

**Jeff Angus**

Management

by

*Baseball*

**The Official Rules  
for Winning Management  
in Any Field**

*"Management by Baseball is a great baseball book and an insightful general management primer. Jeff Angus has written the book I wish I'd had in me."*

— Tom Peters,  
Lifelong Orioles fan...occasional management guru



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# Introducing Management by Baseball



Managing is getting paid for home runs someone else hits.

—Casey Stengel

**M**anagement consultant by day, major-league-baseball writer by night, I didn't see the connection between my two jobs. Then came the day I witnessed a remarkably self-destructive client insist on a foolish decision—and in the evening watched the worst manager of post-World War II baseball destroy his team's slender chances for the season with a boneheaded move hauntingly identical to my client's.

I'd spent a too-long day trying to convince my consulting client that he had lots of wasted talent working for him. An experienced manager recently hired to run a chronically low-performance work group, he had reorganized the group to match his own ideal structure, then unilaterally rebuilt job descriptions to correspond to his new structure. He delegated too rarely. When he *did* delegate, he assigned tasks strictly on the basis of employees' job descriptions, not their individual skills. He completely ignored the people as individuals, imagining they'd just step up to the plate and deliver what the new structure required. He knew *he* could do it, so they could, too. I tried to explain to him the fallacy limiting his group's success. My words just wouldn't reach him.

That evening, I was working at my baseball-writing job, watching the struggling Seattle Mariners, not paying as much attention to the game as I should have. I kept sifting through my brain for some hook that would make clear to my client why he needed to modify the way he operated . . . and then *it* happened.

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Jeff Burroughs, a massively muscled, barely motile Mariner slugger, was on first base. He took off, trying to steal. What happened next unfolded like an auto accident you're involved in—in slow motion so you get to savor every ugly detail. Burroughs started lugging. Then, at the speed of a tectonic plate, the lug went into the least graceful slide I'd seen since Little League. Finally, to add injury to insult, he crashed into the infielder tagging him out. He had to be scraped off the field like some ignominious roadkill—existential humor at its most unsightly. Burroughs missed a chunk of the season, thereby weakening an already anemic offense.

Was the slug-like Burroughs afflicted with a sudden dementia? Nope. After the game, Mariner manager Maury Wills explained that the signal to steal had come from the skipper himself. Wills had once been the premier base stealer in the majors, a compact, efficient speed merchant with an unerring ability to read pitchers and their moves, an exceptional talent that made him famous. Like most people, he came to believe that the talent most important to *his* career was the talent most important for winning. It's a classic management blunder.

Moreover, any intelligent baseball observer would have understood that this particular steal was a low-yield idea. First, the 30-year-old Burroughs had no history of success stealing bases. For every base you get thrown out stealing, you need roughly two successes just to break even. Burroughs's history with stealing was net deficit; for every base he stole, he had been thrown out once, costing his team scoring chances.

Second, Burroughs was a key player with a good batting average, and unlike almost everybody else on the Mariners squad, he was also able to deliver the single most valuable offensive event, the home run. Third, the Mariners were playing their games in the Kingdome, a park that boosted offense at the cost of bludgeoning pitchers. The games the M's played there were far more likely to be decided by a big offensive inning than by squeezing out a run from a steal.

So by sending the steal sign, Wills had risked the health of one of his

least replaceable resources—a power hitter. He had done it in a park that was the worst possible environment for a steal. And he had done it with a player whose record shouted, “Stay on your base, Sparky!”

As all this was spinning through my head, I realized two critical things.

I realized Wills’s decision flew in the face of something Dick Williams, one of the two most successful modern baseball managers, had said to me. Williams stressed that managers needed to make moves based on the contents of their roster, always considering the abilities of each player in specific situations. I also realized my client was making the exact mistake Maury Wills was making. He was trying to make his “roster” succeed at a game he himself had mastered, but one that they hadn’t.

That night in the press box, the epiphany hit me as hard as a Randy Johnson inside fastball. I could apply my interest in the management, strategy, tactics, business, and sociology of baseball to the practice of management in general. Once I opened myself to the thought, baseball lessons started appearing in my consulting practice all the time.

Baseball management, I realized, reflects more general management principles, more clearly and more broadly, than any of the academic teachings we normally use in organizations. I started experimenting with baseball models to coach managers in business, government, and non-profits, especially those with no formal training in the profession—the majority. Using lessons from the National Pastime turned out to be a dynamic, effective method for accelerating my clients’ learning process.

