

Winning in overtime

Written by Julie Desmond
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For the lonely few Minnesotans still watching the Stanley Cup hockey Playoffs, have you noticed the overtimes? Out of 88 playoff games so far, 23 have ended in extra minutes played. These professional skaters train to peak at about this time each season, and train to play about the same three periods every game. So what happens when teams are called on repeatedly to work overtime? Some perform well and win; the others, well, they lose.

Working overtime is a necessity in almost every profession. Ordinary people do it for the same reasons the LA Kings and the Blackhawks do it: they want to win. They believe that if they skate a little longer and shoot one more time, they just might score the goal that will move them ahead in the run for the cup. Who doesn't want to move ahead?

Overtime play takes planning. If your team has given its max effort to a project, and discovers, at the end, that they need to keep going, they are going to get emotional. They want to win. But they also want to be somewhere else, they want to rest, they want to spend time with their families, they want to catch their breath. So, how do you motivate people to win in overtime? You have to plan.

Plan to communicate. Make sure everyone knows what's in it for them: a new product, a big bonus, continued employment... whatever it is, be sure everyone knows. Put a picture of the Stanley Cup (or your new product or the bonus amount) where everyone can see it, so they'll have an answer when they look up and say, "Why are we doing this, again?"

Plan short shifts. Professional hockey players burst over the boards and leave everything on the ice; then they go back to the bench, recover, and do it again. If your team is burning the candle at both ends, allow breaks for conversation, meals, and even sleep. Letting someone run home to let the dog out might seem counterintuitive if you have a deadline to meet; however, the person who makes that run will be back and skating at 100 percent because they have one less thing to worry about, allowing total focus when they're working.

Plan to ask for immediate feedback. People often have their brightest ideas when the mind is stretched and they're physically drained. Listen up. Hear people muttering, "Should have... could have..." and you will know what to change to avoid getting into this situation in the future. Get people thinking about short cuts and dealing with what's both urgent and important, and you

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will be able to weed out some of the extra steps that won't impact the win-or-lose outcome.

Plan for overtime as an exception, not a rule. 23 out of 88 games went into overtime. That's a little more than 25%. Everyone loves a nailbiter, but no one went into any of those 23 games saying, "I hope we get extra ice time."

Your team will win it all if you coach them through it: communicate, allow sanity breaks and be flexible to the suggestions your people make while under pressure. As long as overtime is only occasional and the goal is clearly within reach, you can count on your team to take home the hardware when it counts.

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