



#801

We're off to see the Wizards. The wonderful Wizards of... Ft Wayne?

I threw out the first pitch today. A perfect strike!

Okay, okay, it was at the Ft. Wayne Wizards game - a minor league team.

Okay, okay, a Class A minor league team.

I did not view them as the lowest level of professional ball players. I saw them as the stars of the future. Kind of like an entry-level salesperson.

And just to keep it in perspective, Ft. Wayne has a huge baseball history. The Fort Wayne Kekiongas won the first professional baseball game ever played in 1871. The first night game was played in Ft. Wayne. And, if that wasn't enough, Alex Rodriguez hit his first home run at Memorial Stadium in Fort Wayne in 1993.

Before the game I got to talk to the Wizards manager, Doug Dascenzo. Doug was a 7-year major league player for the Chicago Cubs, Texas Rangers, and the San Diego Padres.

I asked him what his biggest challenges are when handling a team of young "wannabes." He said, "Each player is an individual and has to be communicated with individually. Heck, some players don't speak much English. And each player has a different skill level, and must be challenged to improve every day."

I asked him, "What's the toughest part of the job?"

"Getting my players to improve slowly rather than all at once." Doug said with an all-knowing smile. "They think because they've done something once or twice that they can go to the next thing. That's wrong thinking. There is no "fast" way into the big leagues. Great players have to execute excellently and improve slowly for years, if they want to play in the big leagues. Most of these kids have played baseball all their lives and still don't know enough to play major league ball. And add to that the personality trait of 'no patience' and you have a team of potentially frustrated people."

Kind of like salespeople.

Each player has his own strengths and weaknesses, and his own level of dedication and determination to make it in the big leagues. And each player has his quirks and peculiarities. One of the Wizards burns his bats when he's in a hitting slump - trying to fire-up his hitting tools.

Baseball is full of characters, and superstitions. Kind of like sales.

And the similarities between baseball and sales don't end there.

Practice has to be a daily occurrence. It's the only way to improve. Master the strategies and nuances of the game, so that making the right moves can be instinctive. More games are lost on mental errors than they are physical errors. Kind of like sales.

Here are some more sales balls - er, I mean baseball musts:

- Be your best every day.
- Learn new things every minute.
- Play to win every second.
- Dedication to excellence, achievement, and hustle.
- Love of the game. Otherwise don't play.
- Living the right kind of life off the field, so you can be your best on the field.

I asked Doug about the biggest challenge he gives his players. "I tell my guys to master three or four elemental aspects of the game each year. Then after three or four years, they have a skill set that will get them in the major leagues," says Dascenzo. "But most young players want to master three or four elements of the game every week, and it's doesn't happen that way. They all know it's one step at a time, but they lack patience to get there."

Same in sales.

Doug's title is manager, but his real jobs are coach, teacher, and leader. He has other coaches for specific tasks. Bob Skube for hitting and Wally Whitehurst (his name sounds like a ballplayer, doesn't it?) for pitching. These three men are dedicated to help the other 24 improve.

The object of baseball is not just to win, but also to develop winners. Same in sales.

These coaches have the future of baseball in their hands. They may not look at it that way, but the players on the team are all hoping for exactly that. They're looking for their chance in the major leagues - and every one of them would be ecstatic if Doug and the other coaches could help them climb the ladder from a to double A, to triple A, and finally to the major leagues.

Your leader has the same responsibility.

The game is about to begin. The announcer bellows, "Throwing out the ceremonial first pitch is sales expert and author Jeffrey Gitomer." I take the ball with a knowing smile, and pitching from a stretch, I wind up and throw a perfect strike. The Wizards top prospect Cedric Hunter caught the ball and smiled.

The pitch only lasted a second, but the thrill and the memory are forever.

If you want a few baseball quotes to get you playing better ball and making more sales, go to www.gitomer.com, register if you're a first time user, and enter BASEBALL in the GitBit box.

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