

"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 GRADES of all your team members. Be sure you check those grades against the requirements for divisions to be certain your team is in the division you think it is in (and doing a problem open to them)! The highest grade determines the division, and K-2 teams can choose either Primary (non-competitive) or Division 1 (competitive). Grades 3-5 must compete in Division 1, but if there's a 6th grader on the team, they must compete in Division 2.

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 is it 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.