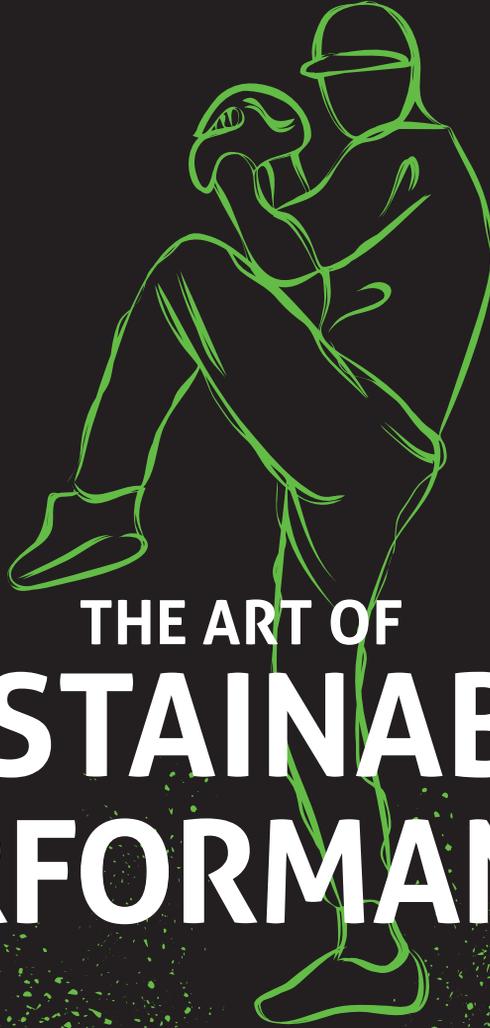


Sebastian Kodden



THE ART OF
**SUSTAINABLE
PERFORMANCE**

Model for Recruiting & Selection
and Professional Development

Sebastiaan Kodden

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**SUSTAINABLE
PERFORMANCE**

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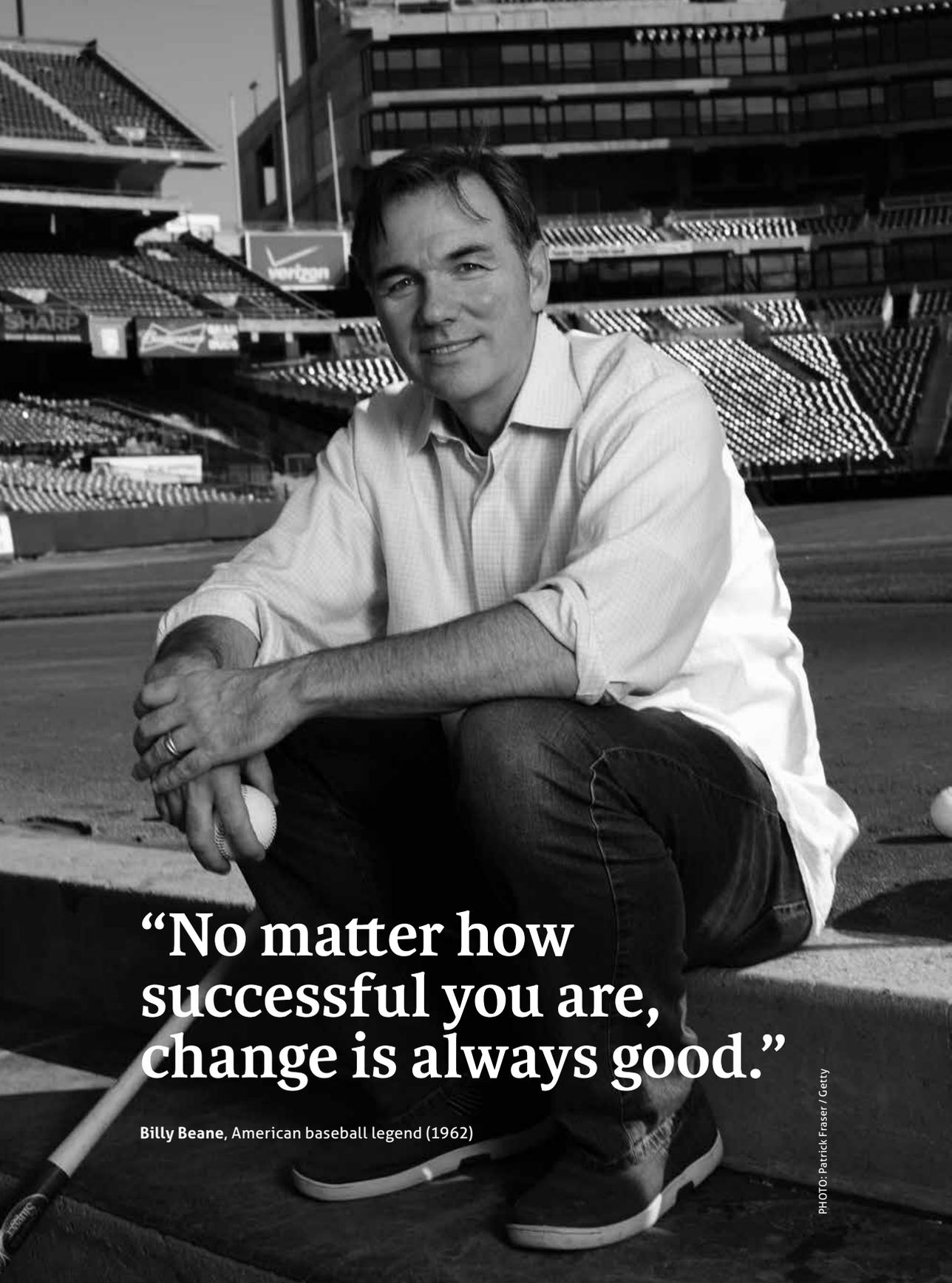
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A black and white photograph of Billy Beane, an American baseball legend, sitting on a concrete bench in a baseball stadium. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt and dark jeans. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. He is holding a baseball in his right hand, which is resting on his left knee. A baseball bat is leaning against the bench in front of him. The background shows the stadium seating, which is mostly empty, and various advertisements, including a Verizon sign and a Sharp sign. The lighting is bright, suggesting it is daytime.

