

Spring training

Spring training has now finished and the teams have headed north from the warmer climates of the southern states. Baseball is back. And it's the first year since 1909 that the Cubs will start the season as [World Champions](#). Ok, its only for America, but Americans have never been short on exceptionalism.

The Cubs' win in the 10th inning of Game 7 of the World Series in Cleveland coming from 3 -1 down was a truly momentous event. It even made the news in the UK. Talk about taking it down to the wire. The Cubs have never done things the easy way.

The history of the Cubs makes teams like Newcastle United look like recent winners. 108 barren years. Curses of all manner to banish, including a [billy goat](#). Only in the north side of Chicago. Growing up in Illinois you either supported teams in Chicago or St Louis. And if Chicago you were either a Cubs or White Sox fan. I was a Cubs fan. Once a Cubs fan, always a Cubs fan.

It takes a particular resilience to support the Cubs. We were led up the mountain by Leo Durocher in 1969. I was in the left field bleachers as a [Bleacher Bum](#) to watch the great collapse after the All Star break. It's no coincidence that I've been abroad pretty much ever since. Some things are too painful to live through. But I always said that if the Cubs made the Series, I'd be back at Wrigley Field – reckoning that there may not be another chance.

So within hours of winning the National League pennant, I'd booked my tickets for a weekend trip to Chicago. Met my brothers, went to Wrigley and sadly [watched in a bar](#) across the street from Wrigley as the Cubs get a gubbing to go 3 games to 1 down. But who cares about ROI when I could be part of a group therapy session over 9 innings? As I walked away from Wrigley I was interviewed by a TV channel who wanted to know how I felt coming all that way for what looked like a hopeless cause; my sister in Connecticut emailed me the next day to ask what I was doing in Chicago – a small world indeed.

I was back in the UK when a few days later we had the miracle in Cleveland. So what's your point caller, I hear you ask? A few things:

Nurturing talent – The Cubs finally appointed a general manager who took a long-term view. [Theo Epstein](#) also had the support of owners who invested for the long-term. After a couple of years and lousy results, Epstein was stopped in the street by an elderly lady who asked him how long it would take and, having thanked her for continuing support, suggested that she continue to look after herself and stay healthy. Sadly, the regulators of public services and many investors in private companies in the UK do not take a long-term view. Short-term results are the order of the day. Ok, it is essential that leaders give confidence that results will come, and sadly the leadership talent is often not in place to give that confidence. Hence, the need to nurture talent both at the top of the organisation and all the way down. We'll watch with interest to see if the Cubbies have the talent to repeat this season.

Engagement – Somehow the Cubs built up a following that transcends generations. Stories abound of family members visiting the graves of loved ones to leave World Series memorabilia. [Cubs Nation](#) is like collective therapy – I bought a t-shirt at Wrigley back in the 1900s that had on the front “If it takes forever”. I had the feeling that it would. Loyalty to brands, organisations and groups is very transitory nowadays. Some buck the trend – [BrewDog](#) for instance. Leaders can do more to engage and respond to the needs of their customers, to give them products and services that build loyalty. Gone are the days in business of assuming they have the support of customers – sadly for many monopolies like health, those days remain. Effective engagement will pay dividends – watch how [United Airlines](#) will suffer through their approach to engagement.

Resilience – It's tough supporting a team that are perennial losers. It can be endemic, and you begin to think that tomorrow will never come. Let me assure [Newcastle](#) supporters that your day will come. It's tough working for organisations that are getting beaten up, whether by regulators or the market – and sometimes by their own managers. You may have no option but to stick it out. In this case, what is your support network, the people who give you the shoulder to cry on, who can pick you up, dust you off, send you back into fray? Cubs fans had each other – even if we didn't have the team, the manager or owner. We kept the integrity of the brand, the organisation, so that when the planets aligned we were there at Wrigley, and the championship was finally ours.

Spring training is held in the southern states to get the good weather. It's ironic that as the Cubs finally gained their place in the sun, the US election result a week later rained on our parade.

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Frontline

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