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CULTURE, TALENT MANAGEMENT

# Want to Better Your Business? Take a Few Lessons From Baseball

by [John Hoover](#) and [John Shalhoub](#) on Oct 27, 2014, 10:05 AM | [0 Comments](#)

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Although characteristics found in almost any sport can be compared to business (great coaching, teamwork, cooperation, refuse-to-lose attitude, etc), business is most like baseball.

As we watch the San Francisco Giants battle it out with the Kansas City Royals for the [2014 World Series title](#), we are reminded that winning in baseball and succeeding in business requires talent, a good manager, great coaches, and leadership.

In baseball, the teams that generally make it to the playoffs are those that combine the best managers, coaching and player talent, opportunities, and front office leadership. In business, similar combinations result in success. Any one or even two of the aforementioned elements is not enough.

It's the combination of all of them that spells success.



## Individuals play in a team format

Baseball is a game played by individual contributors playing in a team format, says [John Shalhoub](#), HR Director for Aflac Global Investments. At any given moment, only one individual has a play on the ball. It is up to the individual players to rise to the occasion or not. Once the ball leaves the

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pitcher's hand, the pitcher is out of the play, unless the batter hits a comebacker or lays down a bunt.

In that case, the pitcher might have another play to make. Once the pitcher picks up the bunt and hurls it toward first base (if that's the most appropriate play), the next individual to perform is the first baseman; hopefully, backed up by the catcher.

The catcher cannot, however, block, body-check, or tackle the base runner, thus assisting the first baseman. It's the first baseman's play to make if the pitcher picking up the bunt has done his and makes a good throw.

It's a team effort, make no mistake, because everybody needs to make the individual effort to do his or her job at the moment it is most needed. But, a baseball team's performance is a collection of individual performances that are so individualized that they become statistics — individual and organizational.

Two players can't be credited with the same hit or strikeout. Two players can't be credited with a catch or an error. Only one run is allowed per player at a time.

## The art of leadership in baseball

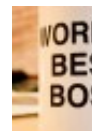
Add all of them up and you have team statistics; the most important of which come October is wins and losses — those everybody on the team is credited with.

Leadership in baseball is never in a position to jump in and do a player's job unless the leader takes the player out of the game and activates himself as a player. In baseball culture, that rarely if ever happens, at least at the major or minor league level.

Leadership, however, selects the lineup, establishes a batting order, positions the team defensively on the field and calls plays. The leader or manager in baseball is also an individual contributor, as are the assistant coaches. The manager pep talks players, disciplines players, substitutes one player for another based on performance, incapacity, the need to counter the opposition's move, or change the line up to better address a change in circumstances.

An avid baseball fan and Little League coach, John Shalhoub has mentored and coached established and emerging leaders for years to look to their individual performance first and, "Do what they need to do," in order to add the most value to the team they are playing on.

As a Little League coach, Shalhoub spends much more time coaching individuals than he does coaching the team as a whole. "Strong and skilled individual contributors, working collaboratively for the corporate good, comprise the best teams," Shalhoub says. Strong and skilled individual contributors, working only for their individual recognition and reward, will hardly resemble a team at all. When Shalhoub mentors and coaches individual contributors, he is coaching the team.



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## Managing your workplace like baseball team

Shalhoub's advice on how to manage your corporate team like a baseball team is to:

- **Coordinate** — Keep everyone and everything on task and focused. As true for a successful baseball team as it is for a successful department or entire organization.
- **Build morale** — Keeping morale up within a company, especially through difficult times, is as important as keeping the moral of baseball players up if they are slumping or trailing in a game.
- **Train and develop** — You need to train, develop, and coach your corporate talent every bit as much as baseball teams need to train, develop, and coach their players in order to get the most production out of them.
- **Have a talent strategy** — You don't put struggling employees or baseball players into difficult positions if they don't have the skills needed and are not mentally up to the task.

Business is like baseball. Watch the series and imagine the possibilities at work. Your office should be your personal and collective *Field of Dreams*.

*John Hoover, PhD, is a bestselling author with over a dozen books to his credit, including "The Coaching Connection" and his satirical "How to Work for an Idiot." He is certified as an executive coach by the International Coach Federation and a coaching supervisor by the Coaching Supervision Academy. Dr. Hoover is the thought leader behind the Contextual Coaching practice at [Partners in Human Resources International](#), and teaches "How to Manage the Coaching Function in Organizations" online through [Fielding Graduate University](#). Contact him at [jHoover@partners-international.com](mailto:jHoover@partners-international.com).*

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