, because I'm sure the players will be focused

on Augusta, yet focused on what's going on with him and paying attention to what he's doing out there."

This begs an interesting question: Would You Want to Work side-by-side with a Tiger Woods? Not the Tiger Woods you loved 6 months ago and would have paid big to play a round of golf with, but the Tiger Woods right now in all of this ~~glory~~ misery. I personally know guys who have waited hours standing around a golf green at a tournament just to get a chance to see Tiger take a putt. But now they would be ridiculed to do the same thing. Did Tiger get worse at golf? Did grown men really view Tiger as their hero?

I personally like American sports heroes best when they are down - after testing positive for drugs, on the way to jail after being arrested for hitting their spouse, after being pulled over with 400 pounds of pot in the trunk of their car. This is when we really get to see our heroes in real life - the ESPN interview and Barbara Walters specials don't tell us anything we didn't know - I want to know the athlete when they're face down on the hood of the car getting cuffed, or ducking to miss getting hit by his wife swinging a 7-iron at his head. That's real life - and that's the Tiger I want to know.

And what about in your work environment? It's happened - Ted in Accounting has an affair with Mary in Marketing, and can you believe it - Ted's wife was pregnant at the time, and Mary's son is disabled - and how could they do this!?!? Organizationally, Ted is a superstar and Mary has 2-times next level potential and pedigree - they're in their own right, bonafide company rock stars. Two consenting adults, didn't work in the same department, wasn't a supervisory relationship, really had nothing to do with business - except it has everything to do with business now - because everyone knows and no one wants to work or interact with either of them.

So, what's a HR pro to do? Unfortunately, it's sticky, but it's also too common in our organizations. If it's not infidelity, it's DUI's, or bankruptcy, or other domestic issues, and HR is the one that has to get everyone to play well with each other the day after. These are the challenging moments that will test your resolve and many times your character and values as a HR Pro. There is no perfect answer on how to handle these issues because each one is issue specific, organizational specific and talent specific (don't kid yourself - it's much harder to cut a rock star than a bottom-feeder - and I'll bet if you can say you would treat everyone the same - you haven't faced this type of issue yet - because Executives don't view all your employees the same!).

Regardless of how you solve this issue - promise me one thing - don't take the easy way out and hand them the EAP card! Your organization expects more than that.

Best Places To Work: ESPN

Edition

BY TIM SACKETT

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For regular readers of *Fistful of Talent*, you'll notice that we have an affinity for the ESPN show *Pardon The Interruption* (PTI) where hosts Tony Kornheiser and Mike Wilbon face-off during a half-hour show devoted to commenting on sports - basically it's two knowledgeable (and funny) sports guys having an opinion of what's going on each day in sports. For the most part, they say what's on their mind, and try to make it interesting - we've modeled our own [FOTv show](#) after PTI.

Interestingly enough, [PTI host Kornheiser was suspended by ESPN](#) this past week for remarks he made about the wardrobe of fellow ESPN employee and SportsCenter host Hannah Storm.

From the article:

ESPN has suspended host Tony Kornheiser from his television talk show "Pardon the Interruption" for two weeks for comments he made on the radio last week about SportsCenter anchor Hannah Storm's clothing...

...Kornheiser described an outfit Storm was wearing at ESPN last week as "horrible," saying her shirt was too tight and looked "like she has sausage casing wrapping around her upper body."

Kornheiser said he had called Storm to personally apologize for the remarks.

“If you put a live microphone in front of somebody, eventually that person will say something wrong,” Kornheiser said on his show Tuesday. “This was one of the times I said something wrong.”

Storm declined to comment, ESPN spokesman Josh Krulewitz said.

ESPN has been troubled by a series of workplace issues involving alleged misconduct by its television personalities, though they have involved behavior off the air.

It's an interesting dilemma we face in asking our people to have opinions. The dilemma is that once people get comfortable in giving their opinion, they move closer and closer to a gray area that can get them into trouble. Did what Tony do on PTI constitute a suspension? When it comes to workplace culture and how the organization wants to be viewed professionally, heck Yes! When it comes to workplace harassment, again, I would say the suspension is due. The problem I have is putting someone (Tony) into a position, where to get ratings he must have interesting, funny, strong opinions - and then disciplining him when such opinions come out.

It's a classic Employee Relations issue that any HR Pro will face in their career, and probably multiple times. An employee trying to be entertaining, funny, interesting, etc., goes too far, steps over the line and says something that is hurtful and/or disparaging. As an HR Pro, the call is pretty simple. You must react, and weigh how damaging the remarks were to the individual, to the employee and to the culture - along knowing that the decision you make will be watched closely by the entire staff. Go too harsh or too light, and you risk mutiny by the troops in support of one or the other sides involved.

