

Chapter 2: The Sellout Mentality

Ground rule #2: The one goal is to increase the number of sold-out games.

Tell me the difference.

You go to two home basketball games of the same team. They could be high school, college, or pro games. You're rooting for the home team, which has a record of a few more losses than victories.

The first game is against the best team in the league. It's completely sold out. The home team has also dusted off its ticket printer and printed a slew of standing room tickets and those sold in a flash.

At this sold-out game, outside the arena are a quirky combination of fans:

1. **Fans with tickets.** They're walking briskly, bobbing and weaving through the crowd, animatedly talking about the upcoming game. They feel good; the anticipation of the game is adrenaline to even the weariest fans. From outside the arena, they catch a scent of hot dogs grilling inside and it's like the bell with Pavlov's dog.
2. **Fans without tickets.** These fans are roaming the perimeter of the arena with a bounce in their gait, asking everybody they see if they have extra tickets.
3. **Fans scalping tickets.** The scalpers are out, waving a pair of pretty good seats while also keeping an eye out for the cops.

On the concourse in the arena, you jump into the concession line, hoping that the fans in front of you aren't going to buy hot dogs and nachos for a small army. You're jostled from the side and, lo and behold, it's a pal from where you used to work years ago. This is like a party!

Inhaling your hot dogs as you find your seats, the home team's starting lineup is announced. You practically strangle yourself cheering and spewing hot dogs.

This is fun! *This is the way sporting events are meant to be!*

Let's now jump-cut to the other game a few days later. This time, your team isn't playing the best team in the league. You're playing the *worst* team. And, it's a Tuesday night.

You feel a little skittish as you walk to the arena from your car. There's *nobody* asking you if you have extra tickets. There are no scalpers. The pace of the few fans walking is *different*. The speed may be the same, but there is no bounce to their step and the conversation you overhear isn't about the game. It's about some jerk at work.

The people attending this game are obviously hard-core fans of the home team. Or, you think, they're probably some stiff from the loading dock that received the company's season tickets for the game.

FANS DISGUISED AS EMPTY SEATS

When you enter the concourse, there is *no line at the concession stand*. You quickly order a hot dog and a soda. The center of the hot dog *seems* cold.

Inside the arena, there is limp air—it isn't quite *dead air* since the home team has some upbeat music playing—but there is no personal electricity. You look around the seating area. It looks like a meadow of empty seats. 70% of the seats are *unsold*.

Which game did you have more fun at?

You say, '*What, are you kidding?*'

The answer is that obvious.

There is nothing like going to a sold out sporting event.

The fans that attend a game that is sold out have more fun than the fan that attends a game where 50% of the seats are unsold.

Let's follow this logic. If the fan has more fun at a sellout, that fan is more likely to buy tickets to *attend more games*. It's human nature. The more we like something, the more we want more of it.

It may seem obvious, but it's worth re-stating:

Fans have more fun at a sold out sporting event. Because they had fun, they are much more likely to buy tickets to attend more games.

A JOB OFFER

After attending those two imaginary games, you are hired as the Director of Ticket Sales for that team.

The mandate from your boss is to sell out *every* home game.

There are several easy ways to do that:

1. **Easy Way #1: Sign a Big Superstar.** Okay, the boss wants you to sell out every home game. Ask him for just one teensy favor. Sign a super mega-star. We're not talking about an All-Star. We're talking Super Mega-Star! When Shaq signed with the Miami Heat in 2004, the Heat sold over 10,000 season tickets in less than a week. LeBron sold out seasons at Cleveland and then Miami. Michael Jordan sold out seasons when he was with the Chicago Bulls, and then after he came back from retirement, he sold out one season for the hapless Washington Wizards. He also sold out minor league baseball games for the Birmingham Barons.
2. **Easy Way #2: The NFL Way.** Your boss might tell you that the best way to sellout every game is the NFL way; you know, sell every seat as a season ticket. Too bad your team isn't a popular NFL team. And, like most teams in this country, your team doesn't have enough local support to sell out the building with *full* season tickets. Right now, you probably have a small base of season tickets—one-tenth to one-third of the capacity of the building. Getting the other nine-tenths or the other two-thirds to fill up the stadium for every game is what this *Playbook* is all about.
3. **Easy Way #3: Build a New Stadium or Arena.** No super mega-star and no NFL team? Fine, ask you boss to get cracking on a new stadium. For years, this has been the magic potion to sell out games. Build a new building, add some swanky bells and whistles and hype, stir in a reasonably competitive team, and fans come out of the woodwork to support the team. The new building becomes like the new restaurant or club in town where everyone has to go and be seen. Unfortunately, if a team rests solely on its season ticketholder shoulders, the shiny newness seems to wear off. Fans start to realize that the new building isn't that special. Season ticket renewals plummet. Attendance plummets.
4. **Easy Way #4: Threaten to Move the Team.** If the owner of your team threatens this, it's time to send out resumes. You see, the owner uses this card only when the team has failed miserably to sell tickets and this is his last gasp. This strategy sometimes works to get a new arena, but there would be a lot of blood on the floor long before that arena is built. Some of that blood would most likely be yours.

Of course these four Easy Ways are most likely not available to you, but don't despair. There is a better way, a much better way.

Let's identify what you have. Like most teams in this country, your team doesn't have enough local support to sell out the building with season tickets. Right now, you have a small base of season tickets—let's say one-fourth of the capacity of the building.

