

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

A FIRST-CLASS TEAM

I help coach a Little League team here in the area. If you're a dad, it's something I recommend you do at least once in your life, even if you don't know the game very well.

Little League players range in age from 9 to 12, which is a big difference in size and maturity from the smallest boys to the biggest. The blending of younger and older kids creates a challenge, but it also teaches a thousand different lessons about life.

We have Josh, a kid with lots of talent, and a cockiness that can work for him or against him.

There's Vincent, the first-string pitcher who's not quite reached his potential, despite repeated attempts by all the coaches to help him get there.

Billy is a gifted youngster that has difficulty taking any responsibility for his actions – or inactions – on the field. If there's an error, it's never his fault; there's always an excuse.

There's Leon, an affable, hard-working 12-year-old that loves the game, but is so quiet that he would disappear into the woodwork if you weren't watching.

Gary is a gutsy 11-year-old that is easily the hardest-working member of the team. He hustles and dives for everything, and manages to find a new way to earn a bruise every day. Not surprisingly, he has the team's best on-base percentage.

Daniel is the smartest one on the team, and his brain is always working overtime. In a game of split-second decisions and instincts, however, his analytical mind whirs like a computer on the field, and sometimes delays his actions by a fraction of a second.

Paul is a smiley, first-year player whose mind often wanders off into other places. Bryan would rather be anywhere else but playing baseball, or so it seems. And Tim may not have the talent of some of the others, but he's bright-eyed and learning every day.

Does my team sound a lot like your office or workplace?

Read through the descriptions again. Chances are you'll see one of more of your co-workers in the faces of these young ballplayers.

Even though I'm not a baseball expert, I'm grateful to have the chance to mold and shape these young people by helping them to participate in one of the greatest sports of all time.

What kind of a coach are you?

Do you get frustrated by your employees with egos that are too big for their own good?

How about the person that has more talent than they've demonstrated to you? The finger-pointer? The marginal performer? The quiet superstar, the one you can always count on in a jam, but too shy to take credit for his or her own talent? The brilliant thinker who may be using their brain power in the wrong way?

The hard worker who's earned his or her stripes, but may be too reckless in doing so? The mindless wanderer who stares out the window most of the day? The new hire that's green but eager to learn?

Every workplace has their share of people like these. No group of employees is perfect, but great coaches (or leaders) are able to bring out the best in each unique team member.

Here are a few things about leading people that I've learned from the dugout:

- **Challenge team members to be their best, and hold them accountable.**

If you don't ask for their best, they may not give it. Stretch your employees by making them answer not just to you, but also to their customers and co-workers.

- **Make sure your players are not afraid to fail.**

If the consequences of failure loom larger than the excitement of success, many people will freeze in fear. Make your workplace a no-fear zone. It's better to try and fail than to not attempt at all.

- **Make each team goal clear and achievable.**

Lay out what it is you're trying to accomplish in terms that everyone can understand and measure. Success can only come if there's a way to figure out if you've arrived.

- **Let everyone know how their individual efforts are contributing to your team's success.**

Communicate regularly, and praise openly as often as possible.

- **Surround yourself with people that want to be there.**

Nothing drains an organization more than whiners, complainers, and those who long for the "good old days". Get rid of the non-contributors, and the others will thank you for it.

Our Little League team's record is not the best. But we'll keep trying to bring out the best in each player, because our first-class manager believes our kids are learning about something far more important than wins and losses.

Someday I believe their future employers will appreciate that.

Bill Guertin, Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The 800-Pound Gorilla, works with companies of all sizes to improve their sales, marketing, service skills, and profitability.