Context is everything in these issues - if Tony would have had Hannah co-hosting with him on the show when the comments were made, and she had a chance to retort about his awful appearance, do you think there would be a suspension involved? My guess is Tony and Hannah probably get along very well as professionals and have high respect for each other. I believe ESPN was appropriate in their response, they didn't right ditch - left ditch this one as we sometimes do as HR Pros. They measured the response from internally and externally, made sure both parties were satisfied with the outcome, then executed the response. From an external view point, looks like the HR Pros at ESPN did a pretty good job.

What do you think? Should ESPN have done more or less? And what was Hannah Storm thinking with that outfit?!

Guilty Partner

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

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Growing up, my favorite baseball player was Paul Molitor. As a youngster, I remember heading to Kobs Field on the Michigan State campus to see the Gophers play the Spartans, and was awestruck at how Molitor destroyed MSU pitching. I remember looking at the free agent draft results in 1977 at my grandma's house in Milwaukee and getting excited that the Brewers drafted "The Ignitor" with the 3rd pick. I made many a trip to County Stadium to watch Molitor and Robin Yount, Gorman Thomas, Jim Gantner, Ben Ogilvie, Sixto Lezcano, and Cecil Cooper lead the Brewers to many a successful season including a trip to the World Series in 1982, as well as cheering "Molly" on as he chased DiMaggio's hitting streak culminating in 39 in 1987.

So, my mouth was agape when he decided to take the free agent route and sign with the Toronto Blue Jays in 1992. I was Shocked! Outraged! Aghast! He was a Milwaukee Brewer! He had always been a Milwaukee Brewer! He was my Milwaukee Brewer. How could he abandon all his fans and switch to another team? How could he betray my allegiance? It was nearly enough to make me give up watching baseball.

Fast forward 17 years, and the saga of Brett Favre, my favorite player on my favorite football team, the Green Bay Packers. Those familiar feelings rose up once again. While the circumstances may be slightly different, it was hard to see Favre put on another uniform, particularly that of the Purple and Gold (ugh!).

This week, I am yet again seeing another icon in my life think of changing jobs. This time, its Michigan State coach Tom Izzo. He is truly the face of Michigan State University. He turned a slightly better than average basketball program into the best in the country according to ESPN writer Andy Katz. Since 1999, Michigan State has won 6 Big Ten Titles, been to 7 Elite 8s, 6 Final Fours, and a National Championship. Now, he is possibly going to leave the MSU campus and take the head coaching job with the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Strangely, I am not so upset. People change jobs all the time, particularly in sports. Loyalty and long career tenures with one organization are not so commonplace anymore. I see the relationships I build with students diminish as students graduate and move on to the next chapter of their lives. Perhaps, it is because it hasn't actually happened yet. He could still remain in East Lansing. Perhaps, I am thankful for the past 12 years under his watch.

Perhaps, it is simply just maturation.

Ultraviolence

BY MATTHEW STOLLAK

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In this week's issue on *The New Yorker*, [Malcolm Gladwell](#) has a fascinating look at football, dogfighting and brain damage.

In the article, he cites a recent University of Michigan study:

...late last month the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research released the findings of an N.F.L.-funded phone survey of just over a thousand randomly selected retired N.F.L. players—all of whom had played in the league for at least three seasons. Self-reported studies are notoriously unreliable instruments, but, even so, the results were alarming. Of those players who were older than fifty, 6.1 per cent reported that they had received a diagnosis of “dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or other memory-related disease.” That's five times higher than the national average for that age group. For players between the ages of thirty and forty-nine, the reported rate was nineteen times the national average. (The N.F.L. has distributed five million dollars to former players with dementia.)

Given this differential, has technology improved to address the issue and protect the player? Gladwell cites the influence of activist Chris Nowinski, a former football player who has experienced six concussions:

“People love technological solutions,” Nowinski went on. “When I give speeches, the first question is always: ‘What about these new helmets I hear about?’ What most people don't realize is that we are decades, if not forever, from having a helmet that would fix the problem. I mean, you have two men running into each other at full speed and you think a little bit of plastic and padding could absorb that 150 gs of force?”

Last week, I had the opportunity to take my human resource management class to a tour of Lambeau Field and meet with a representative of their HR Department. It was quite the experience to see behind-the-scenes, walk on the field, and here about the business side of the organization. However, we did not get an opportunity to hear about the player personnel aspects of the organization.

A business like the NFL is unique in that it puts its key employees each week in harm's way. Certainly, these employees know the risks involved and, perhaps, the salaries they earn serves as adequate hazard pay for the work they perform. Brain damage is not the only health issue. Congress has looked into football injuries [in the past](#) and calls have been made to address this issue at the [Congressional level](#).

Does the NFL have a greater obligation to protect its employees? Is the NFL Players Association doing a disservice to its rank-and-file by not taking greater effort to look out for the economic, let alone physical, well-being of its employees? Is this something that should be addressed at the high school or college level?

About the Authors

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