**“No matter how
successful you are,
change is always good.”**

Billy Beane, American baseball legend (1962)

Prologue:

Billy Beane

As a young man, it seemed that the American Billy Beane could beat anyone at any sport. As a natural, he was so much better than anyone he competed against, it almost seemed like he was playing a sport far easier than the one his opponents were playing. In his second year of high school, Billy Beane was both quarterback for the football team and point leader for the basketball team. It was as if he discovered talents in himself before his body was ready to do anything with them. For example, he was able to dunk a ball before his hands were even big enough to lift the ball with one hand.¹ Billy was a typical example of an American teenager with many talents, including a major one: playing baseball!

Swarms of Scouts

With the exception of football, baseball is the biggest sport in the United States, America's favorite pastime. It is more popular than basketball, hockey, tennis and many times bigger than soccer.

It should come as no surprise then that Billy Beane was blessed with wonderful expectations for his future. His talents, particularly in this very popular sport, seemed a guarantee for success.

Not only did Billy have many talents, he also had the right body physique. At just fourteen years of age, he already towered over his own father by 7 inches. This allowed Billy to stand his ground against much older players. In his first year in high school, his coach even let him pitch in the last game of the season, despite protests of older teammates. Billy got no points against, struck out 10 batters and even managed to score two hits in four innings. In his second year, he achieved an unbelievably high batting average in one of the toughest high school divisions in the country. Starting his third year, Billy's height measured 6'5" and he weighed an impressive 180 pounds. By then, Major League scouts were turning up to each of his games. In his first official game as a pro, he only allowed two hits as a pitcher, stole four bases as a batter and scored three hits. These statistics remained a Californian record for his age group even decades later.²

Kiss of Death

It was not difficult for Billy to stand out. In the eyes of all scouts he was a true winner. A major talent, with the right physique and looks. They all saw what they so desperately wanted to see: a child prodigy, a *Wunderkind*. The greatest talents in history are often described as child prodigies. Kids with an almost supernatural ability to excel at what they do.

Some examples are Wolfgang Mozart, Tiger Woods, or more recently, young Dutch Formula 1 driver Max Verstappen. All of them appeared

to have enormous talents from a very young age. But in the case of Billy Beane something else was going on. Despite being a natural at baseball, it did not seem to offer him much joy. Billy skipped practice, arrived late, or was sloppy with his exercises. More and more, Billy started slacking.

