

How to think like a sports GM

The case of Manny Ramirez highlights the importance of workforce mobility

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We are sports fans. We root for the Nationals (wish they were better) and the Redskins (hope springs eternal as another season opens). And as observers of the sports world, we often look for management lessons there that can be applied to all organizations, including those in the federal government.

In addition to our beloved Washington teams, we follow the Boston Red Sox. We thus watched the saga of Manny Ramirez with great interest. For those who don't follow sports, Ramirez is a top-notch baseball player who was traded from the Red Sox to the Los Angeles Dodgers in late July. Both Ramirez and the Red Sox came to the conclusion that he would benefit from a change of scenery — and a new ball club.

What does Manny Ramirez have to do with government? That's a fair question. The answer is that mobility can benefit both the individual and the organization. One of our disappointments with the Senior Executive Service has been that the goal of having highly mobile senior executives has not been achieved. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 gave members of the SES rank in person, which meant that they could take their SES positions along with them to any or-

ganization in government. The CSRA vision was premised on the belief that the effective use and deployment of people — an organization's greatest resource — would improve and enhance the performance of both the individual and the organization.

As a new administration gets ready to take office, where is government today regarding the CSRA vision for increased SES mobility? There now appears to be increasing recognition that mobility can enhance the government's capability as a whole. First, there is an executive order that encourages mobility for current and future professionals in national security departments and agencies (Executive Order 13434). Second, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has developed the Intelligence Community Civilian Joint Duty Program, which requires intelligence professionals to complete assignments outside their home agencies as a

prerequisite for promotion to senior executive positions.

For the civilian SES corps, the logic of increased mobility is the same. The government needs senior executives with a department-wide focus, gained by moving from agency to agency, or an even more powerful governmentwide focus, gained by moving from department to department.

To achieve the benefits of mobility, government needs the equivalent of a sports team's general manager — perhaps the chief human capital officers. Much like a GM, they would constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to improve their departments by making personnel changes, such as obtaining new talent to fill gaps in their current team or anticipated future gaps because of the impending retirements of key players. They would quickly learn, as effective GMs already know, that a change of scenery can often work to improve individual and organizational performance. Just ask Manny Ramirez and the Los Angeles Dodgers. ■

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