The client I was working with the day Maury Wills imploded was a casual baseball fan. He’d never heard of Steve Dalkowski, but two days after Burroughs went on the disabled list, I saw the client again and told him about the legendary pitcher, almost an apocryphal figure in minor-league history. I thought the Dalkowski story would show him what he needed to know about teaching, personal limitations, and maximizing his employees’ contributions better than I could in three hours of business-speak.

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Steve Dalkowski was a fireballing lefty. Some minor leaguers, including Ron Shelton (who went on to write films such as *Bull Durham* and *Tin Cup*), believed he was the hardest thrower in the history of the game. Shelton said he blew pitches past Ted Williams in spring training, and quoted Teddy Ballgame, who called Dalko the “fastest ever” and added, “I never want to face him again.” Earl Weaver, the other top modern baseball manager, managed the pitcher at two minor-league levels. He stated that Dalko had thrown wild pitches through two different steel-mesh backstops, breaking one of them 60 feet behind the catcher. In his first pro season, the southpaw struck out 10 of the first 12 batters he faced without anyone touching the ball with a bat. He probably threw close to 100 mph.

But Dalkowski had limitations. He had only two pitches, a fastball and a slider. In the Orioles system, they liked guys who threw at least a third pitch at a slower speed (usually a curve) to keep the hitter worried about the fourth dimension, and Dalkowski couldn't learn the off-speed pitch. Plus, he usually had zero ability to control his pitches.

Shelton cites a no-hitter where Dalko struck out 21 and walked 18, and the 1960 season at Stockton, where in 170 innings he struck out 262 . . . and walked the same number. Weaver wrote about a game where Dalko threw 280 pitches (starters usually go about 110 now) and lost no velocity on his fastball while striking out 16, walking 17, and winning 4–3. All three runs scored on bases-loaded wild pitches.

The O's knew what a rare asset they had, but baseball teams, like most large organizations, have rules that are accepted as commandments. For the O's, the commandment read “All pitchers shalt have an off-speed pitch.” Paul Richards, the mastermind behind three decades of Oriole pitching dominance, kept trying to teach Dalko the pitch, and the moundsman kept not learning it.

One season, still-minor-league manager Weaver got permission to give a Stanford-Binet (IQ) test to all the entry-level players in the system. It turned out, Weaver wrote, that “the test indicated that Richards was

wasting his time. Dalkowski finished in the 1st percentile in his ability to understand facts. Steve, it was sad to say, had the ability to do everything but learn. . . . The more you talked to Dalkowski, the more it confused him.”

Halfway through the 1962 season, Weaver taught him one simple idea: that if he didn't throw strikes, all the batters would walk, and he'd lose. In the second half, Dalkowski threw 57 innings, gave up one earned run (ERA = 0.16), and racked up 100 Ks with only 11 walks. Weaver figured if the man could do that with only two pitches, let him ride it until he failed. But higher-ups insisted on the curveball and kept making him work to master it until Dalko blew out his arm trying.

End of career.

Weaver knew what Dick Williams did about how to manage the talent. He did the right thing: go with his employee's strength. But the organization pulled a Wills by trying to make Dalkowski do what he couldn't. It destroyed a rare asset.

My client was touched by the story and readily saw the connection. It helped him make important behavioral changes that led to both his personal improvement as a manager and higher productivity in his group.

Weaver and Wills, Dalkowski and Burroughs are just two *petits fours* from a monster banquet table of illuminating and true stories from the National Pastime. I use field-tested, easy-to-understand stories to teach management skills to people interested in improving their abilities as managers. Each story delivers new ways to examine a problem and shows one or more guidelines for action. Many will add to your store of knowledge about baseball's fine points and the game's lush history.

*Management by Baseball* delivers lessons structured around a model: the baseball diamond. Like that diamond, the model has four “bases”: four distinct skill sets managers have to master to be effective at their jobs. Like a baseball player scoring a run, a successful manager has to touch all the bases and do it in sequential order.

## **First Base—Managing the Mechanics**

Every day of the baseball season, skippers skillfully juggle complex decisions from choosing a lineup to calling for a steal. In the dugout, they handle abstract concepts such as time management and training techniques. In the office, they pore over research reports and apply them to the problems at hand. You'll learn from the masters the methods of successful operational management—and lessons in what to avoid from baseball's biggest bunglers.

## **Second Base—Managing Talent**

Great baseball managers know how to get the most out of a team over a long season by understanding how to evaluate and motivate players, and when and how to hire and fire them. You'll learn models to squeeze better performance out of your own team.