Still, the professional baseball scouts continued to see what they wanted to see: a young prodigy who was destined to become the greatest in a sport that by then had practically no more financial limits in the United States. Teams paid astronomical sums for players that would draw people to their stadiums. Billy was destined for fame and glory and everyone wanted to be part of it. Blinded by bias and the chance of financial gain, the scouts missed crucial indications that Billy might not become the baseball great they expected him to be. Billy Beane had received his *kiss of death* long before. And he was fine with it. “I never looked at Billy’s stats,” a scout admitted years later. “I simply did not have to. He had everything.”

“Billy was a talent wearing a mask,” according to Roger Jongewaard, head scout for the Mets. “There are great guys and there are top guys. Billy was the absolute top. He had the physique, the speed, the arm; he had it all. He was a true athlete. Not to mention the fact that he got good grades and dated the prettiest girls. He was charming; he could be whatever he wanted.”³

And that is where Jongewaard and his colleagues went wrong. Billy did not really want to play baseball all that badly, he wanted to go to college. Billy wanted to go to Stanford. Receiving a college education was his main goal.

Logic, Science and Baseball

Ten years after his – to many completely unexpected – decision to quit professional baseball (1989), Billy returned to the sport. First as a scout and later as general manager for his former team, The Oakland A's. Although Billy had vowed never again to make a decision based on money, he once again ended up in a world where everything was centered around money. Where to find it, where to spend it, and above all, on who to spend it! The major league was all about attracting and selecting the right talent. It still is.

The talent scouts for the Oakland A's, with whom Billy had to cooperate, turned out to be no different to their predecessors who had deemed Billy Beane a future star baseball player. Just like before, they were the ones who decided who would be recruited and be allowed to play ball. As general manager, Billy decided to do without their “professional insights”. At that time, scouts were still focused on high school players, particularly high school pitchers. After all, their young arms were fresh and they were able to deliver the only performance the scouts could measure and quantify: how fast their pitch was. But Billy knew that the most important trait for a pitcher was not his physical strength, but his ability to strike out his opponents. And this can be achieved in a number of ways.

Billy Beane knew that you only had to look at statistics to recognize that high school pitchers had half the chance of making it to the big leagues compared to college pitchers. A quarter in the case of position players. But what happened when you simply let the scouts have their way? They would only select high school pitchers in the first round and you ended up having to pay millions to sign them! It mocked the laws

of probability and it mocked the laws of logic. And logic – perhaps even science – was the aspect that Billy Beane really wanted to introduce to baseball. Scouts, who were often former players, had the tendency to be overly influenced by a player’s recent performance and only saw what they wanted to see. However, past performance is no guarantee for future results and nothing is what it seems. Billy Beane knew that from his own experience. After all, he had been at the top of all those little lists.

Billy had started to realize that the scouting and selecting of baseball players was in the same stage of development as medical science was in the eighteenth century. Billy and his future right-hand man, Harvard statistician Paul DePodesta, became fascinated by that irrationality, because as they saw it, whoever managed to put an end to that irrationality, would create great opportunities for themselves.

A True Winner

Billy Beane was different and thought differently. Winning was all that mattered. Billy’s first pick was the unknown David Beck, who he offered a contract based solely on data provided by his own statistician, Paul Podesta. When he did his warm-up, it was the most bizarre thing anyone had ever seen. When David Beck drew back his left arm, his left hand would flop around like he had no wrist. It was almost like his hand was about to come loose and fly away. David Beck suffered from hyper-mobility and might even have been considered handicapped.

