



**Chapter title:** Invaluable or Insignificant: Undeniable skill not required - by, Andrew Prater

Game changers in sports and business separate themselves because they recognize the process to becoming an **Invaluable** asset while most, unfortunately, quietly remain **Insignificant**. I learned this truth first hand as a professional baseball player which created an awareness and belief that we can all become an invaluable asset in any environment regardless of whether we possess undeniable talent or skills.

In baseball, coaches play the best nine, not necessarily the best nine players. I benefited from this because early on in my professional baseball career I was labeled a defensive specialist. As much as I wanted to be an undeniable force on offense, and was not satisfied with my one-dimensional label, I didn't focus on things out of my control, which typically leads to making excuses. Instead, I stayed focused on the process of becoming an Invaluable teammate and one of the best nine on the roster. A defining moment occurred early one season when some uncharacteristic success at the plate was becoming a distraction. My batting average was at a brief career high and one afternoon our hitting instructor that season stopped by my locker to remind me to stay humble and stick to the process because .300 hitters hit .300, not for just a month or two. It was early in the season and he knew that if I started to focus on sustaining success as a hitter I would easily become Insignificant.

I don't own a t-shirt that says, "Baseball is Life", but I am very thankful that, in spite of myself, I learned that the process to becoming an Invaluable asset – which in turn helped extend my playing career well beyond what my talent deserved. The Process has three parts: **Be on time, focus on Substance Before Image, and Build Relationships.**

I believe in making a strong impression as often as possible. If you are satisfied with just making a strong *first* impression you are selling yourself short. The mind set for making sustainable strong impressions starts with **Being on Time all of the time**. This is an absolute to the Process and requires no special skill or ability, it simply requires effort. "Life Happens" but when arriving on time is an absolute, no one knows you had a flat tire because you called a cab. When you are not on time you become a distraction, become the focus of unwanted attention, and often forced to begin conversations with an apology or excuse. Invaluable professionals are driven by punctuality and understand that punctuality is a fountain of free positive publicity. I had a coach in college that said, "Five minutes early is five minutes

late". He demanded that we discipline ourselves to give us enough time to make adjustments with the unforeseen because he knew that five minutes early was cutting it too close. Punctuality breeds productivity and both are fingerprints of an Invaluable asset.

Image will attract but substance will sustain. My transition from *playing* baseball into the *business* of baseball was built on the principle of building **Substance before Image**. I observed others promote sexier baseball career achievements or baseball cards and glossy 8 x10's, only to find that neither were helping their customers achieve results or reach personal goals. Instead of trying to compete with the image portrayed by my competition, I focused on the *substance* of my brand. I quickly became an Invaluable resource by prioritizing preparation and predictability. Clear and timely communication is a byproduct of preparation and allows you to operate in a predictable manner, allowing both employees and clients to thrive. I further separated my brand by developing an innovative hitting program called Swingtherapy which drew attention to the substance and content I had to offer rather than my image and personal achievements (or lack thereof). I could not go back and rewrite my resume, achievements, or batting average, but I could draw from my past experiences to create an Invaluable component of my brand.

Developing authentic **Relationships** is another huge component to becoming an Invaluable member of any team, in business or sport. Relationships will challenge your sense of entitlement and should not be predicated on what you will get *gain* from them; rather, what you *bring* to them. Early on I learned the value of building relationships could make the world small and provide instant validation and credibility when needing to open doors or make a connection. In my circle, I am surrounded by so many unique individuals whose personal testimonies through different life stages could help me navigate my path more clearly. I was fortunate during my transition from playing baseball to the business of baseball to cultivate several authentic relationships with successful people who helped me begin the foundation for my brand. One mentor would make the subtle statement, "Read about it", from time to time, reminding me that if you are going to put yourself out there and do something, then separate yourself with front-page-worthy innovation, effort and news; essentially make it your own. Success in business is about people because transactions and deals will fall apart, but relationships will weather the storm in business and in life. Expectations without relationship are dead.

Whether you're competing in sports or competing in business, these three lessons will serve you well in becoming Invaluable – no matter what skills you bring.

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About the author: Andrew Prater has a professional baseball background as a player (catcher), coach (hitting), scout (Milwaukee Brewers). I love a great story, hate surprises, suggest you never say the words never or always. I strive to be the best husband and dad. I clearly understand all that I have is a blessing from God; I am simply a humble steward.

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