## **Third Base—Managing Yourself**

The most successful managers in and out of baseball learn enough about their own habits, biases, and strengths to overcome preconceived notions. You can boost your own skills through examples of how baseball's best and worst came to grips with intellectual and emotional blind spots that undermined their effectiveness.

## **Home Plate—Managing Change . . . and Driving It**

The best baseball managers know how to adapt to significant changes in the game. So should anyone who works outside a ballpark. Lessons from

baseball will improve your ability to thrive in times of change and actively drive changes to your organization's advantage—and your own.

If you look closely enough, baseball can teach you almost everything you need to know about management, whether it's project management, getting the most out of staff, strategic planning, facing difficult organizational challenges, or engaging big changes in a specific industry or the entire economy.

At a time when managerial ability is both scant and absolutely necessary for hard-pressed organizations' survival, *Management by Baseball* gives you some new notions of management and slings you some practical examples and proven, practical tools. It gives you a dash of new perspective from the national pastime to trigger and polish your own approaches to the challenges that chew up your peers and competitors.

Drawing from my frontline management and consulting experience, exclusive interviews from my own baseball reporting, and fascinating research from baseball's best contemporary observers, I will arm you with practical and entertaining lessons from over a century of the National Pastime, whether you're a baseball fan or a manager planning to hone your management skills in business, professional practice, nonprofits, government, the military, or in academia.

### ***Management by Baseball* Web Site: Resources, Glossary, Tools**

This book is just the beginning of our ongoing conversation. At [www.ManagementByBaseball.com](http://www.ManagementByBaseball.com) I host a community of managers who, like me, want to work on their skills and exchange knowledge and advice. If you come, you'll find a range of resources. Those who have a copy of the book can register for free, and registered users get access to management tools with instructions on how to use them, an invitation to participate in a discussion group, and a glossary of concepts and words in this book. Join us.

# 1

## The View from the Blimp



If I have seen further it is by standing  
on the shoulders of The Giants.

—Sir Isaac Newton

**W**inning at managing in organizations is much like winning baseball games. In baseball, the team that wins is the one that scores the most runs, so the act of scoring a run is the key objective. To score a run, you have to touch each of the bases safely, and you have to do it in order.

You can't reverse the order, like the Philadelphia Athletics' Harry Davis tried in 1902. In a game with the Tigers, Davis attempted a double steal with a teammate on third. The idea of this play is to force the catcher to throw to second under pressure; an off-target throw, or a bobble on the play by the infielder, will allow the runner on third to break for home with a strong likelihood of scoring. In this game, Davis's attempt didn't draw a throw, and he successfully stole second, but it wasn't the run-scoring play he had in mind. So on the next pitch, Davis took off from second base for *first* base, stealing in reverse in an attempt to coax a throw out of the unyielding catcher. A few pitches later, he stole second again, this time drawing a throw, and his teammate scored from third. A couple of other players tried this maneuver, and two succeeded, but umpires stopped allowing it after 1907. In baseball, you can't change the order you run the bases.

Neither can you cut corners running from first to third by hustling

straight through the pitcher's mound while skipping second base—you'd be called out. Besides, Roger Clemens would throw a broken bat at you, and with his velocity and from that distance, he'd skewer you like a kebab.

In the practice of management beyond baseball, there are four sequential stops as well. Your best chance for success at managing requires you to master or at least be adequate in four main skill sets: operational management, people management, self-awareness, and meeting change. As in baseball, you can't skip any. If you don't touch a base on the way to the next one, learning each skill set in sequence, you're likely to fail in your goal of being a good manager.

### **Safe at First—Starting a Rally With the Basics**

A fellow bossing a big league ballclub is busier than  
a one-armed paperhanger with hives.

—Ty Cobb

The first skill a manager must master to be a success is operational management, working with inanimate objects. These objects include resources such as time, money, and tools of the trade. Other objects are conceptual designs, such as work processes, rules, and guidelines (and the skill of knowing when to ignore them). Operational management also involves setting goals and objectives, negotiating, recognizing patterns, and knowing how and when to delegate.

In the early 20th century, professional management was all about using this process/procedure/tools skills set, and it pretty much ignored everything else. In large part, that's because management as we know it was something that had been developed, as Peter Drucker has explained so tidily, by government to improve results on governmental projects (translation: very big, very complex projects that brook no creativity once set in motion).

