

Three Strikes and You're IN !

How a Love of Baseball Helps Improve Workplace Productivity and Profit !

By John Schaefer

Baseball is a simple game, not easy, but simple if you just understand the basics.

Okay, you're wondering what could baseball possibly have to do with recognizing employees and getting high performance in the workplace? Here's a story that will bring this home:

Mike was born with a baseball glove on his hand. Looking back, he can't remember a day he didn't think about playing ball or watching his heroes on TV. At nine, then the smallest and fastest guy on the team, he caught a fly ball at the right centerfield fence and threw out a kid tagging up from second. At 12, Mike was the biggest guy out there and as a pitcher, struck out 17 batters in one game. The final play was a grounder back to the mound, so he assisted on the 18th out, too. They lost the game because he walked a few guys, but still got the game ball (remember, this was little league!).

Well, as it tends to happen, Mike's pro career never materialized, but he's still a huge fan and enjoys an annual ritual of going to opening day every spring. This year his buddy got them front row tickets on the right field side; Mike brought his glove in anticipation. The first pitch in the top of the ninth was a tailing line drive that was curling toward the stands. Mike instinctively stretched over the wall with fans on both sides scurrying in every direction and then heard a loud SMACK of leather on leather! In what seemed like an eternity, he pulled back his glove and found the prize. Immediately Mike turned and held the ball up to the roaring approval of 3,000 fans above. It was a moment he'd dreamed of since he was a kid and will never forget. He didn't find out until later that they showed his catch twice in slow motion while the announcer espoused the virtues of bringing your glove to the ballpark. "Now there's some great glove work by the veteran, Bob!"

Okay, so you're still wondering what Mike's love of baseball and his lucky catch have to do with employee recognition and workplace performance? Well, there are five significant lessons we can take from his story:

1. **Training** - Be prepared to make the play. Mike spent his whole life learning the skills to make this catch. Not only that, he was ready with his glove on, was still paying attention in the ninth inning and had the instinctive ability to make the play of this level without thinking. A well trained, focused, present and capable workforce will not only make more plays, but will have fewer accidents, waste less material, break fewer pieces of equipment, demonstrate more cooperation, achieve better productivity and make your firm a lot more money.
2. **Practice** - Looking back, Mike realized just how many hours he practiced the skills that ultimately made his reactionary catch possible. It was a backhand play on a fast moving baseball. Only well-practiced employees will be ready to instinctively do the right thing under pressure. Those few milliseconds of indecision that separate the well-intentioned rookie from the well-honed expert could make all the difference between a catch and a costly incident. Lost time accidents, injuries and equipment damage due to inexperienced employees continues to be one of the most expensive and wasteful areas for many companies.
3. **Attitude** - Have the confidence to go for it while others pull back or duck. Anybody can bare hand a little pop foul, but to snag a tailing liner you've got to have a combination of experience, confidence and guts.



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Employees who feel valued and respected are more likely to put in the hours and the effort to be really good at what they do; not because they fear being fired if they don't, but because they like you, appreciate the company and want be a part of a winning team. They're also a lot less likely to take their skills to your competitors when things get tough.

4. **Recognition** - When Mike turned to the stands and held up the ball, just imagine how it felt when thousands of cheering fans came to their feet in approval. Giving immediate, appropriate and genuine recognition when an employee takes a chance and it pays off is one of the most valuable things a supervisor can ever do. When your management team is ready, aware and has the tools at hand, this is not only easy, but soon becomes and habit that transcends the entire organization. Most people underestimate the value of an honest, timely pat on the back when it's deserved. If your team is a well-oiled machine, your supervisors will have more time to concentrate on opportunities to use recognition, because so much less time is being wasted on recruiting, training, and coaching of new employees due to higher than necessary turnover.

5. **Share the Glory** - While Mike made the play, everybody around him seemed to enjoy sharing in the moment almost as much as he did as the high-fives ensued. Let's face it, there's only so much time in the work day for celebrating success and handing out recognition. The best managers realize this, so they make sure that as many peers as possible get to participate in each recognition moment. When other team members see how often it happens, they share the love and look forward to their turn. Team-based recognition is a great way to foster camaraderie and keep everyone more focused on the job at hand.

So how about that; Mike's love of baseball and his story really do carry the secret to optimizing your employee's performance and your company's bottom line. All you've got to do is hire good talent, show them you truly love and respect them, get out of their way so they can be the best they can be, allow them to take calculated chances to improve the company, and be there instantly and in force to congratulate them when they succeed.



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What if you could create an environment in your workplace where this happened regularly . . . on purpose! Its fun, it's easier than you think, and it won't cost any money. As a matter of fact, it'll make you money, and you'll be able to prove it to the CFO!

About the Author:

John Schaefer is a consultant with more than 20 years of experience helping companies realize and react to the employer/employee disconnect. He is the author of "The Vocational Shrink - An Analysis of the Ten Levels of Workplace Disillusionment," as well as "The Vocational Shrink The Game and Manager Training Program "Why Should Supervisors Care?" For more information, please visit: www.VocationalShrink.com or call 888-646-6670

