

# Odyssey of the Mind Coaching Tips... How to Begin

## SUGGESTED GOALS FOR THE FIRST FIVE MEETINGS

These goals should be adjusted according to age levels and experience level of team members.

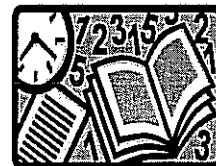
### Information Meeting

- a. Meet with students (and parents for middle, elementary and primary).
- b. Explain the Odyssey of the Mind philosophy (see program handbook).
- c. Describe the Odyssey of the Mind process and give dates of Regional and State Tournaments.
- d. Discuss the time commitment necessary, and the responsibility of every team member to ensure a team effort.
- e. Enlist parental assistance for transportation, refreshments, helpers, etc.
- f. Explain outside assistance. Help parents understand that they can be valuable resources for knowledge and skills, but they cannot volunteer solutions.
- g. Set up practice schedule appropriate to your group.



### First Team Meeting (following the formation of teams)

- a. Work on the development of team spirit and a feeling of camaraderie between team members. Discuss the importance of being a team and working and thinking as a team. Ask students to explain examples of behaviors important to building and maintaining team spirit.
- b. Practice brainstorming and spontaneous activities. (Utilize the Odyssey of the Mind resource books and handouts provided at Coach Training Sessions for ideas and examples.) Rules for brainstorming are included in the Spontaneous Training packet. The coach's participation in these initial spontaneous activities is important for building trust and modeling appropriate behavior. Emphasize the need for patience in waiting for team members to think and in accepting all answers without judgment.
- c. Discuss scheduling, time management, meeting places and goal setting. (Refer to school events calendars, check with school administrators for use of school facilities, etc.) When setting goals, discuss and decide on what the students hope to accomplish. Write down these conclusions for future reference.



- d. Require a notebook for taking notes as they do research and for keeping track of ideas that occur to them at various times.
- e. Organize a brainstorming activity to analyze factors the students might need to know prior to their attempting to solve any of the problems. Students record notes. You can question them and suggest general areas they might consider researching.
- f. Close each practice session with a wrap-up activity that is positive and will review important things learned during the session. Example: Have the team form a circle. Each person identifies someone else in the group and says something positive about that person. Stress the necessity of sincerity and honesty when making comments.

### **Second Team Meeting**

- a. Review the rules of brainstorming and spontaneous problem solving from the previous meeting.
- b. Continue working on the development of team spirit. Organize an activity that requires the use of teamwork or that demonstrates the importance of teamwork.
- c. Inventory team skills and preferences. "Things I'm good at..., not good at...", "I like to do..., I don't like to do..." Refer to this inventory during task assignment that will occur at all stages of the team's development.
- d. Establish rules to govern group decision making. How will disagreements be settled? What will consequences be for lack of participation or disruptions during the meeting? Have the students develop a few guiding rules to ensure fair and fun meetings. Put them on a poster and display it at every meeting.
- e. Discuss fund raising activities.
- f. Close with a positive, team-building type activity.



### **Third Team Meeting**

- a. Schedule a Boundary Breaker to bring the group back together and start them thinking about problem solving.
- b. Continue activities that build team spirit and stress the need for working as a team.



- c. Work on spontaneous problem-solving. Begin to identify what would be considered as creative answers vs. common responses. Discuss the importance of each in the process. (Common responses are important since they keep answers flowing rather than having students stop and spend a lot of time thinking of creative responses. Creative responses earn the team more points.) As the coach, ALWAYS be supportive of answers unless they are in poor taste and in these cases this should be discussed.
- d. Review the Basic Competition Rules on a level that is appropriate for the students.
- e. Practice spontaneous.
- f. If your team has not chosen a long term problem, now is the time. Review the long term problems with the team. Use the skills inventory to discuss what problems this team is best suited to, and most interested in. You may not be ready to decide this today, this is a big decision!
- g. Discuss/choose problem. Brainstorm kinds of knowledge and skills needed to solve this problem.
- h. Close with another fun, positive wrap-up activity.

(HW - Research the problem: can assign topics and areas of knowledge.)

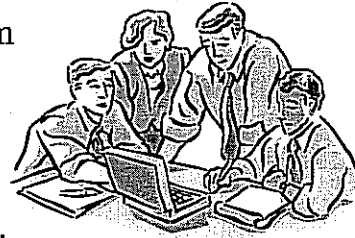
#### **Fourth Meeting**

- a. Incorporate a team building activity.
- b. Practice spontaneous.
- c. Review Long-Term Problem selected. Stress the need for research and experimentation of ideas. Emphasize that it is a long-term problem and what that means. Allow time for discussion and enthusiasm for the problem. Encourage all ideas and acceptance by all group members.
- d. Students identify who will research certain topics and bring their findings to the next meeting. Encourage plenty of group discussion.
- e. Discuss questioning techniques with your team. "Nothing new is learned until a question is asked." Refine this art over the course of the year.

(HW - Choose a favorite problem solution/idea and rough out on paper HOW the team could accomplish this. Bring to next meeting to share.)