Large corporations, looking for greater success in the mass production

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of hard goods (which factory owners saw as analogous to the mass production of soldiers), asked, “Why can’t business be more like government?” Corporations adopted government’s model of professional management, and with that, inherited government’s values and limitations. That’s why it’s inevitable that most giant companies have the same kind of strengths (and weaknesses) that government agencies of the same size do. That’s why the management practices taught in the generic MBA programs (funded by and for giant companies and government agencies) fail so universally in smaller, more entrepreneurial businesses and other types of organizations. And why they fail to blunt the mass dementia of certain management beliefs, such as the “More with Less” cult that has undermined so many outfits.

Rant follows. I won’t do this often.

### **The Most Dangerous Management Cult**

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one

—George Bernard Shaw

American management has been in the thrall of an incredibly dangerous and brain-damaged cult since the late 1980s. If management just examined baseball, they’d know the cult’s teachings were hot air, the gauze would be drawn from their eyes; their bodies would be turned to face the front of the cave; the fantasy spell would be broken.

The cult is the “More with Less” fad, the faith that an organization can achieve net gains in work output while downsizing staff talent or investment in R & D. The “More with Less” cult has run its intellectual course. A decade ago, you heard this dementia all the time; now, organizations behave the same way, but outside of a small handful of delusional amateurs, the chanters know they’re mouthing an empty platitude.

Operationally, real managers are always looking to either (a) do more

with the same, or (b) do the same for less. They take one step at a time, examine the results, then try the next step, iteratively and incrementally. A real manager would never try to do more with less; if you hear somebody saying that, he either has tertiary syphilis, or knows nothing about managing either time or process or technology. If you are working for an organization with executive management that says this and actually believes it, get out before the whole bubble implodes. Only in Communist Chinese prison labor camps and in for-profits that are monopolies is “More with Less” a net-gain strategy.

Real managers know this intuitively. Megan Santosus, a columnist for *CIO* magazine, delivered some hard numbers in a 2003 analysis, “Why More Is Less: Recent Evidence Shows That Multitasking Is an Enormous Waste of Your Time and Your Company’s Money.”<sup>1</sup> She summarized studies proving that the multitasking that ensues from the serial killing of staff slots is a lethal drag on effectiveness and even productivity. One example: administrators with four projects lose 45 percent of effective work compared to those with just one project.

The multitasking that results from the cult’s power flies in the face of what has been known to be state-of-the-art people management, too. Since the mid-1980s, when the book *Peopleware* by Timothy Lister and Tom DeMarco popularized effective management of development teams, practitioners have known that if you interrupt someone who’s working in a “zone,” it takes an average of 20 minutes for her to return to a productive pace. Load multiple rôles on a person, make him cover them in the same day, and it’s a test lab for creating waste. It strip-mines the victims while undermining the quantity and quality of work the organization gets.

So how does baseball fit in? Baseball is the perfect simple lab to test management theories. If you can’t do more with less in baseball, you’d better have a perfect explanation about why it works elsewhere.

What team believes it can replace an all-star with a scrub and garner more wins? None. “Moneyball” has made the Oakland A’s stingy ways widely known, but their general manager (GM), Billy Beane, isn’t trying to

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do more with less. He's trying the proven manager strategy I mentioned earlier: to do the same with less.

Could the Los Angeles Angels of the OC dump Vladimir Guerrero in exchange for ex-Yankee utility man Tony Womack and expect to win more games with less talent? I don't think anyone who manages a baseball roster believes that for a second. They might try to cobble together other talent using the salary savings they gained in the trade, but that'd be trying to do the same with the same. They might try to work on fundamentals and invest in advance scouting to get additional value from the diminished portfolio they had, but that'd be the Beane (the same with less) approach. Marketing departments of major-league teams or their minions, the broadcasters, might try to tell you a stripped-down home team was on the verge of turning it around, but no serious baseball manager believes this.

Beyond baseball, you can't do more with less talent. The rare purge that's done intelligently can dump lower-talent people while retaining the talented, but there's no *more* talent or output than there was before. They are not going to get "more with less."

"More with Less" is a laughable but dangerous cult. Using baseball as a yardstick makes the obviousness of that inescapable.

Successful management, however, is about the distance of a Barry Bonds home run away from just mastering operational management, as we'll see as we motor around first base later in the book to build on additional, vital skills. I'm not underestimating how critical operational management is—without getting to first successfully, you're never going to score, and as Casey Stengel was quoted as saying, "You can't steal first base." If you master operational management, you'll be better than 65 percent of your peers, because that's how many managers *never* get safely to first base.

Part 1 covers a lot of what you need to know about operational management and provides some of the rules for mastering it. This form of