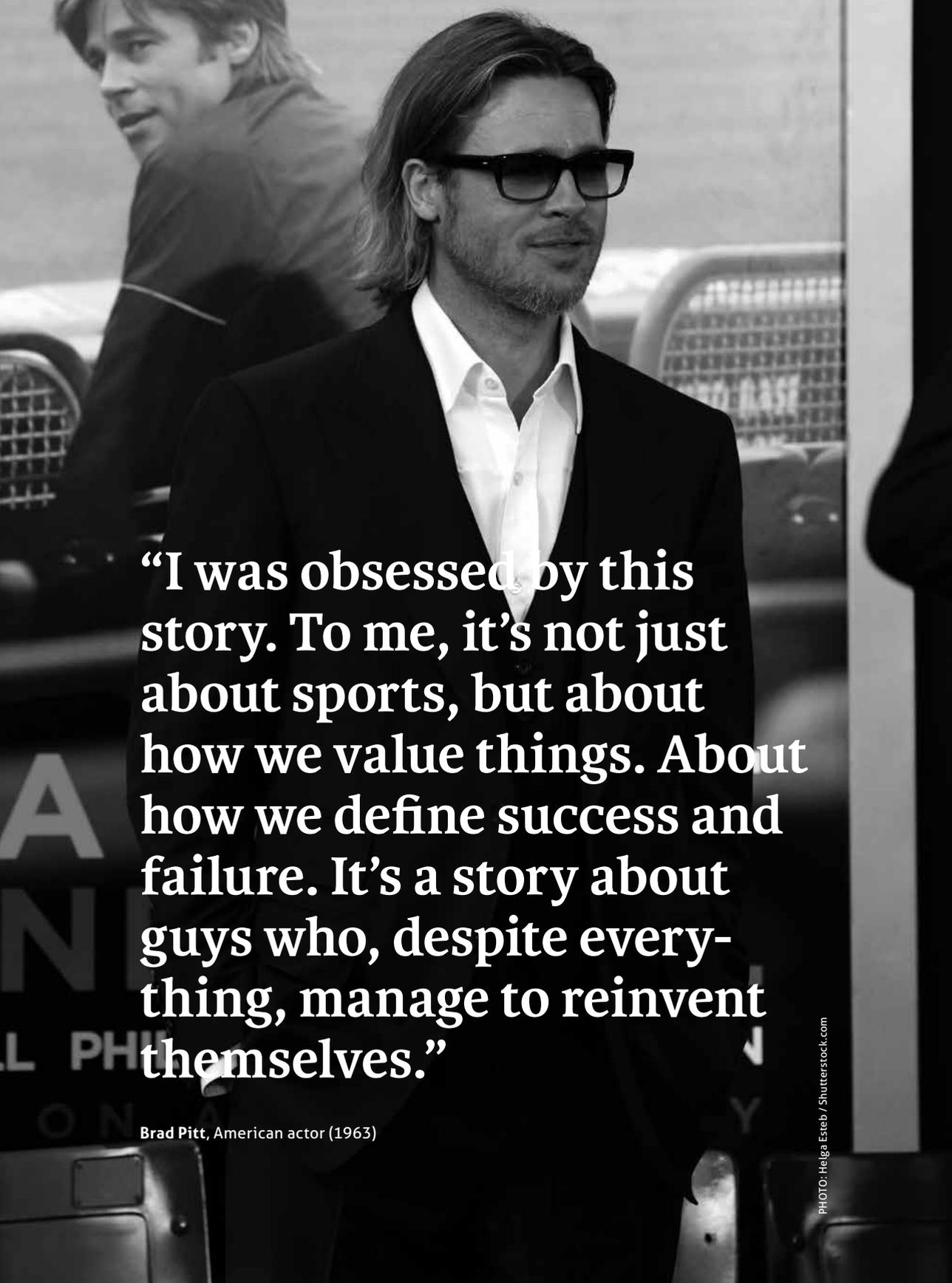
From that moment on, Beck was no longer known as David Beck to the scouts. They started calling him “The Creature”. The Creature subse-

quently dominated the rookie league. With his “Halloween Hand” and his 84-miles-an-hour fastball, he was so much better than his opponents that they had no idea what was happening to them.

Paul’s computer would spit out many more unknown players who were offered contracts. Billy took away the recruiting tasks from the scouts, and gave them to people who had what he valued most: an academic background in something other than baseball. They were able to look at baseball from a different perspective. A perspective that was not just based on a gut-feeling or expectation, but on actively looking for indicators that could predict sustainable performance.

The story about Billy Beane and the movie *Moneyball*, starring Brad Pitt as the general director of the poor but successful baseball team The Oakland A’s, were a major inspiration for writing this book and researching performance indicators and personality traits for sustainable performance. A quest for specific characteristics to explain our own sustainable performance.

Billy Beane wanted to win the Major League with his baseball team. While others were competing for players with high batting averages or hit numbers, he dove into the statistics and combined unique players into a winning team.



“I was obsessed by this story. To me, it’s not just about sports, but about how we value things. About how we define success and failure. It’s a story about guys who, despite everything, manage to reinvent themselves.”

Brad Pitt, American actor (1963)

Introduction

Past performance is no guarantee for future results. The book and movie *Moneyball* drew a lot of attention in the United States. The idea of alternative hiring procedures and statistics-based recruiting and selection procedures had a huge impact. What is needed to continue performing at a high level? How can you reinvent yourself as an individual, as a team and as an organization in order to stay successful?