**Fifth Meeting** (and beyond..., or what to do after the team has decided what to do)

- a. Continue team building.
- b. Continue spontaneous practices.
- c. Brainstorm/discuss problem solutions (may include/overlap style ideas). Allow plenty of time for this, Never settle for the first idea, easiest idea, etc., without exploring all. This process may extend over several meetings.
- d. Conduct a more in-depth study of the Long-Term Problem. Review the Long-Term Problem in terms of breaking it down in to its component parts, carefully reading the rules/restrictions and establishing a time-line for completion of the solution. Discuss new ways to find information and how the students can obtain this information. Brainstorm lists of tasks to accomplish.
- e. Make lists of materials needed and how to get them.
- f. Make a team generated time line. Discuss team member responsibility for doing what they say they are going to do, and when. Assign tasks. Have the students discuss when certain components must or should be completed. The schedule should be tentative and allow for modifications.



Carry on, good luck, and ask for help if you need it!

### **Odyssey of the Mind Coaches Share**

#### **"Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me"**

- a. "I wish someone had told me that team members always pull through the day of competition. They face any problem they encounter on that day, as a team and with a maturity that makes you forget all the stress and all the bad moments you had. The way they behave themselves on competition day makes you, as a coach, so proud that you figure: 'All these months were not so bad after all, I can do this again next year!'"

- b. "That there's nothing mysterious about Spontaneous. It seemed so secretive and scary to the kids. The judges are all volunteers and folks just like the coaches. A copy of the problem is placed on the table for the kids to read and use as reference and if a solution does not break the rules of conduct for Odyssey of the Mind and is not specifically prohibited by the problem, go for it."
- c. "I wish I knew how important practicing spontaneous is. The difference between places at competition can be very directly related to how well a team does in spontaneous!"
- d. "I wish I knew most of the actual work gets done in the last couple of weeks. For years I gave up every Saturday until last year when I was coaching two teams. They each got every other weekend and both got done on time."
- e. "I'm a kid, but I know my coaches wish they came up with the idea of practicing spontaneous during lunch doing both hands on and verbal. It helped our team out from not placing at all to getting first."
- f. "I am a Spontaneous Judge. It breaks my heart to see the kids so frightened to be in the presence of the "THE SPONTANEOUS JUDGES" As a Judge I always do everything I can to get the kids relaxed before we start. At worlds last year I had a pink flamingo finger puppet sitting on my clipboard. If there were kids who needed it Phyllis would give them a little peck on the cheek (she got a work out). Judges are there because we love kids; we don't get any pay except the joy of seeing so many creative kids doing such amazing things. For me that is payment in full!"
- g. "If I could suggest something for all new coaches and especially coaches for Division 1 teams. Please don't let the fact that you can't be with them get you nervous and upset, the kids will pick up on that and go into the spontaneous area with all of your worries added to there own."
- h. "As so many people have said, you need to practice all types of spontaneous problems on a regular basis. Get your team comfortable with the idea of thinking on their feet, and don't forget that many Spontaneous problems have a score for teamwork. If they have never competed be sure to tell them what to expect once they are in the room with the judges. When you practice don't forget selecting their five participating team members. It would be outside assistance for the coach to make this decision in advance. Let them figure it out as part of your practice sessions. (a hint on practice: nothing builds confidence like success. When they fail to solve a practice problem, let them try again)"

- i. "Assure them that while spontaneous is an adventure into the unknown, that is just part of what makes it spontaneous. Please remember that we as judges want every team to do their very best; we will do our best to be fair and consistent in our judgments. The best thing you can do is prepare them well, and smile when they go!"
- j. "I don't know whether it's silly or not. When my team first went to a competition years ago, we didn't know we need to fill out the different forms BEFORE we come to the competition area. We were a bunch of eighth graders at the Eurofest in Berlin in 1994 (our first competition ever), and we thought we had to fill out the forms there. You can believe the hurry we had there when the staging area judge gave us a copy of each form and we had to fill it in in English!"
- k. "Today as a judge I still meet teams who don't have enough forms. I can understand their situation today, but my advice would be to bring always enough forms, if you bring more, nobody's angry."
- l. "When I coached, I always kept my set (one each, completed forms) in our problem binder (sort of a journal of our journey to the solution plus permission and membership forms, required forms, other forms, member lists, etc.)"
- m. "I always brought the problem binder with me to competition. In order to plan for the worst, the kids usually had me keep another full set of the completed required forms in case of emergency (like the time they all blew away.) The full set was an exact replica of the submission packet they'd prepared complete with appropriate numbers of copies. Besides, who can think straight enough during the excitement of competition day to correctly fill out and copy forms? Not me, by a long shot."
- n. "I consider sportsmanlike conduct towards the other members of the team an essential part of teamwork. Spontaneous can be nerve-wracking for members who have to sit patiently while a team member is stuck (mind goes blank)."
- o. "Don't forget there is an award for competitors/teams who exhibit extraordinary "Omership", to coin a word. Those who exhibit all (or a good portion) of the qualities OotM hopes to instill and/or draw out in a participant qualify to be nominated for OMER's Award. (Nominations made at nominator's discretion.)"
- p. "It breaks my heart to see teams who obviously just don't "get it" and try to perform at each other's throats. A relaxed attitude and a pleasant, heartfelt smile of encouragement from a team member goes a lot farther towards breaking a brain cramp than glares and impatient sighs."

