



# The Courage to Scribe: 42's Trusted Advisor

Recently I saw the movie "42," based on the true story of Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 bravely fought custom, bigotry, and violent hostility to become the first African American to play major league baseball. His courage came from his inner strength which allowed him to withstand with dignity the cruel behavior from fans, other team managers and players, and at first some of his own teammates.

As I watched the movie, I was equally taken with the story of Robinson's "scribe," Wendell Smith. Also an African American, Smith bravely fought many of the same obstacles as Robinson, but not as visibly, to become a respected sports writer who in 1994 was posthumously inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame.

Wendell Smith introduces himself to Robinson early in the movie as Robinson's "Boswell," a reference to James Boswell, the biographer of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century writer, Samuel Johnson. In his [Life of Johnson](#), Boswell chronicles his conversations with Johnson written on their travels together. Like Boswell, Smith chronicles his travels with Robinson. The movie describes the relationship between these two black men struggling to do what each does so well; Robinson to play baseball and Smith to depict the fight to be able to play the game.

From the beginning, Smith establishes his role not only as "scribe," but also as trusted advisor. He warns Robinson about the difficulties facing the baseball player. He describes probable situations and provides advice on how Robinson should respond.



ENHANCED PERFORMANCE. ENDURING RESULTS.

by:

*Elizabeth Larson, PMP, CBAP, CSM  
Co-Principal, Watermark Learning, Inc.*

View more articles on our website at:  
[www.WatermarkLearning.com](http://www.WatermarkLearning.com)

## The Courage to Scribe: 42's Trusted Advisor (cont.)

In preparation for those difficulties, Smith gives Robinson an abundance of advice not related to playing baseball, but how to react to the physical and verbal abuse he is likely to encounter. As is common with decision-makers when confronted with advice, Robinson often views the advice as well-intentioned but ill-conceived, so he often pleasantly ignores it, usually to his detriment. Sometimes, however, Robinson reacts hostilely. Smith, who has also suffered race-related indignities throughout his career, reminds Robinson of the courage needed to succeed. As the trusted advisor, he encourages Robinson to use his strong moral character to avoid reacting violently to violence.

From HBO's *Game of Thrones*, to Sam Gamgee in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, trusted advisors literally and figuratively take their life in their hands when providing advice that is clearly in the best interest of the decision-maker, but equally unsought and unwanted. Their advice is often neglected at best. At worst, decision-makers react with anger, or in the case of tyrants, even death. Yet despite the physical and/or emotional danger, trusted advisors do not often get much recognition. Writing about Smith, a Los Angeles Times post poignantly reminds us that "As Jackie Robinson was making history, Wendell Smith wrote it. Many fans remember Robinson and his struggle, but few remember Smith, who sat in the stands typing on a manual typewriter writing about integration on the field, while being barred from the press box because he was black."<sup>1</sup>

So what does all this have to do with the BA both as scribe and trusted advisor?

As with Smith, shunted off to the stands, we scribes are often shunted off to the back of the room. In virtual sessions, scribes are often

forgotten and not even introduced. After the workshops, participants tend to remember who facilitated and participated, but not who scribed. Yet we scribes are, after all, the ones who have the greatest opportunity to create structure from chaos. Scribing requires us to actively listen, absorb, synthesize a great deal of information, and structure elicitation results, such as requirements, issues, workarounds, decisions, etc., into documentation that can be easily read, understood, and confirmed.

As scribes who are also trusted advisors, we often courageously go out on a limb by articulating the need for the role of scribe in organizations which don't see the need, working with the project manager to account for scribing tasks in the project, and ensuring that the elicitation activity results are documented ethically. In addition, we need to speak up and be heard when remaining silent could jeopardize the accuracy of the documentation. As trusted advisors, then, we need to work behind the scenes to ensure that the organization provides strong, experienced skilled scribes.

Secondly and importantly, we may not feel like we're in the center of requirement activities, but we really are. What will be remembered is dependent on the job we do scribing. Just as Smith "accompanied Robinson throughout his first major league season, creating his image, reporting his words and crusading for his rights," we scribes accompany the facilitator; make sense of often rambling and contradictory discussions, while "crusading" always for the right thing for the project and for the organization.

<sup>1</sup> Bill Plaschke, <http://www.latimes.com/sports/baseball/mlb/dodgers/la-sp-0414-plaschke-20130414,0,3199706.column>, April 14, 2013, viewed on April 14, 2013.

### About Watermark Learning

Watermark Learning helps improve project success with focused business analysis, project management, and business process management training and mentoring. We foster results through our unique blend of industry best practices, a practical approach, and an engaging delivery. We convey retainable real-world skills to motivate and enhance staff performance, adding up to enduring results.

Watermark Learning offers public, private, and online training. With our academic partner, Auburn University, we also provide Masters Certificate Programs to help organizations be more productive, and assist individuals in their professional growth. Watermark is a PMI Global Registered Education Provider, and an IIBA Endorsed Education Provider.

**Watermark**  
**Learning**

ENHANCED PERFORMANCE. ENDURING RESULTS.

**7301 Ohms Lane, Suite 360**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55439**  
**800-646-9362**

**[www.WatermarkLearning.com](http://www.WatermarkLearning.com)**