

Microspeak: Baseball card

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One tool that some teams at Microsoft employ during talent discussions and evaluation is called a *baseball card*.

In real life, a baseball card is a type of collectible sports trading card. On the front is a picture of a baseball player with some key identifying information (name, team). On the back are the player's essential performance statistics and some biographical information. Although different card companies use different formats for the back of the card, the format remains consistent within a set.

The Microsoft version of the baseball card is the same basic idea, except for employees rather than baseball players, and rendered in electronic form rather than cardboard.

The baseball card is a one-page PowerPoint slide that follows a fixed format agreed upon by all the managers.¹ Traditionally, it has a photo of the employee in the upper left corner, accompanied by other key identifying information (such as name, job title), and then the rest of the page is broken into sections, each dedicated to one aspect of employee performance. One section may be to highlight a notable accomplishment, other sections are for evaluating the employee against various attributes, and there may be a section for feedback received from others.

At some point, the employee photo was removed from the baseball card in a small effort to remove potential sources of unconscious bias.

I don't know the origin of the term or when it was introduced, but it may have been inspired by a similar employee-assessment technique described in Ray Dalio's *Principles*. Here's an example of [how baseball cards look at one company](#).

One of the important aspects of a baseball card is that it is *brief*. Large talent discussion and evaluation meetings may encompass hundreds of employees, and you need to be able to capture the employee's talents and contributions at a glance.

Depending on the team, the baseball card could be something written entirely by the employee's manager, or it could be something written by the employee and their manager working together. But regardless of who is involved in its creation, the employee baseball card can't be put in the spokes of your bicycle.

¹ And unlike other things called one-pagers, the one-page limit on the baseball card is hard and fast.