

Delay is Not Denial

When I was with the Colorado Rockies, I had the pleasure of working with Clint Hurdle, a Major League manager and one of the best in the game today. Almost everyone who knows Clint agrees he's an even better person than merely a great baseball manager.

Clint could be tough and stern when needed, but he always showed compassion toward others. When we worked together, we had to send players down from the Major League squad to the AAA team at the end of Spring Training, as they were not going to make the 25-man roster. This makes the last week of Spring Training a stressful time for players *and* staff. The majority of veteran players feel confident they've made the team, but the others sit squarely on the "bubble," knowing their fate could go either way.

When a player was deemed headed to AAA, one of the coaches would send him to Clint's office. There, we'd break the unfortunate news gingerly, knowing the player's feelings were already hurt. *No need to throw salt in the wound by being too negative.* Clint would handle the situation as well as I have ever seen. He got the departing player to understand he was an important part of our club that season and could eventually rejoin the team at the Major League level. If that return was likely sooner than later, Clint used a particular statement that struck me as perfect for the situation. He'd say, "Delay is not denial."

It's so true. We knew many of the players sent to AAA would be playing with the "Big Club" soon, but our immediate task required building the "collective" best 25-man squad to begin the year.

“Collective” meant constructing our roster in a way that might dictate a player wasn’t a fit *at that point*. We may have needed a left-handed reliever instead of a right-handed one or a left-handed hitter on the bench instead of a right-handed one, for example. For that player, not making the club out of Spring Training didn’t mean never playing at the Major League level in the future. We *delayed* his participation, but we weren’t forever denying it.

Delay Not Deny Applies to Staff, Too

Theo Epstein made the most of his opportunity in public relations. Imagine if he’d only wanted to work in Baseball Operations and turned down the position in PR. It would have been a different story for him personally and for the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs. Some could even argue that, if Theo had never agreed to the PR job, the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs might still be looking for their first World Series Championship in 86 years and 108 years respectively. By building a pathway to working in Baseball Operations through a different door, he became General Manager of the Boston Red Sox and then President of the Chicago Cubs.

Theo’s job in Baseball Operations may have been *delayed*, but he would not be *denied*.

What about John Mozeliak (Mo), Senior Vice President and General Manager of the St. Louis Cardinals? He worked as a clubhouse and equipment staff member to get into professional baseball. Longtime Colorado Rockies Executive Assistant Adele Armagost remembers Mo raking leaves outside the Spring Training offices in Tucson, Arizona.

The fact that Mo was raking leaves wasn't what made his story remarkable. Adele emphasized his impressive work ethic and great attitude. Mo has been dedicated to his career in MLB from his first day at his humble job. Today, Mo is GM of one the most successful baseball franchises in Major League history!

Take another look at the list in Figure 2.1 and notice where some of those MLB hotshots started their careers. For you, too, delay does not mean denial.

TIP: If you don't find a job in Baseball Operations with a Major League team to begin your career, it doesn't mean you've been denied a career in Baseball Operations.