

The Offseason

All leaders go through stretches when they have to work overtime to meet deadlines and deliver results. We refer to these times as “busy seasons,” and they are illustrated by the following examples:

- The farmer harvesting his crop
- An event planner finalizing details on the eve of a major conference
- A student studying for final exams
- A marketer rushing to complete an ad campaign

Busy seasons for leaders are like game days for athletes. During these stages of life, victory or defeat hinges upon the leader’s ability to initiate action and execute the game plan. The stakes are high, adrenaline is flowing, and everyone is watching to see what happens.

At other times, the pace of life slows, and pressure abates. We use the phrase, “offseason,” to describe these less hectic phases. In the offseason, leaders do not see immediate results from their work, nor do they face pressing deadlines. During the offseason, not every action carries do-or-die consequences, and stress levels are greatly reduced. Whereas everyone tunes in to watch a leader perform during the busy season, hardly any spectators pay attention during the offseason.

Making the Most of the Offseason

Leaders are revealed during the busy seasons, but they are made during the offseason. Work done for months behind-the-scenes determines what happens onstage the night of the show. Here are five ways leaders, and the teams they lead, can make the most of the offseason.

1) Develop Stamina

During the offseason, leaders develop stamina through a mixture of rest and training. Recognizing that they’re ineffective when worn out, leaders prioritize rest during the offseason to replenish energy reserves. However, leaders must also condition themselves to be ready for the rigors of the upcoming season. Much as a runner would be foolish to show up for a marathon without having trained, leaders cannot remain idle throughout the offseason and expect to be at their peak when the season arrives.

Revisit Vision

The offseason is an opportune time for leaders to revisit vision and values, and to make sure their team is focused on what matters most. Once they’ve gained personal clarity, leaders then can help their team generate its goals for the future. Keeping a vision in front of a team, and giving it goals to reach for, brings much-needed purpose and motivation to offseason activities.

Build Team Unity

During the offseason, teams face less stress than at other times of the year, and they do not have as many critical tasks to accomplish. This makes the offseason a prime occasion for investing in relationships. When teammates connect meaningfully during the offseason, they form bonds that can sustain team unity during the pressure-cooker of busy seasons.

Pursue Personal Growth

The frenetic pace of life's busy seasons crowd out time for personal growth. Conversely, during the offseason leaders find themselves with plenty of room to breathe. Wise leaders make productive use of their extra time by attending training seminars, studying industry experts, and reading up on cutting-edge strategies. Those leaders who develop their skills and enhance their knowledge during the offseason have an advantage over the competition once the season starts.

Rehearse

Much as a music band must rehearse before going on a concert tour, a team must practice together in the offseason to prepare itself for future projects. Championship teams spend the offseason shoring up their strengths and working out the kinks in their systems. They conduct trial runs and pilot programs to test new ideas and fine-tune their processes. The practice that a team puts in over the course of the offseason improves its performance, and instills confidence for the upcoming season.