



Motivational Tips

The late Badger Bob Johnson's motto, "It's a great day for hockey," is a creed that Marc Crawford adheres to. The ebullient personality of the Vancouver Canucks' head coach radiates onto his players and is reflected in the motivational tool bag he brings to the rink with him each day.

At the heart of Crawford's philosophy is the belief that negative criticism is to be avoided whenever possible. "You're going to turn them off whether it's a pro, a teenager, or youth hockey players," says Crawford, who played on back-to-back Memorial Cup major junior championship teams in Cornwall, Ontario in 1980 and 1981. "Let's face it, nobody wants to hear what they're doing wrong all the time, and eventually they'll stop listening. That's not the type of atmosphere you want as a coach."

The trick is to point out mistakes in a positive manner, and Crawford illustrates the idea, using defensive zone coverage as an example. The basic strategy is to have one defenseman on the puck in the corner and the other defenseman supporting the front of the net. But the system becomes unglued when the defenseman who is supposed to be helping his goalie gets impatient and wants to be near the puck all of the time.

"I appreciate your aggressiveness," Crawford would advise in our imaginary example. "I like the fact that you want the puck and you want to be near the puck, but you have to assess the situation and ask yourself

this question: Is the dangerous player in the corner with my partner, or is the dangerous player the guy in front of the net who might get the pass?"

Crawford is guiding the defenseman to the right choice by showing him some alternatives. "I really haven't stressed too much negative with that example," adds Crawford. "I've pointed out the positive points, that he's a forceful and aggressive player, and we want that. But at the same time we want to take those attributes and control them a little more so they're going to be better served in a more dangerous situation."

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their age, that there are options, you will be surprised how often they figure out which is the best way. "Chances are they'll learn a lot faster, too, if they feel they have a part to play in the solution to a problem," observes Crawford.

An important, but often neglected role a coach must fulfill is to assess the mental state of his team before each practice or game. "Are they tired, or are they fresh? Are they coming off of a big loss of a huge victory?" asks Crawford. "Those things all play a part in what type of attitude your players have. You have to put a certain amount of thought into

your practice, and your first focus should be ascertaining what frame of mind your team is in. So if you can make it fun when it has to be fun, make them work hard when they need to work hard, or make it miserable when you feel they're taking it too lightly, then all of these things come into play when those circumstances arise."

Leadership starts at the top on game day, and it's Crawford's experience that very little is required in terms of motivation for the so-called "big games." A good coach is a person who has his team thoroughly prepared for those "sleeper games."

"Maybe it's a Monday night in the pros when you're on the road, and a snowstorm results in a sparse crowd, or a Tuesday night in minor hockey, at a rink in the middle of nowhere, when your kid would rather be home watching Bart Simpson," says Crawford, who appeared in 176

NHL games as a member of the Canucks. "These are the games that take a lot of preparation for the coach."

It's then the responsibility of the coach to demonstrate to his team that he's ready. "There are a lot of ways to do that," states Crawford. "Maybe it's with a detailed plan of what you want to accomplish on faceoffs or with your forechecking system. But if you show your players that you're ready to play this game, they'll take their lead from that, and I think that's very important."