

What's the Score?

Are you a sports fan? Chances are pretty high that you either are a sports fan or you know plenty of people who are.

We could talk about any sport, but a lot of people in the USA are football fans, so let's start with football. Do you have a favorite college football team? It may be the Florida Gators, Oklahoma Sooners, USC Trojans, a team near your home or your Alma Mater. If it's your favorite team, you feel a connection to it in some way. It's human nature to want to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and teams provide a way for us to do that.

Picture this: It's Saturday afternoon and the stadium is packed with fans – 60,000 or more. Are they having fun? Sure! Are they passionate? Yes! Why? It's not about the money – nobody paid the fans to be there. In fact, they paid for their tickets, may have made a hefty donation to get them, paid for airfare, hotels and devoted their time to come. They have come dressed in their school colors and are prepared to cheer and do everything they can – to do what? Spur their team to victory, of course! For whatever reason, they feel a connection with this team and the other people in the stadium. They came to be part of it, to watch and to help “their” team to win in whatever way they can. And there are fans on the other side of the stadium dressed in their colors that are going to do the same for their team.

The players on the field are just as pumped up and passionate, ready to give 110% -- even playing hurt if that's what it takes. Why? At least theoretically no one's paying them, so again it's not about the money. Sure, a few of them may see this as a stepping stone to a professional football career, but most of them know that will never happen. Why do they work all year long lifting weights, running endless sprints, enduring long practices and accepting brutal punishment to their bodies? So they can be part of the winning team – and hopefully have a meaningful role in making it happen.

Whether you are watching or playing, football is bigger than any one of us. No one can play a football game by himself. When we participate with the team, we feel connected and we share a common goal with our teammates on the field and in the stands – we want *our* team to win!

Now picture that the stadium is packed, the band just left the field and the game is about to start. The announcer comes over the PA system and says *“Welcome ladies and gentlemen. We are about to start today's game. But we are doing something different today – and we are doing it this way from now on. You will notice that we have removed all scoreboards from the stadium. We are no longer going to keep score. We will play today's game for three hours and then we will stop and go home. Then we're going to come back next Saturday and do it again. OK teams, let's start!”*

What would happen to the passion of fans in the stands? After the riots are extinguished, I suspect that most of the fans would leave before the end of the game – and they probably wouldn't return next week. The players on the field bust their butts to get the ball across the goal line but nothing happens -- they simply turn around and go the other way. What happens to their passion? Pretty soon the players are feeling that what they do doesn't make any difference – and their passion quickly fades. The whole purpose of the game seems to be gone.

Is there any sport that doesn't have some kind of a scoreboard? Football? Basketball? Baseball? Tennis? Racing? Golf? Olympic sports? Every sport has some kind of scoreboard. The scoreboard puts the fun in the game. It develops the passion in the people. It gives everyone involved in the game a purpose and a measure of how they're doing toward their goal of winning – and looking at the scoreboard gives them a “reward” at the end of the game if their team is the winner.

Have you ever been bowling? The pins are a form of scoreboard. You roll the ball down the alley and try to knock down as many pins as you can. You keep track of your score – trying to beat your fellow bowlers, the other team or your own average. Bowling is fun! But take away the pins. You still roll the ball, but it doesn't matter whether it goes down the middle of the alley or in the gutter, a minute later your ball comes back. You roll it again. A minute later, you roll it again. Another minute later, you roll it again. Pretty soon, as you're waiting for the ball to return once more, you're looking at your watch saying “*My God! When is my eight hours up so I can go home?*” knowing that you must come back tomorrow and do it again!

People are people whether in sports or in business. Where is your company's scoreboard? Do you have one? If so, do all of your team members see the team's score? Or are many of your team members bowling every day without pins?

We have seen a lot of clients who have had motivational speakers come in to get employees pumped up and passionate. It usually works for a few days, because people *want* to feel passionate about what they do. Rousing speeches create enthusiasm and a desire to change. But then we hear that after a couple of days or a couple of weeks, the impact has worn off and we're “back to normal.”

I'm a big fan of good motivational speakers. But if you don't have a scoreboard, you will never sustain the passion and energy that they create. The scoreboard is a necessary tool for developing a culture of sustainable passion.

If your business doesn't have a scoreboard, we need to create one. But before we can create your scoreboard, we need to be sure we know what winning means for your team and how we're going to measure it. A scoreboard that isn't appropriate, accurate and timely can be worse than no scoreboard at all. We'll talk more about that as we progress.