

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---



The word keeps coming back to me as I look for one word, or one idea, to sum up what I saw in Terry Francona's introductory press conference.

That word is trust.

What we are seeing with Francona's hiring as the 42nd manager in the history of the Cleveland Indians is a marriage built on trust. And hey, that's what they say about relationships and marriage, is it not? The good ones are built on a foundation of trust.

I can only hope that is the case here.

Let me be clear and go back to what I've gone back to every time this has come up, since Manny Acta was fired, to today. This team is not going anywhere, regardless of manager, without improvements made to the talent that is in this organization.

That being said, you have to feel good about the direction they could be headed with Francona at the helm. Not just because it is Terry Francona, a two-time World Series winner and someone who has been lauded as a "expert communicator", but because the hiring of Francona sort of represents that idea of change we've been angling towards.

I'll say this right off the bat, and apologize it if I've already said it in my first piece when the Indians announced that Francona would take the reigns of the squad. But by hiring Terry

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

Francona to manage his ball club, Chris Antonetti has essentially put it all out there. Because guess what? If Francona doesn't turn this team around, then Antonetti has run out of excuses. If anything, hiring Francona is either the be-all-end-all for Antonetti and this Indians 'regime' as we know it, or it is the beginning of it's dynastic potential.

Did I throw out the word dynasty? No not really. But Francona had eight wonderful years in Boston and if the Indians can duplicate anything similar to, then, well I think we'll all be happy.

With this in mind, I watched every second of the Francona introductory presser and I have scribbles, I have notes, I have reactions and quick snaps of judgment. I'll try my best to intertwine them with only the best of the best out on the internet as you're normally accustomed too.

### [FRANCONA RUNDOWN]

Kicking off my theme of "trust" is partial reason that the word trust comes to mind. [Peter Gammons penned an interesting piece](#) for MLB.com in which he states that Terry Francona is returning to a place that he can trust.

*Tony La Russa constructed a remarkable culture in St. Louis that carried through to the last game he managed, which was the seventh game of last year's World Series. He felt that culture -- which extended from the players to the coaches to the manager to the front office -- was built on three elements: trust, respect and caring. Antonetti and Shapiro are seeking a similar culture.*

*La Russa and Jim Leyland built their legacies on their personal relationships with their players, finding time every day to reach out and converse with each one. Francona will do the same. He will make them laugh at times, he will be self-effacing, he and his coaches will take care of what has to be faced. He is a manager players trust because he will never sell them out for his own media benefit, and trust is the foundation on which respect and caring are built.*

Here, when you boil it all down, is the main thing that I gathered from what Terry Francona was saying. He kept coming back to it every time he was given an opportunity to state why he

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

exactly chose Cleveland. At first, I found it terrifying and a little scary. To say that Mark Shapiro and Chris Antonetti were reasons one and two as to why, makes it seem a little frightening that he's just doing it to join some friends.

The thought of group-think continuing to run the organization where no one challenges or bucks the system. Hey, we tried that in Manny Acta and while I'll get into that a little later, that didn't seem to work as well as one would have thought.

But it goes a little bit deeper than the scary potential of group-think. It goes back to the trust and the respect Gammons is talking about. Francona talked about valuing the friendship of Antonetti and Shapiro, from when he met Shapiro in 1999 at the Winter Meetings on a treadmill and the leadership, saying he was ready to tackle the challenge of making the Indians great together, as a unit, as a "we".

Perhaps the most scary thing that I initially heard from Francona was when he was asked about "the challenge" as we perceive it to be. This club is a challenge. It has a snake-bitten fan-base desperate for a winner in a town that is majorly concerned about football 364 days out of the year, with the one other day being Opening Day for the Indians.

They root for a team with ownership and management they don't trust. This is a challenge in itself, regardless of what talent hurdles there currently are to overcome.

Francona said that he didn't really know or seem to care about what the challenge actually is or how hard it is. He said that he was really just focused on the relationships. That itself sounds like a scary statement by saying he "doesn't know or care" about something, but the point is clearly. The way Francona seems to look at this situation is that, regardless of what is in front of him, he gets to tackle it with his buds. He gets to go after something with people he trusts.