With that small season ticket base, *how in the world do you push the market to sell out every game all season long? What do you do...what do you do?*

You could hire a sales staff and telemarket every man, woman, and child in the area to buy season tickets. With tens of thousands of phone calls and some high voltage salesmanship,

this would indeed nudge up your season ticket base a bit. Not a lot, but *a bit*. However, you would most likely lose most of these new sales the next year when it was renewal time. Now you're back to square one. When that happens, your boss may suggest, *let's just repeat the process*. Again, you have your sales staff phone every man, woman, and child in your market. Your telemarketers push and pull and bite and kick and pressure and finally they almost replace all the season ticketholders that did not renew.

You could repeat this process every year. However, more sellouts would elude you. You might become an expert in hand-to-hand sales combat, but not in selling out your building all season long.

An alternative way of looking at the problem is to look at the *experience* of going to a sold-out game. The sold-out game can become your strongest marketing tool. That's right, your strongest marketing tool is sold-out games.

*Your strongest marketing
tool is sold-out games.*

That's what this book is all about. It's taking the sellout game and replicating it, time after time after time.

You should use all of your energies and your staff's energies to increase the number of sold-out games.

Usually your mandate would be to increase your average attendance. That's not your goal here! Your goal is: **increase the number of sold-out games.**

(By the way, when you increase the number of sold-out games, you will increase total attendance.)

STOP!!! TIME TO DIGEST.

This concept is so different from almost every team we need to pause for a moment and let this sink in:

There is but one goal for you and your staff: **Increase the NUMBER of sold-out games. That's it!** Your goal is to increase the **NUMBER** of sold-out games.

Don't worry about the number of tickets sold for the season, worry about the NUMBER of sold-out games.

You should stay up nights thinking about how to get your next sellout.

Don't worry about the less popular games; *worry about games you have a chance to sell out.*

If this redirection of energies comes at the expense of some of your lesser attractions, so be it. I'm not saying spend less time in selling your lesser attractions; *I'm saying spend **no time** selling your lesser attractions!* Focus *all of your time on selling games that you have a chance of selling out.*

Let me re-state this in two parts:

1. Spend **no time** selling your lesser attractions! *No time! Nada! Zilch! Nyet!*
2. Focus **all of your time** on selling games that you have a chance of selling out. *All of your sales staff's time too!*

When you increase the number of sold-out games, you will find that your season ticket base naturally *increases*. Automatically. Every time. Does it happen immediately? Of course not. This isn't a case of selling out one game and the phone rings off the hook the next day. It takes some time but you'll find it's far easier to sell full season tickets when you have more sellouts. Your salespeople won't have to beat fans over the head with a baseball bat for them to buy full season tickets. In fact, your salespeople will become problem solvers instead of thugs.

In this *Playbook*, you'll learn how to replicate a sellout time and time again. You'll learn how to replicate it enough times until your building is sold-out all season long.

Fans have more fun at a sold-out sporting event. Because they had fun, they are much more likely to want to buy tickets to attend more games. The more sellouts you have, the more your average attendance goes up.



NAYSAYERS CHANCE TO REBUT

If you don't hear the naysayers screaming about what I just wrote, I do. I've heard them for years. They're so boring; they always complain about the same thing and they're always wrong. Your naysayer could be your boss or the administrative assistant or the team owner or your neighbor or almost anybody who hasn't successfully marketed tickets before. Here's what you most likely are hearing:

Naysayer: “*We need to run some promotions for those crummy weekday games against no-name opponents just to make it look better.*”

My response: “There are several things wrong about promoting a crummy weekday game. Number one, it takes you away from your mission of focusing on just increasing the number of sellouts. Doing a promotion for a crummy game will get *minimal* results, will cost valuable marketing dollars, will take time and energy and, unfortunately, you’re always disappointed with the results.

“Lastly, what promotion would you use? 2-for-1s? 50% off? Free bobblehead to the first 1,000 fans? Thirsty Thursdays? Whatever you try, it will have a minimal effect. 200 seats sold? Maybe 300 seats sold? Heck, Thirsty Thursdays at most only bring in several hundred drunks. Are three hundred drunks for one game worth it? Of course not.”

“Focus on the games where you have a *chance* of selling out if you put muscle and manpower behind it.”

Naysayer: “*It’ll look bad playing in front of a lot of empty seats.*”

My response: “Yeah, it will, but that’s just a *temporary* situation. You will be selling out those crummy weekday games in about three years because you’re increasing your sellouts every year and eventually you reach those crummy weekday games. One consolation about those empty seats: If nobody goes to the game, nobody knows that nobody went to the game. Conversely, with a sellout, people talk about it the next day at work.”

If nobody goes to the game, nobody knows that nobody went to the game.

Naysayer: “*Can’t we just dress up the stadium a bit by comping a thousand or more tickets to some charity?*”

My response: “Papering the house with free tickets really doesn’t work in your goal of creating more sellouts, and it proves to be *counterproductive* in reaching that goal but I cover freebies in more depth in Chapter Eight in this *Playbook*. This is what I told a group of owners of a team that had dismal attendance who hired me. ‘I’m going to give you a list of games that you can come to,’ I said. ‘You’ll feel great about the energy in the building. It will please you that you own the team.’”

“What about the games not on the list?” one of the owners asked. “I own the team, I can go to any game I want.”

“I said, ‘For those games not on the list, it won’t be much fun. There won’t be a lot of energy in the building. You won’t feel good about owning the team. You’ll think the community should provide more support. You’ll get depressed. You’ll want to gobble down a bunch of anti-depressants. All that depression is temporary, but it is real for certain games this coming season. It would be better if you scheduled a business trip when those games are played.’”

After studying the *Playbook*, you’ll know the sellout mentality is the right strategy. Hang in there against the naysayers. Send us an email or give us a call and we’ll act as your support group when the pressure mounts.

ONE THING TO KEEP IN THE FOREFRONT OF YOUR BRAIN

One goal: Increase the number of sold-out games.

