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Earlier this month, Shapiro said he doesn't expect to talk to Wedge about a possible contract extension [until after this season](#). Much of that might have to do with the fact that the Wedge's contract has a pair of club options for 2008 and '09, so there really isn't a rush to make a decision on his long-term future.

But there might be more to it than that.

For the past four years, there has been a public perception that Wedge and Shapiro have been of one mind, rubber stamping each other's moves without so much as a hint of difference. The local media had a little bit of fun with it last year, dubbing them the "Wedgiro Twins";

The mutually back-scratching relationship between manager and GM has been viewed as the soft underbelly of an otherwise strong Indians management regime. If nobody is questioning anybody else, how can change be affected when things go stagnant, as they did last year?

No one outside of the Tribe's inner sanctum really knows what goes on behind closed doors, but we do know that Wedge and Shapiro have been intensely loyal to each other as the rebuilding process took shape. Both know that stability is paramount when you are trying to turn a young team into a winner.

They rolled with the punches, facing the good (93 wins), bad (September collapses) and ugly (Milton Bradley) together, always believing that they were building toward something greater than whatever the previous two weeks had shown.

Then came last year.

It was the first time failure couldn't be chalked up to the trial-and-error pitfalls of the rebuilding process. For the first time since Wedge and Shapiro set down this road together in 2003, the team took a true step backward. Both men failed the team last year, Shapiro when he dismantled the American League's best bullpen from the year previous with no real backup plan, Wedge when he didn't step in and provide adequate clubhouse leadership.

It might have been the beginning of the end of Wedge and Shapiro walking arm-in-arm down the yellow brick road.

Burned by last year's 15-game backslide in the standing and fourth-place finish, there is some real pressure on Shapiro and Wedge to perform and lift the Indians back to respectability this year. Shapiro feels he's done his job, adding veterans to the bullpen and outfield, and trading for a potential stud bat in Josh Barfield. Now Wedge is finding out that, even in the flattest of organizations, shit still flows downhill.

The burden falls to Wedge once the curtain goes up on the season in a little over a week. If Wedge can't take the team Shapiro has assembled and win with it, the business-soulmate connection Wedge likely thought he had with Shapiro will be quashed once and for all.

It isn't quite the Sword of Damocles dangling over Wedge's head, but the heat has been turned up on the stove. Wedge is surrounded by potential replacements, from Joel Skinner and Buck Showalter on the major league staff to Torey Lovullo at Class AAA Buffalo.

That's not to suggest a managerial move is imminent should the Indians once again stumble out of the gates, but if Wedge hasn't discovered the difference between managing a rebuilding club and managing a club that is expected to contend, he is about to.

The results Wedge is now expected to produce don't amount solely to productive major-league players, as it did during his stints as a minor-league manager, as it did for his first three years managing the Indians. Now, it's wins, which are a lot more black-and-white than prospect development. And a lot more here-and-now.

Throughout his career, Wedge has been trained that slow is good. Do not rush to snap decisions, let things play out in full. As a player developer, he was a sculptor, carefully crafting his final product. Now, his job is transitioning into something like a pizza deliveryman. Wins,

delivered to your door in 30 minutes or it's free. You don't deliver the wins, you don't keep your job.

We will see over the next six months if Wedge can make the transition.

Shapiro is still a partner-in-blame with Wedge if things once again go awry in 2007. But now he has the security of a long-term deal and a roster full of homegrown talent to fall back on.

Rightly or wrongly, Shapiro gets to sit back with his arms crossed like the rest of us and pass judgment on Wedge. Rightly or wrongly, Wedge is quickly transitioning from de facto front office member to just another manager trying to save his skin, judged solely on his team's record.

Hopefully Wedge realizes that before it's too late.