Many of us get involved in fantasy sports because of the thrill of the deal. We love the wheeling and dealing, and nothing beats the rush of landing that player you've long coveted – especially if you can unload some dead weight in the process.

But what happens when your league hits a standstill – when trade offers go unacknowledged, rosters grow stale and managers stop actively trying to improve their squads? The life can get sucked out of your league pretty quickly.

Granted, it's only a game, and there are more important things in life. Sometimes the real world takes over, and it's only natural that managers sometimes have to take a step back from their teams to focus on other things. But as a rule, we all want to be part of active leagues. As a commissioner, you're not helpless in this. There are steps you can take to foster a culture of steady activity in your league, twelve months a year.

Recruit the Right Managers: Like many things in life, you have to start off in the right way to achieve the end result you want. When starting a new league, set the expectations clearly from the outset. When I sent out my first batch of e-mails to recruit managers for the GFHL five years ago, I was very clear about what I was looking for. I wanted owners who would be in it for the long haul (ready to build their team over the course of many seasons); who were committed to being active (responding promptly to trade requests, attending the draft in person, always seeking ways to improve their team); and who would maintain a high level of interest year-round, even if their team was near the bottom of the standings. If they couldn't commit to this, the GFHL was not the league for them.

For the most part, this was a successful strategy. Five years in, we still have 10 of our 12 original owners, and we have added two new teams to the mix. Though not all of them are as active as I would like, I think our overall level of owner is engagement is higher than in most leagues.

If your league is already established, it may be too late to go back and undo a poor start – or is it? If you have an owner who is really not committed, there's nothing wrong with approaching them to ask if this is really something they want to do. Over time, the less committed owners will drop off, and you'll have the opportunity to replace them with new managers who are ready to fully buy in.

Build it Into Your Rules: Our league rules create activity by stipulating that players can only

play for a team for four years maximum, after which they must be traded or released prior to the next draft. This type of rule isn't for everyone; to some, it seems artificial. I just look at it like contract terms in the NHL. As much as an NHL team may wish to keep a player forever, when his contract is up, he's free to move on (granted, with restrictions in the case of restricted free agents).

Our rule was originally created to guard against one team having a career-long monopoly on a player like Sidney Crosby (when our league was formed, there was talk of him having the capability of putting up Gretzky-esque numbers). Though that turned out to be unnecessary, I love what it's done for the activity level in our league. Last summer marked the 4-year anniversary of our initial draft, which led to a free agent frenzy the likes of which has never been seen in the NHL. Crosby, Ovechkin, Malkin, Daniel Sedin, Zetterberg, Toews, Kane, Thornton, Chara, Weber, Green, Lundqvist and many other big names were on the move last summer. The normally quiet months of June and July were filled with one blockbuster trade after another – truth be told, it was the most exciting stretch of fantasy hockey I've ever experienced, and no games were being played.

The Power of the Deadline: Deadlines create movement. In the NHL, most of the moves are clustered around a number of key dates: the trade deadline, the entry draft, the start of free agency, and to a lesser degree, the Christmas roster freeze.

Likewise, the same is true in fantasy leagues. You likely already have a trade deadline and draft date built into your schedule. The roster protection deadline is also a critical date. Every year on August 15, our teams must submit their protected lists for the mid-September entry draft, along with a list of players who are being released. This not only gives managers a month to prepare for the draft; it also creates movement in the dog days of summer as owners scramble to finalize their protected roster, and get some value out of players they are planning to release.

GM of the Year: Everyone likes to be recognized – and if there's a prize involved, so much the better! At the end of each season, hold a vote to determine the GM of the Year, to honour the manager who most improved his team over the past year (thus opening it up to all managers, and not just those at the top of the league). If you're playing for prize money, you might even set aside a small cut for the winner of this award, to provide incentive to all managers to improve their squad, even if they're not in the running for the championship.

Make it Fun: Trades are big news, so don't let them slip under the radar unnoticed. Particularly during the summer when your fantasy site of choice may be shut down, be sure to send out trade bulletins to all owners whenever a move goes down. And don't just announce the nuts and bolts of it – have some fun with it! In our league, news is broken by (fictional) GFHL Insider Bob McKinsey, who provides instant analysis, behind-the-scenes rumours, fake Twitter leaks and more. Up the "fantasy" factor in your fantasy league, and you're sure to keep your owners involved and interested.

How do you foster a high level of activity in your fantasy league?