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Assist/Turnover Ratio

Performance in many of life's endeavors is measured with the use of statistics, but this is especially true in sports. A batting average in baseball, a scoring average in basketball, and a quarterback's completion percentage in football are among the more common sports' statistics.

There is a statistic in basketball that applies chiefly to the point guard, the player who is the primary ball handler and runs the team's offense. This is the "assist/turnover ratio." An assist is a pass that enables a teammate to score. A turnover is a pass stolen by the opposing team, or a violation of the rules that gives possession of the basketball to the other team. A quality point guard wants to have a minimum of two or more assists for each turnover, that is, an assist/turnover ratio of 2.0 or higher.

Some fascinating research has been done on relationship health that involves a similar statistic. This is the positive to negative interaction ratio. Positive interactions include expressions of support, encouragement, and appreciation (i.e., assists), whereas negative interactions are marked by disapproval, sarcasm, and cynicism (i.e., turnovers, or behaviors that hurt the "team"). Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson and mathematician Marcel Losada found that teams that flourish in the workplace (higher productivity, customer satisfaction, and employee evaluations) have a positive to negative ratio of 3:1 or greater. Psychologist John Gottman has found that marriages marked by a positive to negative ratio of 5:1 or greater are less likely to end in divorce (predicting divorce with 94% accuracy over a ten-year period).

While it may seem that no turnovers in basketball and no negative interactions in relationships may be ideal, this isn't the case. Fredrickson and Losada found that the upper limit for positive to negative interactions is approximately 13:1. Some negative interactions are important for realism, correction, and adjustments. (In basketball, a point guard who never has turnovers is likely playing too conservatively.)

If you were to measure your relationship performance using the positive to negative ratio, what would your statistic be? To promote healthy personal and work relationships, aim for at least 3-5 interpersonal "assists" for every one interpersonal "turnover!"

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