

The professional, the baseball player, and me

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"On behalf of the crew, welcome to Boston!" British Airways flight 0213 has just landed. Once through customs, I realize that I am really standing on American soil. Tired? Yes. Nervous? Definitely. Looking forward to my time in Cambridge? Absolutely! My name is Wiljan Hendrikx – coming from the Netherlands – and for this autumn semester I am a visiting fellow at the GoodWork Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. During my study visit, my aim is to get to know the GoodWork concepts more thoroughly, and to get to know the GoodWork Project from the inside. This will enable me to gain a deeper understanding of how we can make use of the GoodWork materials back in the Netherlands. Being in close contact with the Dutch Professional Pride Foundation and Tilburg University, I try to share as much of my insights as possible via blogs written in Dutch. I am happy to share this weeks' blog on professionals and baseball players in English below.

'I was in awe every time I walked onto the field. That's respect. I was taught you never, ever disrespect your opponent or your teammates or your organization or your manager and never, ever your uniform. Make a great play, act like you've done it before; get a big hit, look for the third base coach and get ready to run the bases; hit a home run, put your head down, drop the bat, run around the bases, because the name on the front is a lot more important than the name on the back. That's respect' (Ryne Sandberg, 2005 introduction speech to Baseball Hall of Fame, as quoted by Hecló, 2008: 3).

On Wednesday September 26, I went to see this season's last baseball match of the Boston Redsox at Fenway Park. A terrific experience, especially when you look at the sport and everything that goes with it through the lens of an institutional thinker. Before the game began, different old-players from all time periods entered the field one by one welcomed by loud applause and with deep awe. Together, they formed the Redsox 'dream team'. The stadium, – Fenway Park – is usually a little small, but it is one of the oldest stadiums in the US and aged over a 100 years, it is a national monument. The tribunes were pretty crowded, mostly with families and some of the kids had made colourful banners saying 'this is my first Redsox match.' After the three hour match, everyone was invited to walk the legendary bases on the field. For most baseball fans this was an experience where superlatives like 'awesome' and 'amazing' fell short.

Thinking institutionally, what is it? It is exactly what the quotation of the baseball player above illustrates: it is about the role a person can fulfil within a bigger picture. The baseball player does not play the game purely for himself and for his own fame and glory. No, he plays for the team, for the name of the club, and eventually especially for the game and all the traditions that come along with it.

Not thinking about yourself, but thoughtfully taking notice and making use of everything that is being handed to you is central. An institutional thinker focuses on the long run and feels as if he owes the world around him something. He does not regard himself to be someone to whom something is owed (Hecló, 2008: 98). A professional in the classic meaning of the word is a person like that. Although it is not unimportant, he or she is not in it for the salary, it is about the profession. The doctor is committed to the health of its patients, the teacher cares about the development of its pupils, and the judge wants every case to be examined and considered righteously, objectively and precisely. Nevertheless, thinking institutionally is not an easy task nowadays. Or as Hecló says, 'thinking institutionally has become a countercultural act' (2008: 160).

One of the reasons that Hecló mentions, is that institutional thinkers are often considered to be opponents of change. However, he points out that this is a misconception. Being institutionally minded offers space for change. Or as Hecló expresses, 'if we want things to stay the same, there are going to be some changes' (2008: 99). This matches the mission of the Dutch Foundation for Professional Pride perfectly: striving for a renaissance of professional honour and professional pride. I do not consider this mission to be a 'back to the past'-plea. It is an expression of thinking institutionally that puts innovation upfront in order to preserve what is of value. That might sound hard, but basically what it comes down to is that we all have to think a little more like baseball player Ryne Sandberg.

Hecló, H. (2008). *On Thinking Institutionally*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

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