

## "Top 25 Things Coaches Should Know"

RELAX! This isn't your problem to solve and if you keep the kids working and having fun, you are doing fine. Lots of people are out there to offer help if you need it (other coaches, school coordinators, regional directors, state directors).

BE SURE YOU KNOW THE BIRTHDATES of all your team members. Be sure you check those birthdates against the age requirements for divisions to be certain your team is in the division you think it is in (and doing a problem open to them)!

A CALENDAR with meetings scheduled and dates marked is useful for all teams and coaches. Adjust as necessary, but make sure everyone knows what the minimum time commitment is.

CONSIDER WORKING ONLY ON SPONTANEOUS until you are certain all team members are committed. If a team member drops out before the team discusses the Long Term problem, he or she may be replaced. Once Long Term is discussed, those team members must remain on your roster all year, even the ones who quit.

TEAMS MAY HAVE UP TO 7 MEMBERS. Up to seven may perform in the long term portion of competition; only five may do the spontaneous part of the competition.

OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE: Remember, this ISN'T your problem to solve ... ideas and their implementation must be entirely the team's! Teams are capable of much more than you may believe at first.

CHAOS is ok sometimes ... enormous creativity may emerge from what seems like randomness. Let the kids explore options as much as safety limitations, time, and your "house rules" allow.

READ the long term problem and then read it many more times. Encourage the team to do the same, and to discuss a section at a time. Re-read and refer to it often.

CLARIFICATIONS may help a team understand some of the limitations of a problem ... have them send for one if they cannot understand the meaning of the problem. Be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

SPONTANEOUS is just as important as Long Term Problem-Solving. There are three kinds of spontaneous problems - verbal, hands-on and combination. You should practice some at each meeting.

RESPECT is the basis of a good team. Insist that all team members respect each other and you. Insist that they accept all ideas as possibilities and avoid negativity.

**TEAMBUILDING is also the basis of a good team. Teambuilding activities may be as simple as an outing to the hardware store or may be a specific exercise. But all teambuilding should be fun and promote recognition of each member's strengths.**

QUESTIONING techniques will help a team get past blockades, but always keep questions broad and open-ended so ideas will be the team's own. Ask "what are ways

to put things together?" not "how can you glue this?" Never ask questions that steer a team to a solution in YOUR mind!

BRAINSTORMING is important in Odyssey of the Mind. Remind the team there is no such thing as a bad idea, and encourage them to brainstorm solutions and to write them down!

COMMUNICATION to the team of your "house rules" and expectations at the very beginning is essential. Enlist parental support in enforcing those policies.

PARENTS should be informed of the process, especially Outside Assistance rules, and kept informed of the team's progress. Communication encourages parent support and assistance.

FORMS are a necessary part of preparing for competition. Make sure you read what paperwork is required for your regional meet and teach the team to fill it out. (Division I teams may dictate to the coach.) Make sure registrations and fees are mailed on time.

PRIMARY TEAMS have different rules than competitive divisions. Make sure you know what the primary guidelines are for your region.

A SENSE OF HUMOR will keep you sane and keep your team happy, too. Just be sure that if you have a valuable rug or a dog you don't want painted blue, make sure the kids work in an area that allows some mess and then "go with the flow."

STYLE is a part of the team's requirement. Be sure you know what is required for your team's problem, and be sure your team chooses an exact element for each "free choice."

ALWAYS be a "guide on the side" not a "sage on the stage" (and cleanup should be part of the team's responsibility each week, too!)

YOU are a special person for being willing to coach Odyssey of the Mind! Parents and team members should respect your right to schedule meetings and activities at YOUR convenience, and should divide the costs incurred by the team.

FOOD is a magical substance for Odyssey of the Mind teams. It not only encourages teamwork and creative thinking, but makes work into fun. Be sure you know how to order pizza!

COMPETITION encourages teams to work their hardest, but remember that it is the PROCESS not the product that is important. Showing off their solution and their creativity is a much better goal for team members than winning a prize.

RELAX! If you and the team are having fun, you are 90% of the way to success.

## 16 Things That Have Worked Well

Thanks to Coach Bill Moore

1. Get Commitment from your team members (and their parents) – first meeting should include team and their parents and should include a review of what you expect from each.
2. Understand, and ensure your team understands, the problem – very well!
3. Have a good supply of building/prop materials in the house – collect all year long – one box, two boxes → a room!
4. Encourage members of the team to get together on their own.
5. Have the team identify what they want to get done at the beginning of a meeting and how long it should take.
6. A change of venue for meetings is often helpful.
7. Meet in a place with few distractions – they'll create their own.
8. Have the team develop a signal that, when used by the coach, means to “come to order”.
9. “Coach is Coming to Your House Nights” – it's amazing how much gets done when they know they have you one on one for ten minutes. (It's also a good opportunity to talk with parents).
10. Friday Night Sleepover Meetings – an “endless” team meeting can be very productive.
11. Super Sundays – for “big” props and messy activities.
12. Divide your team into small manageable groups when developing props – a co-coach is a real asset.
13. Get obligations from the team for what each individual will do at home between meetings.
14. Pizza Meetings – for a change of pace.
15. Delegate non-coaching responsibilities (T-shirts, end-of-year parties).
16. Enlist parental help on tournament day (van and prop movement) so that you can concentrate on your team.

## 2 ½ Things That Have Not Worked Well

1. Voting – Build Consensus Instead.
2. Too many chefs in the kitchen (don't have seven kids decorate one mural at the same time).
3. Mixed feelings on “getting it out of your system” breaks – works for some teams, riles others!