And because he has that, nothing else matters. He mentioned hitting the ground running and being able to jump right into this thing because Antonetti knows Francona and Francona knows Antonetti. There is no feeling out process. They're friends and they know what they want to do and they know about each other.

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

I think this is summed up best by what Anthony Castrovince, who was all on-board the Sandy Alomar Jr. train before it even left the station, said in his Francona piece.

*For the Indians, this is quite a managerial coup. They've averaged less than \$60 million in player payroll over the last three years, they're coming off a 94-loss season and their upper-level Minor League talent is, shall we say, suspect.*

Add up those factors, and this ordinarily would not be the type of job a Terry Francona -- a two-time World Series winner with a resplendent reputation -- would touch.

*But the relationship has remained steady and sturdy, even as many changes have taken place in Francona's life and the Indians' various ups and downs. When the Phillies fired Francona in 2000, Shapiro, the Tribe's newly appointed general manager, scooped him up in a special assistant role. When Francona interviewed for the Red Sox job, Shapiro and his then-assistant, Chris Antonetti, helped prep him.*

These are people that trust each other and now they get to work each other. I got the feeling, with as many times as this came up, and how Terry seemingly alluding to his philosophy as a manager and how it didn't seem to be present prior to his arrival, that there was a lack of trust between Manny Acta and the administration. Sure they had a lot of things they were on the same page about and that it seemed like a match made in heaven.

But as time wore on here, the cries for help seemed to grow from Acta and as that happened, and the Indians continued to trend downward, the one thing that could have potentially saved Acta, his relationship with Antonetti, became the thing that doomed him.

Remember how we all thought Eric Wedge should have been gone sooner than he actually was? It was likely because of the strong relationship between Wedge and Shapiro. The two were a lot alike and saw eye-to-eye and even played monopoly at each other's houses on Tuesday evenings (kidding). In the end, it was perhaps what dictated when and how Eric Wedge was fired. And when it was done, how hard it was to do and how Shapiro spoke as if it was something he really didn't want to do.

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

Chris Antonetti didn't really not want to fire Manny Acta. While he made it a point to say that Acta was not responsible for this downward spiral of a season, he certainly implied it with his words. And then by calling Terry Francona the day he fired Manny Acta, it certainly seems like there was a broken relationship somewhere along the lines.

And this is what we have now. A group heading up this franchise that is on the same page, that have that "trust" with each other and are apparently ready to tackle this "challenge" as a unit.

Part of that, is oddly enough, Francona continuing to build his relationships. And it is why the word "trust" is central to this news and this move. Terry Francona is going to try to put his trust into people. He said that he wants to build relationships and that he has already started that process, deciding to "punt" the idea of a speech for the press conference so he could contact 40+ people in the organization.

Terry Francona is someone who Curt Schilling [calls one of the best communicators he's ever played for](#). And that praise does not end there. There are numerous others that say his best quality is his communication and how he can create those relationships he was talking about. It's clear that is his philosophy. Antonetti went as far as calling him a 'relentless communicator'.

So it should no longer be a surprise to us that is the exact reason why he picked Cleveland, because of relationships. Heck, the guy [has an out clause in his contract](#) based off the "people he works for" being dismissed. He even said contract negotiations took all of 10 minutes.

Yet still people are wondering. Why? Why would Terry Francona go to CLEVELAND? Heck, I think we all wondered that. Why? We have the answer now and even as someone who called the possibility a pipe dream, I get it and I understand.

However there are the people who were wondering and are wondering why and there are the people who are, for lack of a better term, are stunningly ignorant. You mean Cleveland? Why do that when he can...blah blah blah...insert your reason here.

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

To those people... Well, how about we just ignore those people and not worry about it. Terry Francona is in Cleveland and it no longer matters why he is here. He's here and he's ready to go. As Francona said himself, he hasn't come to Cleveland to "go to pasture", he's not afraid of a challenge.

### [THE BITS AND PIECES]

Now that I've completely worn out the words trust, challenge, and relationships, here are some other things I gathered throughout the press conference and the links.