Fifteen years of being an entrepreneur; for me it ended in 2013. Over thirty thousand hours of hard work, of falling and getting back up again. They were also fifteen years of study and research, finally resulting in a Ph.D. What had started with the goal to improve my own business – after all, nothing is as practical as a good theory⁴ – ended years later working for Nyenrode Business University, where I teach ambitious professionals in the fields of leadership, entrepreneurship and personal development.

Time to Take Stock

What had I truly learned after all those years of practice and study, and which theories had I found to be genuinely important? This question, which I asked myself during a break between teaching MBA students in 2013, hit me like a ton of bricks. What was really the essence of it all? During my time as an entrepreneur, why did some things go right while other things failed? What had brought me joy? And did all that theoretical knowledge I had come across over the years have anything to do with reality?

I had just finished explaining the ten thousand hours theory to my students. In his book *Outliers*, American best-selling author, Malcolm Gladwell, supports the statement by Swedish psychologist Ericsson⁵ that you can only gain insights into personal success after you have spent at least ten thousand hours practicing something. By 2013, I had three times that, both in acquired knowledge as well as in terms of practical experience. It was time for me to take stock.

Gladwell's book and Ericsson's ten thousand hours theory became the reason for me to write the book *Become a HERO*. Something I really enjoyed. In it, I tried to find my own answers to questions such as: What management theories are truly valuable in the real world? Which organization and management aspects increase job satisfaction? *Become a HERO* turned out to be a hit, particularly because it seemed that many professionals in the Netherlands were not satisfied with their jobs. Many lacked (and still lack) work engagement and life engagement and, like me, were looking for tools to achieve those.

What Is Needed to Continue Performing?

As a researcher, an entrepreneur, but especially as a father to two young children, there was one question that kept me awake at night: What is needed to continue performing? After all, winning once is not good enough.

As an entrepreneur, I had employed hundreds of people, conducted or had others conduct over a thousand interviews, and tested hundreds of talented people. Nevertheless, I often still felt that maybe I had hired the wrong person. Even worse; how many talented individuals had I let slip through my fingers who had the abilities and personality traits to become top performers that would have significantly contributed to my teams and organization? Had I been blinded, focused too much on myself or had I put too much stock in appearances? Why was it that I – as an entrepreneur or person – lacked the skills to truly recognize who was talented and who was not?

What is needed to continue performing? Unanswered questions like that continued to make me restless. How you could become attached to and remain engaged in your work, sure, that was something that I had figured out. By making available the right energy sources, an energetic attitude, taking charge of your own life, and above all *taking action*, that is what brings results. But how do you make sure that you can win *again*? And again after that? What is needed for that? And how do you recognize candidates that have the right knowledge and ability?

The question I asked myself late 2013, after reading *Moneyball* and watching the movie, was this: Which personality traits and performance criteria are crucial for a sustained performance? And what

was the fatherly advice that I could give my two young children? With the results, I could also answer what is the most crucial question for many businesses: How and based on what criteria can you select the best people for your team and organization? All in order to keep on winning.

The Journey, Not the Destination

I went looking for answers, devoured dozens of management books and scientific articles, spoke to experts from academic, professional sports and business circles and created a model that I thought could explain the importance of personality traits; a model that could also explain why I myself had not always performed optimally in my own life.

You've probably been there yourself. After years of learning, studying and preparing, you started your first job. Ignorant, unaware and perhaps not quite competent yet, but with boundless energy that you were finally going to put to use. You received your first compliments, got your first promotion and started off on a high. Fantastic, I had it in me all the time, you said to yourself. Nobody saw it, but now they do, my talent is finally getting noticed. I have arrived. I just had to discover it. Right?

However, things often get difficult after graduating or winning an award. Because you wonder what's next. I realized later that it is not about the award or diploma. What I really enjoyed was getting there. The flow, the enthusiasm that comes with a new challenge and pursuing a new goal. Life engagement is not about the destination, about the goal; it is about the journey. Which personality traits will be the most

helpful to you during that journey? Exactly that is what this book is about!

Past Performance

Just like Billy Beane we all receive our own *kiss of death* at one time or another. We've all had our first successes and celebrated them, but then the first cracks start to appear and you notice that there are many other individuals who are just as good – if not better. That first win in no way guarantees another win tomorrow. Many department heads, managers, board members, CEOs and entrepreneurs have also experienced this phenomenon from the perspective of leaders. One team was successful, while another did not do so well. And the team and organization that were once so successful, suddenly started to show disappointing performances years later. Poor performances that could not be explained by the economy, competition or anything else. Things simply didn't work anymore.

