

**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 reminded 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 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 a sexier baseball career achievements or their 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 there of). 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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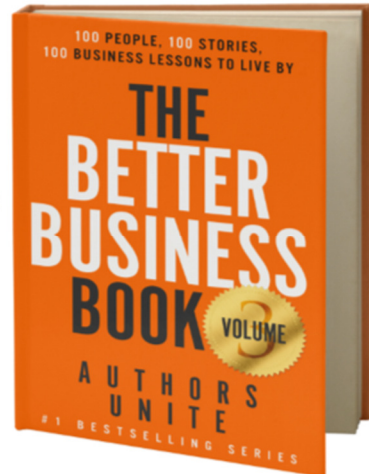
TO LIVE BY

"I learned an important adjustment to my approach that helped me take the combat out of communication"

The Better Business Book v3

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**Chapter title:** Narrow Margin Buzz Kill - by, Andrew Prater

One of the toughest areas I have struggled with as I have grown and expanded my resume in business is when my blind-spot has been the lack of margin for people, situation or circumstances. God blessed me with passion and drive for a lot of things in life and when leveraged as a strength, I am invaluable, but when I approach situations with narrow margin while bringing too much emotion, predisposition and on edge, often, defensiveness dominates, and I end up saying things I wished I hadn't, cutting people off, and leaving others wondering "what's with this guy"? Small margin robs me of the ability to apply one of the most valuable tools and strategies when in a role of leadership or management; the ability to pause and process. My excuse is that I am passionate and how could anyone else understand all the sweat equity and time I have invested in the trenches. As a visionary, I don't have time for people that might question my process or ideas even if they are just trying to provide fresh-eyes or opinion. The sobering reality in these moments, is that my gap has narrowed to the point where I will continually fall victim to narrow margin behavior unless I adjust and work on my perspective and approach.

One of the most impressionable examples of projecting wide margin came at a time when the pursuit of my dream to play baseball in the major leagues as a catcher had choked me down to paper thin margin for most people and circumstances around me. The honeymoon stages had given way to the grind and I was struggling with the collision of expectations and reality. Similar to various circumstances we all face in life, I was good enough to participate, but not good enough to compete for a starting job and I was beginning to lose patience with the process. On a ball field late in my minor league career, an umpire made a strong and lasting impression on me. He too shared the dream to make it to the major leagues, but he had adjusted his perspective to meet expectation and had not allowed the grind of the process to narrow his margin. After a called third strike late in the game, a batter turned and said a few choice words directed at the umpire before he headed to the dugout. In my mind, this was a clear sign of disrespect and often not tolerated. I turned to the umpire and asked, "are you going to take that from him"? and I never will forget his response. He said "Prater, I just took food off his table. He's not supposed to like striking out. He's out here trying to grind out a living playing baseball. When a batter steps to the plate I anticipate and understand there will be some emotion and I don't let it bother me". His margin gap was wide because his perspective was spot on. He had latitude to process the emotions and criticism which allowed him to thrive in his job. Proper perspective allows you to lengthen your patience without lowering your standard.

I have not been able to escape seasons of narrow margin, but I have learned how to navigate and cope by adjusting my approach. Leaders need filters and one of the best I have employed is pause. This is counter intuitive to my natural instinct and it has not come without struggle. Pause was first introduced to me during my early days as a baseball coach. I made the natural transition from playing baseball to coaching baseball; however, I quickly learned that I was a great teacher of the game, but not a great manager of people. I began to feel pressures from sources I had never been exposed to (primarily parents) leaving me feeling threatened and insecure. Defensiveness narrowed my margin to the point where I no longer enjoyed my role as a coach and I needed to adjust my approach. I was introduced to the 24hr rule which forced me to wait before I responded to topics tied to my emotion or narrow margin issues. This provided necessary pause and opportunity to process the situation well in advance which helped me separate the immediate emotion I felt and focus on the issue. The fruits were many more instances where my passion and strengths were not turned against me in a moment of emotional outburst or relational train-wreck. Like the countless times I had helped a hitter out of a slump by keeping the same swing, but adjusting his approach to each at bat, I too had learned an important adjustment to my approach that helped me take the combat out of communication. The pause that the 24hr rule provided buffered my emotion and widened my margin.

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