-When asked about what he did when he told his dad, Francona admitted he "cried a little bit". Of course his dad, Tito Francona (the real Tito as his son put it), played for the Indians for six years and was on a team in 1959 (when Terry was born) that was very good. Tito was a proud papa on Monday as his son stood up and [became the manager in a city he considers a second home](#)

-Terry was asked how he's had success with young players and I thought he gave a fantastic answer. Instead of taking credit, Francona praised personnel development people, saying that the people in the position are the ones that are responsible for it. Yeah, he knows the players that come through the organization, but player development people do their jobs and progress them to the point where he gets them at the major leagues and that he can't take credit for all of it. So in other words, you need talent. It isn't all on the manager. Where have we heard that before?

-That's kind of what I was alluding to earlier when I brought up Acta. Francona seemed to take some jabs, saying that his job was to be the manager and he has to "spend all his energy on the players". He said that he didn't ask for 'payroll support' and that you have to work for what you have. Maybe Acta didn't ask for "payroll support" outright, but this past year he kept talking about needing another bat and another pitcher, almost openly asking for help

But here is Francona, who had it all in Boston, saying he isn't going to demand anything. He says a large payroll doesn't guarantee success and that a big budget can help you cover up mistakes, but that it doesn't always win. A lot of what Francona was saying seemed to be directed at the fact that he is the manager and his job is to be a manager and now worry about

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

anything else. To me, it sounded like he was saying that he will do what Acta did not, which probably came from Antonetti saying "this is what we want, this is what we don't want." Maybe just me reading into it.

-When asked how close the team is from competing, he said two minutes. It sounded to Francona that competing basically means, competing, not what we would deem as competing, like for a Central title or the playoffs. He means, competitive baseball. This team will compete every night out in his eyes.

-He lost perspective after Boston and needed some time away after some "wear & tear" from eight years in Boston.

-After all the questions, someone asked him what we could expect "baseball wise" from him. And I think it might have been Schilling again, who said that Francona wasn't a real 'X/O's' type of manager and that's pretty much been confirmed by Terry himself. He said that we can expect winning a ton of games, but that there is also a lot of work to do. He alluded to the fact that he isn't sure what the 2013 team will look like.

-He also expressed that his concern isn't the AL Central, but with "us" as in the Indians.

-Francona said that there is a clean slate for everyone and that he's not going to holler at Chris Perez (and that he talked to Perez already). He's aware of things, especially the good, but that essentially, the bad things are not things he's going to hold against people.

-Of course everyone wants to know what he's going to do with his staff and immediately Francona would respect Sandy Alomar Jr. a [nd not talk about next year's staff](#) . He has reached out to Sandy Alomar Jr however and Chris Antonetti was hopeful they could have him again in 2013.

*"I would expect he'll get other opportunities to interview for a manager's job," Antonetti said. "Sandy has a lot to offer any organization. Selfishly, I'm hopeful that he will stay here, because he's had such a huge impact on us. At the same time, I want what's ultimately best for Sandy."*

## It's All About Trust: Francona Initiated into the Tribe

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, October 09 2012 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 09 2012 9:10 AM

---

Speculation has come up about Brad Mills, but in their perfect world, the Indians could have Sandy Alomar Jr. returning as the bench coach, which could be a realistic possibility if no other managerial options come open for Alomar. Even then though, you couldn't blame Sandy if he wanted to go elsewhere.

### [AND FINALLY]□

The best question of the whole thing? ESPN Cleveland's T.J. Zuppe asked if there would still be accountability despite the relationship between Francona and Antonetti. Terry's response was simply "of course" and went on to say that they'll have an argument or two. Antonetti even chimed in and said that they'll exploit Terry for his opinion.

That of course is the biggest question I have had throughout this whole thing. Will there be accountability? Let's hope so. This isn't going to work if there is no accountability. This will not work if Terry Francona isn't at least given a little help in the talent department. He can build all the relationships he wants. But if he doesn't get enough talented players to build those relationships with, this will all mean nothing.

-

*Nino has a blog! Give it a visit at [The Tribe Daily](#) , because Shin-Soo Choo will certainly be dancing 'Gangnam Style' somewhere there.*

[Follow @TheTribeDaily](#)