



## 9 Innings with Jeff Angus

Baseball metaphors run through business speak as easily as Willie Mays ran down fly balls. But too often, writes consultant and baseball columnist Jeff Angus in *Management by Baseball* (HarperCollins, May), business fails to live up to the American pastime. *Fast Company* shared a bleacher with him at a spring-training game of his hometown Seattle Mariners.

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**Fast Company:** *Do baseball managers really "manage"?*

**Angus:** Sure. I would say that the 20th percentile of major-league baseball managers is significantly better than the 80th percentile of nonbaseball managers because of the amount of data they have to handle while coping with rapid change. Plus, they can't be passive and wait for something to work itself out, a behavior that's endemic in business.

**FC:** *They anticipate the play before it happens.*

**Angus:** It helps to think like a catcher, which is why so many become good managers. A catcher always has the whole play in front of him and can think critically about what he sees. So a person beyond baseball should always be thinking, Could this be done better? We consider management an art, not a craft, so we don't train managers as if it were a profession. We hardly ever see managers outside of sales auditioned at all. I strongly believe in auditions as part of the hiring process, which is something baseball does well.

**FC:** *Which is why we're in Arizona in March.*

**Angus:** Right. You need to learn what people do in situations where their success or failure is less critical. That's what the minor leagues and spring training are all about. In business, there are plenty of opportunities to get people up to speed before you have to count on them for game-day results.

**FC:** *So baseball managers are people people?*

**Angus:** Since the National League was organized in 1876, managers have known that they will succeed only on the drive, acuity, and sharpness of their players. In business, the thing that prevents you from being outsourced or downsized is keeping the talent you have from being commoditized. Tom Peters and others started talking about this in the mid-1980s. Baseball had a 90-year head start.

**FC:** *Baseball hasn't changed much in more than a century. So how is any of this relevant to business, which changes all the time?*

**Angus:** Baseball is a perfect example of making yourself over on a regular basis. Every off-season, they debrief, reassess, start a new cycle, bring up young players, try people in new positions. Look at the Atlanta Braves' Bobby Cox. Over the past 15 years, depending on the talent, he's made power teams, hitters' teams, pitchers' teams--and they've all been competitive.

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