

## John Deffenbaugh blog – Deep left field

**Chicago Cubs** are in last place in the Central Division of baseball's National League. The Cubs pretty much have their name carved on the basement wall. Cubs fans are used to this position. Our last World Series win was in 1907. Even the Red Sox and White Sox have won since then recently.

Not the Cubs. There's something about the Cubs that endears them to the faithful. T-shirts are sold at Wrigley Field with the slogan, "If it takes forever". And it seems it will. I think the nearest success of glorified failure in England is Newcastle United.

What is it that takes persistence against all the odds? I was in the bleachers of Wrigley's left field for the great collapse of '69. 9½ games ahead at this time of the year, we blew it to the Mets, who went on to win the Series. Leo Durocher was the manager, he of the famous statement, "Nice guys finish last". The Cubbies were maybe just too nice.

Being in a minority is tough. If your leadership style veers towards coaching, affiliative and participative, you're probably in a minority. Maybe you're too nice, and are out of step with the directive bunch. I find myself in that position now in my non-exec role. We're dealing with a little local difficulty, and I'm a minority of one among the non-execs vis-à-vis a course of action. Mine is the informal route to tackle a performance issue, theirs is the formal route. I think I'm right, they think they're right.

Time will tell, as will a level playing field of information, which we don't yet have. As the economist John Maynard Keynes observed, "If the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" I have to be open-minded, and am prepared to review my position if the facts change. In the meantime, I'll continue to ask, "Why?"

The "why?" question is critical. It often comes from 'deep left field', which returns us to the Cubs. I often hear NHS leaders refer to 'deep left' or 'left field'. Yet I imagine that they have no conception of the setting for left field. Have you been to the ballpark, savoured the hotdogs and warm beer, sung the anthem, cheered the double play, booed the ump for the bum call, enjoyed the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch as (the now late) Harry Caray leads the fans in "Take me out to the ballgame"? And of course thrilled at the homer with 2 on, 2 out in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup>, the count 3-2, cheering as the ball sails over the left field wall for the Cubs to win by 1? The nearest most folk have got to this was Meatloaf's rendition of "Paradise by the Dashboard Light". It's also the nearest Cubs fans usually get to success.

Back to deep left. So you know next time, here is the explanation: Most batters are right-handed, so they swing to left. Ballparks do not need to be symmetrical, so teams often make left field further away than right. In Wrigley Field, for instance, there is over five feet difference between left and right fields. This may not seem 'deep', but you try hitting a ball 368 feet. Hence, 'deep left'. It is also why teams stock their rosters with southpaws (left handed pitchers and batters).

Deep left is therefore where you find the "why?" question. Where does your thinking come from? Are you too busy pacesetting and directing, rather than taking some reflective time? You'll get plenty of that when you sit in the left field bleachers of Wrigley Field. Sadly, not in the Fall, as October ball for the playoffs is not a feature known to a Cubs fan. It will indeed take forever.

But you don't need to wait as long as Cubs fans. Go out to your own deep left to do some left field thinking and questioning of your own.

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