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Five Skill Players – What Change Leaders Need



Baseball scouts the world over assess prospects on five skills:

1. Hitting for Average,
2. Hitting for Power,
3. Running Speed,
4. Arm Strength, and
5. Fielding Ability.



The best prospects are said to be “Five Tool Players” because they possess exceptional talents across all five skills. Many players bring good ability to one or two skills, but the best players – the ones in the major leagues – rank exceptionally well in four or five of the skills. The scouts zero in on those prospects and the rest of us are left to play in the minor or fantasy leagues.



I believe we can apply the five tool model in the present change climate we face. The best leaders in the coming economy – the major leaguers – will be the people who excel at all five of the basic tools. No longer will it be enough to excel in one or two areas because speed and change are increasing and becoming more pervasive in our world. True leaders will need all five tools to both understand the change that’s occurring and use that change for their (and their organization’s) advantage.

The five skills change leaders need today are:

1. **Technical Skill** – the ability to use specific knowledge about a given subject to reach goals. This could be industry/practice knowledge, process knowledge, and/or functional knowledge, and the ability to apply that knowledge in specific settings.
2. **Financial Skill** – the ability to understand the financial impact and interplay of specific actions.
3. **Strategic Skill** – the ability to bring a broad perspective to a given situation and apply that perspective to provide clear direction. The perspective is most effective when it stretches across the broadest possible spectrum of both time and circumstances. Harry Truman once said, “There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know.” That may not be absolutely true, but the more history and experience that can be applied to a situation, the better the perspective will be.
4. **Synthesis Skill** – the ability to assimilate different experiences, ideas, and opinions in order to create an optimal solution. The world is far too complicated for one person alone to develop an optimal and comprehensive solution for any complex problem. The best solutions come from a variety of sources, nursed and combined by a master synthesist.
5. **People Skill** – the ability to engage people in your mission. People are becoming more important to success as technology plays a bigger part in our economy. The more ubiquitous information

becomes the more important it becomes to know people who can make the most of that information, and harness their talents to reach your goals.

These five skills aren't new. They've been around a long time and the best leaders have always been able to put them to use. What's different is the need to put all five skills together in order to be a true change leader – a Five Skill Player. The present environment demands five skill change leaders – skills that also match up with baseball's five tools. Let's explore the parallels.

Power: Technical Skill

Just like a home run can change the entire momentum and outcome of a baseball game, deep technical skill can lead to insights and breakthroughs that change entire industries. Companies fueled by inventions and cutting edge technology – or even just superior knowledge of their industry – constantly play for the equivalent of the three run homer. Many small technical advances, combined with outstanding execution, can power businesses to great success.



Average: Strategic Skill

Players with the ability to hit for a high average are always on base and creating opportunities for their team. The same is true of leaders with Strategic Skill. They are able to see the conditions and situations that are being thrown at their organization and develop actions to take advantage of those situations. They create opportunities for the organization by simplifying situations and making it easier for their organizations to act.

Speed: Synthesis Skill



Speed is a game changing quality in baseball. The players with speed change the game by taking extra bases and putting pressure on the opposition defense to make the right plays. Synthesizers also change the game by helping the people around them come up with the best solutions. They are unique in their ability to find answers because they search for the truth – no matter the source. Just like the speedster on the basepaths with no regard for the defense, synthesizers laser in on the best answers, without regard for politics, position, or any other factor.

Arm Strength: Financial Skill

Arm strength is a basic talent of a baseball player. Players with strong arms – pitchers or position players – can overcome other shortcomings or reinforce their other defensive abilities with a strong arm. Financial skills have the same effect in the business world. They are basic skills that reinforce other business skills and sharpen understanding of the business. Mediocre businesspeople with strong financial skills often outperform people with stronger business sense and weak financial skills.

Fielding Ability: People Skills

Great fielding ability can keep people in the major leagues for a long time. The infamous telegraph “good field no hit” still applies to many players. Defensive ability is one of the cornerstones for great baseball players. The same applies for people skills. Leaders in the new economy **must** have solid people skills in order to succeed – especially in a changing environment. No longer can companies rely on security, benefits, or the lack of other opportunities in the marketplace to keep and motivate talented employees. Leaders must be able to engage their people and provide opportunities for them to excel in order to deliver superior performance. People skills are a cornerstone talent: essential for success in these times.



These times require Five Skill Players to lead organizations through these difficult days. New and changing paradigms, historical successes, financial stresses, and the mobility of employees all make it imperative that leaders use all five skills. Gone are the times when managers could compensate for shortcomings in one area with strengths in others. Complicated organizations require the leadership found in Five Skill Players, those without those talents will be relegated to lesser or more narrow roles.

Where are the Five Skill Players in your organization? Are they in the proper positions? Your company's survival may depend on it!!

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