In the business world, a player/coach is an employee whose job description requires him/her to perform a combination of individual contributor and supervisory activities. That is to say, you perform some required hands-on tasks that are the same and/or related to the people who report to you.

As funny as it sounds, the role of player/coach is one of the hardest job types in business. Some of the reasons for this difficulty are:

- **Your time is divided between two very different responsibilities**
  When a person’s job description and business tasks are divided between two roles, it’s very hard to do both well. What generally happens is that each of the task types, in reality, require more than 50% of your time. Therefore, any time spent on one task, reduces the time needed to do well at the other. From a player/coach perspective, this means if you spend too much time helping and supervising your staff you can’t get your work done. Alternatively, if you spend too much time on your individual tasks, you can’t properly manage your team.

- **To be successful in this role requires two very different skill sets**
  If you are a techie, a construction worker, a teacher, a nurse, or almost any other professional, the skills you are trained to perform are very different than the skill set...
needed to properly manage a team. Since both skill sets are required to be successful in a player/coach role, weak skills in either area can put your entire job in jeopardy.

- **Your team heavily scrutinized your delegation decisions**

As the team manager, one of your responsibilities is to delegate work assignments to the members of your team. This is a mainstay of management responsibility. An issue, if you’re a player/coach, is that you are also assigning tasks to yourself. Therefore, if you give yourself choice assignments (easier, cleaner, shorter, more profitable, more fun, etc.) the members of your team may feel resentful and believe you are not dividing the work fairly, even if you are trying to do your best. For example, let’s move it out of the office onto the baseball field. As a player, it may be best for the team if you bat first. If you are also coach, putting yourself first could raise suspicion.

- **The tasks you like doing puts other tasks at risk**

Stronger personal interest in either the individual contributor tasks or management tasks puts the other at risk. The reason for this phenomenon is that all other things being equal, people, including me, would rather perform the tasks we like and we do well. Therefore, it requires continuous personal discipline to make sure that less desirable tasks are done well and on time. This is particularly hard if you are being overworked in general.

Truth be told, the list of potential difficulties associated with a player/coach role is much longer than the few items previously listed. My goal here was to try to pick the items that are most common and most problematic.

If you currently work in a player/coach type role, take a moment and reflect on the specific challenges and issues you face on a day-to-day basis. The simple process of analyzing these challenges can help you maximize your personal job performance and reduce your stress, because an understanding of these challenges is the first step in formulating a plan to minimize their effects.
If you are not personally in a player/coach role, but your boss, subordinate, client, or co-worker is, take a moment and reflect on their specific challenges in this difficult role. Understanding his/her daily stresses can provide you with insights into how to work more effectively with the person in that role.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- The role of player/coach can be extremely challenging because of conflicting time commitments, need for multiple skill sets and other related issues
- Taking a moment to reflect on the specific challenges and issues you face on a day-to-day basis as a player/coach can help you maximize your personal job performance and reduce your stress

Until next time, manage well, manage smart, and continue to grow.

Author Bio:

Eric P. Bloom, based in Ashland, MA, is the president and founder of Manager Mechanics LLC. He is also a nationally syndicated columnist, keynote speaker, and author of the award winning book “Manager Mechanics: Tips and Advice for First-Time Managers.” Contact him at eric@ManagerMechanics.com, follow him on Twitter at @EricPBloom, or visit www.ManagerMechanics.com.