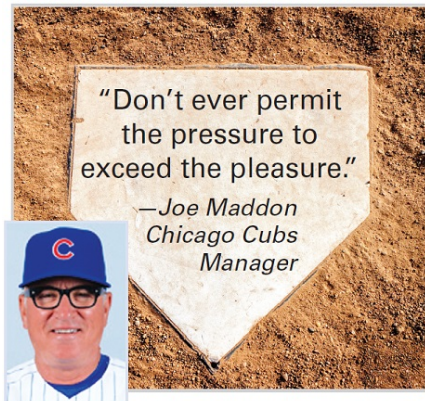


Manage Like Maddon: 6 Things HR and Front-Line Bosses Can Learn from the Chicago Cubs



"Don't ever permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure."

—Joe Maddon
Chicago Cubs
Manager

For baseball fans, September means one important thing—exciting pennant races leading up to the playoffs. This year, the stars may be aligning for the most historically woeful team in baseball, the Chicago Cubs. The perennial cellar dwellers haven't won a World Series since '08 ... as in 1908. But this season they have the best record in baseball, led by Joe Maddon, their guru/mad scientist manager.

Maddon and his fellow baseball managers are always under intense scrutiny to make the right decisions. Who to start? Where to position their players? When to give players a kick in the butt ... or a pat on the back?

HR professionals and front-line bosses in your organization face many of the same management challenges each day. Here are six things you can learn from Maddon and the Cubs about successfully leading your team:

1. Put your players in the right positions—but don't be afraid to shift them around. On most teams, players stay in the same position on the field and the batting order each day. Not in Maddon's world. In the 162 regular-season games last season, the Cubs used 119 different batting orders. They had pitchers batting eighth (rather than the traditional ninth) 140 times. And superstar Kris Bryant has moved around to six different positions this season. (In May, he played three different positions *in the same inning!*)

The lesson: Play to your employees' strengths, but recognize that shaking up the status quo and giving employees opportunities to shine in different capacities can yield big benefits.

2. Be patient with your young guns. The Cubs made a conscious decision five years ago to bring in lots of young talent. That also meant lots of growing pains (and losses) in 2012, 2013 and 2014. But today the Cubs are one of only eight MLB teams with 11 or more players under age 27. Most of those teams have losing records, while the Cubs are #1.

The lesson: Don't keep your young, energetic players at the end of the bench—give them chances to learn and grow.

3. Stats matter—track them. The Cubs were late adopters of sabermetrics, nontraditional statistics used to identify inexpensive but productive players. But their new regime is big on data-driven decisions, which has resulted in acquiring talent others teams overlooked, including bargain reclamation projects like ace pitcher Jake Arrieta.



The lesson: Use all available tools in your search for talent, then lean heavily on data to track progress in each of your positions.

4. Work hard, but don't forget to have some fun. *"Don't ever permit the pressure to exceed the pleasure."* With these words at his introductory press conference, Maddon set the tone for the 2015 season in which the Cubs won 97 games, compared to 73 the year before. The ringmaster works hard to keep his players loose. Some of his more "unique" tactics: organizing a petting zoo on the field, bringing a magician into the clubhouse, and having players wear onesie pajamas on overnight flights.

The lesson: Taking time for fun will create a bond that spills over into better teamwork and better performance.

5. "Do simple better." ESPN shows the monster home runs and highlight-reel catches. But Maddon constantly reminds players that solid fundamentals is what lead to success. "Do Simple Better" became a team mantra for not overcomplicating their jobs.

The lesson: If you keep your staff focused on doing the small things right, the big things will take care of themselves.

6. Realize that your home-run hitters will strike out more often. This year, the Cubs are in the top 25% of teams with most strikeouts. Sounds like a bad thing, right? But they've also scored nearly 700 runs so far this year—third best in baseball.

The lesson: Jumping on your players for every mistake and failure will block their interest in risk taking and creativity. When possible, give them the freedom to "swing for the fences."

Go Cubs Go.