

HARDBALL

Are You Playing To Play or Playing To Win?

GEORGE STALK and ROB LACHENAUER

GEORGE STALK is a senior vice president with The Boston Consulting Group. He specializes in international strategy and time-based competition. He is the coauthor of two other books, *Competing Against Time* and *Kaisha: The Japanese Corporation*. Mr. Stalk is a graduate of the University of Michigan, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard Business School.

ROB LACHENAUER is CEO of GEO₂, a company working towards the reduction of harmful emissions from internal combustion engines. He was formerly a vice president with The Boston Consulting Group specializing in the automotive industry, consumer retailing and branding. Mr. Lachenauer is a graduate of Cornell University and Harvard Business School.

The Web site for this book is at www.bcg.com/hardball.

SUMMARIES.COM is a concentrated business information service. Every week, subscribers are e-mailed a concise summary of a different business book. Each summary is about 8 pages long and contains the stripped-down essential ideas from the entire book in a time-saving format. By investing less than one hour per week in these summaries, subscribers gain a working knowledge of the top business titles. Subscriptions are available on a monthly or yearly basis. Further information is available at www.summaries.com.

MAIN IDEA

Companies that play business hardball aren't content with just having a competitive advantage. Instead, they work hard to create a virtuous cycle that will take them far beyond the reach of their competitors. In practical terms, hardball companies focus on turning a competitive advantage into a decisive advantage that will neutralize, marginalize and ideally punish their rivals.

More than anything else, hardball players play to win. They use their decisive advantage to set the agenda for their industries. They don't do anything illegal but competitors realize hardball players will do everything within their power to exploit their competitive advantage to the maximum degree. If this approach to business attracts some negative publicity because the weaker or marginal competitors get squeezed out of the marketplace, hardball players don't lose any sleep over it.

In essence, hardball is all about playing the game of business at a professional level. It's all about seizing and then finding ways to enhance a competitive advantage. It's about responding effectively to the moves of competitors and others who are scheming ways to take a piece of the action for themselves. Hardball is the game of business the way it should be played.

"The winners in business have always played hardball. In the next ten years, companies are going to move more quickly, act smarter, and battle more fiercely than ever before. There will be the leading players and lots of niche players, but very few, if any, players in between. The softball players – those who fail to fully exploit any competitive advantage they do have – that have survived until now (many airlines, certain automakers, plenty of health-care providers) don't have long to live. Only the hardball players will survive. Only the hardball players should survive."

– George Stalk and Rob Lachenauer

1. The Five Principles of Business Hardball Page 2

The distinguishing characteristics of hardball players are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| The Principles of Business Hardball | 1 Intensive focus on competitive advantage. |
| | 2 Turn competitive advantage into decisive advantage |
| | 3 Use of indirect attacks |
| | 4 Hire people who have the will to win |
| | 5 Know where to draw the line |

2. The Six Hardball Strategies Pages 3 - 5

The classic hardball strategies in business are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| The Classic Hardball Business Strategies | 1 Unleash massive and overwhelming force |
| | 2 Exploit anomalies to discover growth opportunities |
| | 3 Go after a competitor's profit sanctuaries |
| | 4 Take a good idea and assume ownership |
| | 5 Lure competitors into retreating |
| | 6 Break compromises and erase concessions |

3. Using mergers and acquisitions to become a hardball player Page 6

Many times, when a company seeks to harness one of the classic hardball strategies, it finds it is not properly prepared to do so, or does not have the requisite resources. In those circumstances, sometimes the best way to move forward is to acquire or merge with a company that does have what's needed. Mergers and acquisitions can be used to enhance ability to use hardball strategies.

4. Potential Changes in the Hardball Field of Play Page 7

The one sure thing in business is that nothing stands still. The game of hardball is dynamic and constantly evolving. Therefore, it makes sense to always keep an eye on the major global trends which will alter how the game of business hardball is played in the future.

5. The Hardball Mindset Page 8

More than anything else, those who play business hardball successfully have a particular mindset – they get to the heart of the matter and stay there no matter what. To do this day-in and day-out requires an intellectual toughness and an emotional awareness combined with an unwillingness to accept the status quo. To play hardball in the future successfully, focus on developing a similar mindset.

Summaries.Com

The Ultimate Business Library



We condense **300+ page** business books into **8-page** summaries.

By reading summaries, you'll get the **key ideas** in **30 mins**, so you can spend more time turning your ideas into **dollars**.

Knowledge is Power — Invest in Your Future

For just **\$2 per week**, you will...

- Learn from the mistakes and success of the smartest people in business;
- Get fresh ideas, strategies & motivation that could be worth millions to you;
- Follow emerging trends, so you can catch the wave before your competitors do;
- Catch up on the classics you always wanted to read.

1,000 Top Business Book Summaries

Our catalog includes summaries on a range of topics for aspiring entrepreneurs, managers, and consultants.

BUSINESS PLANS

MANAGEMENT

PRESENTATIONS

SALES

LEADERSHIP

MOTIVATION

STRATEGY

AND MORE