“Talent is time sensitive,” according to fellow professor Lidewey van der Sluis. “It is transient. You can be considered very talented one day, people love you and want to network with you, but all of that can change in an instant. You can fall off your pedestal. Take professional athletes, for instance. The more games and trophies they win, the more people love them. However, expectations also increase. It is easier to learn how to win than to keep on winning. Success never simply occurs out of nowhere and quality is never a coincidence.”⁶

“Past performance is no guarantee for future results,” as many of today's financial radio and TV ads say. Unfortunately, that statement is also

true for our own lives and careers. But then, which personality traits and which employees do you need in order to remain successful? Whenever I spoke about this topic with experts from academia or professional sports, I often heard things like, “It’s a matter of perseverance,” or “Enthusiasm determines everything.”

That seemed obvious, hard to argue, but I thought there had to be more. And, as Billy Beane, the legendary baseball coach from Oakland found out, there is indeed more. Much more. The movie *Moneyball*, about his personality and drive to discover the most important performance indicators in baseball, inspired me to start a similar study. Instead, mine would be aimed at the current personality traits and performance indicators of Dutch professionals.

Culture of Mediocrity

Whether we like it or not, the Dutch culture of only doing the bare minimum no longer suffices. A Harvard diploma is within the reach of many these days. In 2008, there were 179,800 Chinese students who received an education abroad. By 2015, that number had already grown to 523,700, an impressive increase of 13.9% compared to the year before. According to the Institute for International Education, 27% of them went to school in the United States and 20% in the United Kingdom. Especially prestigious universities such as Harvard, Columbia and New York University are popular. Of the 9,396 international students that were enrolled at Harvard in 2016, 938 were from China. A year’s tuition for one of those schools costs upward of 50,000 dollars, but many upper middle-class Chinese people are more than willing to pay it. And the American universities welcome them with open arms. In 2014,

Chinese students added 10 billion dollars to their income. Tuition is not even the biggest expense for many Chinese students. They also spend tens of thousands of dollars on coaching and training to prepare them for their future careers.⁷

The job market has changed completely because of a new generation full of young, ambitious and very well-educated professionals from all over the globe who want their piece of the pie. And they often get it, at the expense of our own young professionals, who often think the bare minimum is good enough.

Therefore, I believe that modern parents should not just raise their kids with love and attention in a safe and nurturing environment, but also make them more resilient. To prepare them for a job market where they will be confronted with high demands on performance. Of course, giving them love and attention comes first, but preparing them for what the future will demand from them, should definitely be next on the list. But how do we do that? And more importantly, what are the requirements?

Moneyball

The story of Billy Beane, reinventing yourself, the movie adaptation of *Moneyball* starring Brad Pitt and a chance to meet one of Billy Beane's best friends, were the reasons for my own research. My own *Moneyball*: Why and based on what criteria are certain talented people in the Netherlands hired while others are rejected? What personality traits do continually successful Dutch professionals have? Do we perhaps all have the same blind spot when it comes to finding the right candidate?

The result of three years of research now lies before you. Eighteen months of preparation and two years of actual research among supervisors and senior colleagues of over 1,100 professionals and many dozens of interviews with experts from science, business and sports sectors provided new insights that can help you reinvent yourself as a professional and help build sustainably performing organizations.

I hope you will enjoy the book!

Sebastiaan Kodden

Utrecht, April 2017

Why does one organization remain successful while others are falling apart or just disappear? Why is one person successful over and over again, while no one expected him or her to be?

Please forget everything you think you know about recruiting and selecting the right employees. Because it really is quite different than you think it is! The secret of winning persons and teams lies in the combination of talent and four important performance indicators, on which – strangely enough – many organizations just do not select their employees ...

Sebastiaan Kodden studied performance indicators among executives and senior staff of over 1,100 professionals and 50 CEO's of the Dutch best known companies. His surprising findings put the present recruitment and selection procedures of many Dutch companies in a new perspective.

And the book is not only about the theory: it also offers a useful model for recruitment and selection and professional development. Including various questionnaires and checklists for hr-professionals and executives who want to build sustainable winning teams and organizations.

Sebastiaan Kodden (1970) is a writer, speaker and researcher in the field of leadership, entrepreneurship and personal development. He works with Nyenrode Business University at the Center for Leadership Management Development.

He is the author of *Word een HELD*, a bestseller published internationally.
