



What's Your Leadership Batting Average?

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Ok, you may be a special person on your campus; a “pillar” of the community. And you’ve accomplished so much success that you’ve experienced the fruits promised in the cliché that success breeds more success. But do you have any idea how good you really are as a leader?

Reflect for a moment on your experience as a student. I’d hazard to guess that, at most, only twenty-percent of your teachers were above average. And off to college you went, only to encounter a continuation of this reality, finding that only two-out-of-ten professors were above average. Yet, ask any coach to rate himself or herself as a leader and you’ll find that almost all (let’s say 90%) will rate themselves in the top half. How can this be? Half of all coaches must, by definition, be in the bottom half. What’s going on here?

If you’re over 40 years old you’ll quickly recognize the *Lake Wobegon Effect* at work. Garrison Keillor, the host of the long-running radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*, often playfully referred to a fictional town in Minnesota as a setting for humorous news and simple stories. This fictional community, Lake Wobegon, was, as Keillor informed, a special place “where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” Thus, the *Lake Wobegon Effect*—the tendency to overestimate our abilities, achievements, and performance—and our looks.

In social psychology, this is known as the *illusory of superiority*—the tendency to overestimate one’s positive qualities and capabilities, and to underestimate one’s negative qualities, relative to others. Most of us are surprisingly unaware of the fact that we think we are smarter, warmer, funnier, more talented than we are. Social science researchers refer to this pernicious tendency as a self-enhancement bias.

So how then might you make sense of your leadership effectiveness? After a decade of research and practice I discovered a useful tool for describing leadership performance and effectiveness. I borrowed from the sport of baseball a straightforward model that provides a relevant way of observing leadership.

You see, in baseball a .250 hitter is often considered a part-time player. This hitter averages two and one-half hits for every ten at bats. Rarely does a .250 hitter make the all star team. Then we have the .300 hitter. The .300 hitter can, and often does, make the all star team. Yet, the separation between the two-fifty and the three-hundred hitter is only one-half more hit per ten at-bats. However, the distance between the all star and the utility player is considerable when applied to game performance. The skill to hit .300 is widely regarded as one of the toughest tasks in sport. If you have the opportunity to pick either the .250 hitter or the .300 hitter for your team you’ll select the all star .300 hitter.

Okay, let’s kick it up a notch. Let’s meet the .330 hitter. If a player hits .330 for a career, they are a good bet to make the Hall of Fame. Keep in mind, the spread between the utility platoon player and the

.330 wunderkind is less than one hit per every ten at bats. Like a fine-tooth comb, each notch on the batting average expresses some measure.

The reality within the game of baseball is that these three averages, standing side by side, are really meaningful. Everyone knows that these three averages provide a very useful scale to measure baseball hitters. An effective way to frame these three different averages is simply as good, better, and best.

So what does this have to do with leadership? Coach, there's a chance you are hitting .250 or slightly above as a leader (Don't shoot me I'm only the messenger). Another good bet is that only a handful of coaches are hitting .300 as a leader. And then the Belichick's out there, yes the extraordinary few, are hitting .330. You fit somewhere on this scale, but let me break it to you gently; it's not likely that you are hitting close to .330. Admit the *Lake Wobegon Effect* and try to, as best possible, rate yourself fairly.

A high level of self-awareness is essential if you want to improve as a leader. Interpreting your leadership batting average involves judgment and a certain amount of guesswork. At first glance, this looks like a daunting task. But if you work with other coaches to identify how to rate performance on leadership skills and abilities, I think you'll find your way through to a useful understanding of leadership and performance.

In the end, what does all this mean? It means, like the .250 hitter you need to identify your strengths and weaknesses, you need to use a "hitting" coach and you need to practice, practice, practice. Are you practicing relationship building? Are you guiding with your head and your heart? Are you engaging in regular intense reflection? Are you shaping the informal and formal aspects of common purpose? And are you focusing intentional behavior through roles and goals? Growth as a leader does not materialize by magic, nor through a declaration of sweeping changes. The roots of leadership lie in the gritty reality of every-day life.