

NewsStand - Anticipation

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Recently I've been thinking about the attributes of greatness in athletes. Is there a common denominator in great hitters, great infielders, great goalies, great quarterbacks and great race car drivers. And is there a way to apply this attribute to the way we run our own businesses so that they, too, rise above the herd and exhibit greatness?

Let's start with football. One chapter in Brian Billick's *More Than A Game* addresses the challenge of picking first round draft picks during the football draft, and in particular the near impossibility of predicting whether a quarterback will succeed in the pros after an outstanding college career. A full 50 percent of all first round quarterback picks fail to live up to their potential. Why is this? I've been watching Drew Brees of the New Orleans Saints who has been having another stellar season. What does Brees do that other quarterbacks are not doing?

In baseball, what makes Derek Jeter a superstar? It isn't just charisma. How does a great hitter like Albert Pujols snag a 10-year contract worth more than a quarter-billion dollars. How about goalkeepers in soccer, or the National Hockey League? What do the best do that the rest do not? What about champion race car drivers? At the NASCAR level they all have to be good. Is there a quality that sets the best apart from the rest?

There are undoubtedly many qualities that contribute to success, but one in particular that seems especially common to all is the ability to anticipate. Alertness, focus, anticipation. Here's an excerpt from a blog called Axon Potential which deals with the mindset of athletes.

Based on athletes' reports and technology that tracks their eye movements, we know that athletes anticipate what's coming next by focusing only on the most relevant cues in an opponents' movement pattern. And that this skill changes and becomes refined with training. The eyes of novices are all over the place, whereas athletes' focus is much more targeted and economical. Across a number of different sports, expert athletes demonstrate similar "visual search strategies". Their eyes focus on fewer targets, jump around less, and they stay focused for longer periods of time than do the eyes of novices.*

This is a fascinating concept because in a world filled with a gazillion pieces of information flying at us from all directions, how do we process it all? The key for Drew Brees when he faces down 11 defenders has more to do with which information not to process, and identifying the right cues so as to obtain the most effective result. Crowd noise and stunt maneuvers by defensive linemen are all distractions. Perhaps his success in a scoring touchdown pass revolves around what he sees in a single linebacker's eyes.

So it is in the quick lube market. During these past 20 years we have seen many changes, and we have also heard a lot of noise that hasn't changed things much. Here are some examples:

More diesel-powered vehicles

Because such a large percentage of European cars are diesel, including 60 percent of VWs sold there, many expected a much larger share of North American vehicles would be diesel by now. It hasn't really played out the way many predicted.

Growth of electric or other environmentally friendly vehicles

Electric vehicles have been talked about endlessly these past 15 years. Despite the media attention they garner, Tesla has only sold 2000 cars in 30 countries. Nissan, the leader in sales, only sold 8720 vehicles in the most recent calendar year. With more than a hundred million gasoline-powered internal combustion engines running around, I do not see a threat to our oil change livelihood any time soon.

Extended drain intervals

The May 1996 issue of *Lubes 'N' Greases* featured an article based on a meeting with representatives of the three major automakers. The article begins with a quote by Stefan Korcek, a Ford engineer: "We should have gotten more from the GF-2 process." Representatives from the three companies then detail how lack of knowledge about available lubricant technology led to an unsatisfactory PCMO (passenger car motor oil) upgrade.

One of the primary issues was extended drains. "Certainly there is technology available to raise the standard and extend the drain interval without compromising engine durability or removing the performance cushion... Europe is already at a 9,000-mile drain interval and is seriously considering twice that," says GM's Mike McMillan.

Unlike the diesel and electric vehicle predictions of the late nineties, these were voices that indicated clearly the direction oil change intervals would be going, and have gone. In a study conducted this summer by the NDP Group on U.S. Auto Owners' Attitudes about Motor Oil Change Intervals barely half of vehicle owners say they believe oil should be changed every 3,000 miles or three months. Just four years ago nearly 60 percent held this position.

In point of fact, many in our industry did see the writing on the wall regarding drain intervals. Some threw in the towel. Some took action to fight against it. But have you ever tried to reverse the tide? When the tide is going out, do you line people up on the beach with buckets to stop the ocean from receding? Surfers go with the wave, not against it. Hindsight is 20/20, but a better approach would have been to think creatively and to look for programs that provide profits while simultaneously giving customers the convenience they are looking for, without sacrificing protection for the vehicles they maintain. In most cases a premium synthetic is the solution.

*"The anticipatory skills of athletes, by Via Joaquin

<http://axonpotential.com/the-anticipatory-skills-of-athletes/>