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Put Me In, Coach!

Staff Writers

Listen to the keys coaches utilize and you'll win a lot of games for your printing business in the months ahead.

Flowers are blooming. Birds are singing. Grass is greening. It's baseball season!

Fans are filling ballparks across the country once again as the great game takes center stage. Personally, this will be the thirty-seventh year I've rooted for the Texas Rangers since their move to DFW in 1972. I'm still waiting for that first playoff series victory. It's also my tenth season cheering for the Astros following our relocation to Houston. Unfortunately, merging my two favorite teams into one wouldn't be enough to overcome the talent on the Red Sox or Mets.

Like most kids who grew up when baseball was the most popular sport, I dreamed of being a major leaguer. However, I couldn't hit the curveball...nor the fastball...nor a soft, underhand lob from my cousin, whose name was Lisa. I was also a left-handed third baseman, and there isn't a lot of demand for those. So that glorious dream ended at age 13.

The Fundamentals

Then there's my client Jim, a longtime printing center owner in Kansas City. "Fergy" was a pretty good college pitcher circa 1981—even struck out a few guys whose names you'd know. Later, he coached his two boys from Little League through select baseball, traveling the country and succeeding at national tournaments. The kids are in college now at their parents' alma mater and, after sitting idle for a couple of years, Jim felt the urge to get back in the game. So, this spring he's coaching 11- and 12-year-olds for the acclaimed Mac-N-Seitz Baseball Club.

"These are talented kids, but no one's taught them the game at this point," Jim told me recently. "For instance, all nine players move on every play. Fans don't see it, but everyone has somewhere to go wherever the ball is hit. We're learning."

He said their first few months of practices focused on the basics, and over one week-long stretch during spring break the kids never once had a bat in their hands. Instead, they drilled continuously on positioning for throws from the outfield in different situations.

As Jim shared his passion for grooming these kids into outstanding ballplayers, I realized the four things he considers most important to a team's success are also essential to printers. So, grab some peanuts and Cracker Jacks, and consider how these tips will make yours a team of All-Stars.

Single: Knowing

Watching a bunch of kids play baseball is a wonderful sight. However, there's a big difference between first time players and those who participate on competitive travel teams. If your desire is to play at an elite level in your printing business, then it's essential everyone understands their role in helping your team win.

It's not enough to fill out the lineup card and send them out on the field. You have to provide all players continuing instruction on how to be more effective in their positions and guidance on the strategy behind your game plan.

Double: Priorities

Bottom of the ninth. Visiting team leads by a run. Runners on first and third. One out. Batter swings and grounds hard to shortstop. Baseball fans of all ages know that's the perfect scenario for a game-ending 6-4-3 double play.

Sometimes in business, though, employees aren't sure where to throw the ball. So many things come at them so fast they struggle to know what to do next. Your job, as the coach, is to refocus them on the best decision in each moment.

Triple: Corrections

One of the most important roles of a youth baseball coach is to teach players how to stop making the same errors. That requires patience and the ability to communicate effectively on a level kids understand. The same is true in your printing center: It's your responsibility to address areas in need of improvement.

During the conversation when Jim and I discussed baseball, he told me about an \$11,000 mistake his printing company made on a variable data project that week. "It's part of the learning process," he said. "We talked about it, corrected what went wrong, and put processes in place to ensure it won't happen again. Did I like it? No. Did it make me mad? Yes. Did I let my emotions show? No. That wouldn't have changed anything or helped anybody."

Home Run: Confidence

The highlight of my baseball career came when I was 12, as we faced a pitcher who had thrown six no hitters. With two outs in the bottom of the last inning, we hadn't even had a base runner. Naturally, guess who was coming to bat? My coach walked to home plate and told me I was going to get a hit. I took a Ruthian cut at the first pitch—probably with my eyes closed—and somehow made contact...a lot of contact. The ball banged off the centerfield fence. I, of course, with my stellar .086 batting average, stopped at first base, but my coach came running over and gave me a big hug.

A recent survey showed one of the primary reasons young employees leave a company is because they feel a lack of appreciation. Don't let that lead to turnover for you. Look for opportunities to praise your players. They'll surprise you with how they perform when they know you have faith in them.

Sneaking an AM radio under the covers to follow the late night heroics of the boys of summer was a rite of passage for kids who grew up in the era before SportsCenter. Hearing their local version of a Vin Scully, Jack Buck, or Ernie Harwell vividly describe the action brought the majestic images of baseball to life.

Listen to the keys youth coaches utilize and you'll win a lot of games for your printing business in the months ahead. Play ball!

David Handler is the founder of Success Handler, LLC, and previously served as a senior executive at ICED. Since 2003, he's coached clients in the quick printing industry to explore their professional and personal dreams. David actually made it to the Major Leagues—producing 700 games for his beloved Texas Rangers during a 14-year television career. To better lead your team to success, send an email to coach@successhandler.com [mailto:coach@successhandler.com] or visit www.successhandler.com [http://www.successhandler.com].



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