

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE research

THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

TITLE	Stepping Up to the Plate: Leadership Behavior in Baseball
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OBJECTIVE	This study sought to identify leadership skills in baseball players through the use of a leadership evaluation tool designed for a business setting.

METHODOLOGY

The leadership practices of four former major league baseball players were examined: Willie Stargell, Ernie Banks, Brooks Robinson, and Harmon Killebrew. All were members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, with at least 15 years of experience, the subject of at least two major publications identifying the player as a leader of his respective team, and having at least 30 living teammates who played with them for at least five years. The latter provided the sample of respondents for completion of the Leadership Practices Inventory – Observer for each “leader” respectively.

KEY FINDINGS

The pattern of responses to the five leadership practices was generally equivalent for the four players. Indeed the absolute values for three of the players were also quite consistent, the exception on the low end being Brooks Robinson. Encouraging the Heart was the leadership practice ranked first in usage by these player's teammates, while Challenging the Process was ranked fifth.

The author writes:

The survey results indicate that Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory is a practical tool for use in assessing leadership skills of individual players in baseball. With few exceptions, respondents were able to use the LPI questions as written by Kouzes and Posner in the evaluation of their teammate. The LPI is not only useful in the evaluation of leadership skills of individuals in the world of business; it can be used in the evaluation of leadership abilities in players and coaches in all sports (p. 58).

This thesis illustrates that the LPI in its present form can serve as an aid to individuals on sport teams. Kouzes and Posner's LPI will assist in the identification of characteristics of leadership on the baseball diamond and clarify how influentials can step up to the plate and improve their leadership abilities (p. 59).

The author also comments about the adaptability of the LPI with various populations:

When work began on this thesis, I made an attempt to manipulate the LPI questions in order to construction questions that related more closely with baseball. However, as I played with the words, I kept coming back to the original phrase of each question. That is because if the reader looks closely at each question, modification is not necessary. Each of the thirty leadership inventory questions are so deftly phrased that they can be answered no matter from what experience the reader comes. It matters not if the respondent is part of a team of lawyers sitting in luxury office chairs in a conference room or part of a team of baseball players sitting on pine benches in a locker room. It matters not if the respondent is a lawyer or a mail clerk; an all-star center field or a bat boy. The questions are clear and succinct. Each question is appropriate no matter what the profession of the individual who is the subject of the review (p. 59).