

1 - SWING FOR THE FENCES:

Embrace Failure

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” goes the childhood meme that we all learned in school. That’s what we were supposed to say to someone who taunted us with shaming epithets like “loser,” “fake,” “dork.” Over time, our scratches, bruises and even our broken bones did heal - yet those taunting words echo still in our consciousness. Left unchallenged, those words fester and become “stinkin’ thinkin’.” We don’t need an older brother around telling us what a loser we are. We have built-in sound systems that reverberate in our brains, repeating over and over again that we don’t measure up, we suck. No matter how hard we try, we are just not quite good enough. It’s not that we have done something wrong, nor that we are bad people, it’s just that we always seem to fall short of the goal.

That “stinkin’ thinkin’” is more pervasive in our culture than we’d like to believe. It’s time for a revolution. Rather than a call to arms, I’m suggesting a “call to bats.” Let’s use the lessons of baseball, especially a “swing for the fences” mentality, to overcome the shaming messages bouncing around in our heads. Our fences are out there: they are the deepest hopes, long-held dreams, great passions and strongest desires of our hearts. We would love nothing better than to really connect with, really hit, the sweet spot response to some situation in our life that allows us to knock it out of the park. We could touch all the bases and jump on home plate while those around us cheered. We could say to those old voices, “be gone,” and create new voices that affirm us, accept us, love us. We could be the people we were meant to be.

Who wakes up in the morning intending to fail? Who plans to screw up everything at work, sabotage every project, say hurtful words to people and generally ruin every human interaction they attempt? Let’s say no one, even though there could be some really sick people

who do just that. But we know lots of people – in our families, schools, places of worship – that love to tell us how we constantly fail to measure up. No matter how hard we've tried, it just is never good enough. Well, guess what? We DO fail more times than we succeed! Lots more. So, let's embrace failure! Let's embrace baseball as a way to overcome the stinkin' thinkin' that so often immobilizes us and makes us feel so terrible.

That's right. Baseball. It's a game of failure. It's also about teamwork, sacrifice, affirmation, grace, tolerance and a whole bunch more. Learn the lessons of baseball and you will navigate the sticks, stones and awful words slung in your direction. Remember that baseball is the only sport where the person scores, not the ball....and the person comes "home" to do so. You are more important than any "thing" and others are counting on you. Of course, you'll suck. Baseball is not about perfection. You just need to suck less. You do that by showing up every day, digging in to what you have to do, and swinging for the fences. You'll practice. Your attitude and effort will pay off – just not all the time. Get really involved in the game of baseball and you'll see a whole new ontology (the way things are in the universe) unfold before you. It starts with hitting.

The hardest thing to do in all of sports is to hit a round ball with a round bat. The ball is often spinning and traveling at close to 100 miles per hour, taking less than half a second to reach the batter. The sweet spot on the round-surfaced bat, which is swinging toward the ball, is the size of a dime. To hit that ball and make it travel to anywhere on the field in a manner that someone won't catch it, scoop it up, or throw to a base, is ridiculously hard. Doing so successfully three times out of ten (yielding a slightly-better-than .300 batting average) would probably land a person a major league contract. Ted Williams, the greatest hitter of all times, entered the Hall of Fame with a career batting average of slightly over .400 (read "four

hundred”). Where in life can you FAIL six, or even seven, times out of ten and still be richly rewarded?

To be sure, all hitters practice in the batting cage. Hundreds of balls come at them, sometimes at great speed, and they hit virtually every one of them. But in a game, things are different. Not all pitchers throw the same way. Often times, a curve comes unexpectedly and the batter’s concentration is disrupted. The batter cannot guarantee success, even with all the practice in the world. However, the batter will most certainly guarantee failure by not swinging the bat. Focusing on how many times the ball was missed, or how poorly the time at bat went, is not what puts people into the Hall of Fame. It is how many times the batter came to the plate, dug in, and swung for the fences that maybe, just maybe, resulted in a run being scored or a game being won or even just the batter getting to stand on first base for a while.

Get your bat off your shoulder. Embrace failure. Swing for the fences.



Consider your own “stinkin’ thinkin’.” Whose voice/s do you hear? What are they saying? In what way/s can you step up to the plate, dig in, and suck less? Describe what it would be like to swing for the fences. How does that feel?