

Excerpt from Bochy Ball Book Chapter 7

Hiring Formula

The Giants have a formula for attracting the kind of players who will protect and promote the club's chemistry and special culture. It has been a key ingredient behind each of their three World Championship rings. It's a novel and relatively sophisticated idea:

*We can build a much stronger franchise if we simply . . . **hire people who don't suck.***

In every organization there are two types of people: those who add and multiply—people who add something to what the other players offer and multiply the flexibility of the team, giving it more options and elevating its power to perform; and those who subtract and divide—people who take something away from other players and have a divisive effect on the team, limiting its ability to perform to its potential. The adders and multipliers are a fountain; the subtractors and dividers are a drain.

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There are people who can find opportunity in adversity. Good-humored and optimistic, they play the game to win versus playing it not to lose. They exude enthusiasm and inspire others to dig deep when it seems like all is lost. They unify people and help others believe in themselves, making the team stronger. We're all better for having them around.

Then there are people who can find the difficulty in every opportunity. They are cynical, sarcastic, and pessimistic. They take themselves way too seriously and create drama that doesn't need to exist. Unless we have extraordinary resolve, if we rub shoulders with these people long enough, we get sucked into their shit storm and jaded by their worldview.

Bad attitudes suck.

They quite literally suck the passion, energy, teamwork, unity, and life right out of an organization. People with bad attitudes and a flawed character drag other people down versus lifting them up. They make excuses instead of making things happen. Their unchecked egos won't let them revel in the success of others so their energy is spent drawing attention to themselves. And, ultimately, they suck chemistry out of the team as well.

The solution seems so obvious. Except it's not.

Why do so many teams, and businesses for that matter, end up with toxic people who screw up what would otherwise be great chemistry? Well, someone looks at a guy on paper and says, "We have a deep hole to fill and this guy has the stuff to fill it, even though 'fit' might be a little questionable." Or a player points out another player's negative impact on the clubhouse, yet the manager says, "I know, but he's one of our most productive guys; we need him."

Bit by bit, player by player, management builds a dysfunctional team under the assumption that raw talent trumps culture. Until it doesn't. What to do about underperforming players who negatively disrupt a clubhouse is a no-brainer. It's the toxic guys who excel on the field that tempt us into denial. Initially, we fail to realize that our compromise corrupts chemistry. And then, when the infection eventually shows up on the field, we wake up to realize we have compromised fit, conceded character, and corrupted our formula—all at the expense of culture.

Boch: You can't be held hostage by great talent. There's no question about it, we want players who can perform under pressure, just when you need them the most. We want guys with some swagger. But I've seen managers—I've done it myself—who put up with a player who is toxic in the clubhouse because they have tremendous skill. Just when you've had enough of their attitude they come up with a burst of brilliance in a game, so you let it ride. It never works out because what you don't realize when you capitulate like that is the drip, drip, drip negative effect on other players. Then you wake up one day and say: "How did we get this way? Why are we so disjointed?"

Here's the question: Do you go after the best talent, with stellar numbers, who will obviously fill a gap, and hope they will be a cultural fit? Or do you hold out for talent that has the statistical pedigree *and* the right character, which usually isn't easy, fast, or convenient?

When the *Wall Street Journal* asked CEO Larry Baer to prioritize character versus talent in hiring an employee—whether a director of ticket sales or a shortstop—his response was unequivocal: "When we sign a player, we make repeated calls to people who know him and know about his character. Same thing when we hire someone in the front office. We really do a deep dive into the character and values to see if the values are a match. If the values are a match, that's probably the most important thing. And I'll tell you a good way to do it: About 70 percent of our new hires have come through our internship program."³⁰

Baer said that he was influenced by a top venture capitalist who told him that he would rather invest in a person with strong values and "B" talent than the other way around.

You can't legislate or fake chemistry, but you can create the conditions to make it flourish. You can bring people into the club who are naturally predisposed to contributing to chemistry and making it a priority. That starts with the GM and the front office. "We want well-rounded people who fit with the culture here," Sabean said. "Even the most talented athletes can screw up good chemistry if they aren't aligned with our values." The club's results are a testament to his unabashed fanaticism for finding players who can flourish in the Giants culture and perpetuate its chemistry.

DO SOMETHING NOW

It is much easier to draw out, refine, and reinforce something that's already there than it is to build it from scratch. Recruit people with high character and compatible values, who are already into the journey you are on. Your chances of building a team with strong chemistry are much greater.

Know the Target

A franchise is who it employs. The people you hire today will establish the culture you enjoy—or endure—tomorrow. This means you have to know what you're looking for. Consider the following dialogue:

Let's get pizza for dinner.

What kind do you want?

A good hot pizza.

Thanks, now I understand.

If you don't know precisely what you're looking for, how will you ever find it? If the target is vague or undefined, you severely limit your chances of success. Every club wants “good hot” players, but what does that really mean? The sabermetrics guys can tell you exactly what that means in terms of a player's technical skills. And they can certainly help you look at it from hundreds of different angles.

Take position players, for example. Do they have power and speed? Can they hit, run, and throw? Or take pitchers. Do they have great stuff? Can they move the ball? Do they have good velocity coupled with good control? These are the essentials, the price of entry. But what the sabermetrics gurus can't define—not yet anyway—are the intangible qualities of a player that factor into chemistry. Look at the following list of situations that reveal those qualities, for example:

- How does a player handle victory or a devastating loss?
- Have they been through adversity?
- How did they deal with it?
- When they are in clutch situations, do they rise to the occasion or cave in?
- Are they coachable?
- Are they willing to share their experience and insights with other players?
- What are they like with the fans?
- Do they have a genuine love for the game or want to be a star?
- Are they high energy or low energy?
- What are they like on the bus, on the plane, or in the restaurant after the game?

Choosing players is both an art and a science. The key is the right baseball talent packaged *with* character that protects and promotes the desired chemistry of the clubhouse.



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