

Brand Yourself with Specific Skills

I've been fortunate to conduct hundreds of entry-level professional baseball employment interviews in my career. In these interviews, striking similarities arise as candidates offer their reasons for getting hired. I've heard the *exact same responses* to my interview questions even from people of sharply differing backgrounds. Every candidate tends to use one or more of these phrases:

“I was born to be in baseball. It's my life.”

“Nobody will work harder than me.”

“I've dreamed of working in MLB all my life.”

“Baseball is my only passion.”

“Nobody wants this more than me.”

“I'm the best candidate out there; I just need a chance.”

These are quotes from the masses. As an applicant who has this as your only strategy, you have no separation from the other candidates. Instead, determine what makes you different from all of the rest of the candidates (*your defined strength, your brand*).

If you had to describe your brand, how would you define yourself? Let's explore your answers to these questions:

- If you were packaged as a product, what would be written on the label?
- What are the ingredients contained in this product?
- What does this product do?

- Why is this particular product better than others someone might buy?

In essence, when they make a hire, MLB executives are purchasing a product—a future employee who has particular *skills and talents* on the open market. Remember, this market has no shortage of highly qualified candidates. So brand yourself consistently with the specific skills and/or duties of the job. Your label should reflect the ingredients desired by the club for the position. If the label appeals, they'll want to learn more about the product. The more advanced your specific skills and talent, the more likely the MLB club will hire you. Your specific skills help define you and your brand.

TIP: Define your brand clearly.

Branded

Joe Maddon was a Major League coach for the California/Anaheim/Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim from 1994 to 2005. A consummate student of the game, Joe studied every phase of professional baseball during his long apprenticeship, first as a player in the Minor Leagues and then as a Minor League coach, manager, and roving instructor. As a Major League coach, Joe dug heavily into statistical information to help the Angels gain an advantage over their opponents. Remember, the mid-'90s were like the "stone-age" compared to today's standards of statistical research.

In my recollection, Joe became one of the first data-driven field staff members in professional baseball. He embraced the

computer and used it without fear of scorn or ridicule at a time when most people in Major League Baseball relied on their “gut” or their “eyes” to make decisions. Joe relied heavily on statistical analyses to do his job and prepare the Angels to compete against their opponents. The media, always on the lookout for the next story, heard about Joe’s new-age data-driven approach and wrote articles about the coach who was helping the Angel teams succeed. By the way, Joe wore thick, black-rimmed, geeky- looking glasses—part of his brand.

Needing a manager to succeed Lou Piniella in 2005, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays went looking for suitable candidates. Andrew Friedman, the 29-year-old GM of the Devil Rays, had a progressive mind and a background in finance. He saw great potential in the analytical study of the game, and it became part of his strategy to level the playing field with the high-payroll teams in the American League Eastern Division. He needed a manager who wasn’t hung up on the traditional way of decision-making and could use statistical evidence as well as baseball instincts. Because of Joe Maddon’s branded reputation, it didn’t take Friedman and team President Matt Silverman long to find and hire him.

Joe managed the Tampa Bay Rays from 2006 through 2014, winning the 2008 American League pennant. Following the 2014 season, he joined the Chicago Cubs, led them to the 2015 National League Championship Series and the 2016 World Series Championship. Today, nerds are cool!