- q. "One thing I wish I had known as a first year coach last year was that the coaches should pick up their team scores within a half hour after the scores are posted. I coached two teams last year. The first team competed, then went on to spontaneous, and then we moved to the other team's long term problem competition. It was at the second team's competition that the head judge said something to me about coming back in a certain time to get the score sheet to review. I never thought of going back to the first team's site to check their score sheet. Well, I found a mistake in judging on the second team's sheet that the judges quickly corrected...a mistake that would have cost our team 20 points! After the awards ceremony I picked up our envelopes with the final scores and found a mistake on the first team's score sheet...a mistake I also could have had corrected if I had known about doing that. At least I learned from my mistake and won't be making the same mistake this year!!"
- r. "Knowledge of the scoring process (not only what's in the "rule book" but actually understanding HOW scoring happens) is one of the most critical things a coach and team can learn."

### **Coaching Do's**

- Do teach your students the creative problem-solving process and use it throughout the problem solution.
- Do help students to understand that winning is not the goal. The process of getting there is the important thing – not the competition.
- Do help students to see and recognize the abilities of each team member and encourage team members to capitalize on the individual strengths of ALL.
- Do encourage growth through each new experience.
- Do help them get organized and notice the importance of keeping a schedule and meeting deadlines.
- Do help them expand their minds, dig deeper, and come up with more creative ideas.
- Do work with teams on the spontaneous problem part of the Odyssey of the Mind program.
- Do try always to answer a question with a question.

- Do help them give and take constructive criticism of IDEAS but avoid insulting and insensitive personal remarks.
- Do be willing to admit you don't know everything and encourage your team to get help from others. (Be careful with this one.)
- Do help them to learn how to evaluate their ideas and progress continually throughout each aspect of the problem solution.
- Do go over the score results with the team after a competition to help it improve in future tournaments.
- Do set a good example of adult behavior and by all means be a good role model for your team and others.
- Do let your team members know you are human and have needs also.
- Do be a quiet "guide on the side," not the "sage on the stage."
- Do relax and enjoy seeing these young, creative minds at work!!!

### **Coaching Don'ts**

- Don't tell them how to solve the problem, but rather ask questions that help them think it through.
- Don't allow any criticism of teammates' personalities or physical attributes – no cutting remarks.
- Don't step in on their disagreements. Let them work it out as part of learning to work on a team.
- Don't limit creativity by setting restrictions that are too tight or which reflect your own, perhaps limited, vision.
- Don't get disturbed when teams make mistakes along the way. This is part of the Odyssey learning process.
- Don't allow them to be irresponsible. Help them realize that this hinders the entire team.



- Don't make them feel like they have failed if they don't win. Failing is only when they won't try again.
- Don't complain about other teams, coaches, or judges.
- Don't allow teams to prepare a problem solution, which knowingly goes against the Spirit of the Problem or any of the limitations given in the problem itself. **READ, READ, AND REREAD THE PROBLEM AND THEN READ, READ, READ SOME MORE!**
- Don't dispute a judge's ruling without explaining why to the students. Always be sure your dispute is valid and that the team wishes to carry it further.
- Don't get uptight. Relax and remember that the team members are the ones who have to know everything or find out. You are the coach and are not supposed to produce the problem solutions.

## EFFECTIVE COACHING

*This section provides tactics for coaches to get their teams to work together cooperatively and to think creatively. It comes from the Odyssey of the Mind Coaches Training Manual.*

### I. Coaching Styles

**A. Introduce various ways to coach a team.** Suggest that coaches record good and bad experiences to help them in following years.

1. The amount of time a coach spends with the team depends on the schedule of the team members as well as that of the coach.
2. One or two hours a week is average, with more time spent during the weeks immediately preceding the first competition.
3. The coach can assign a different aspect to each team member and have them work on their own.

**B. Illustrate to coaches what not to do.** Here are two extreme coaching techniques, neither of which is recommended:

1. One coach required teams to work before school, after school and every Saturday. This began in September and lasted until April, when the team failed to advance in competition. This deprived the team members of other valuable experiences necessary to growing up. Even when this coach's teams made it to World Finals, the kids missed out on many opportunities in other aspects of their lives.
2. One high school coach would hold an initial meeting for anyone

interested in being on a team. He told the students to form the teams themselves, told them their budget, and the date and time that the bus would leave for the first tournament. He did nothing else.

Although his teams often made it to World Finals, this is rare and deprives the team of the intangible benefits of having a respected adult acknowledge their hard work.

- C. **Discuss the need for balance and perspective.** Coaches are not responsible for solving the problems, so the team must decide how much work and effort they are willing to devote to this. One of the objectives of Odyssey of the Mind is to have students take responsibility for their own successes and failures.

## II. Coaching Tips

- A. **Describe the behavior that is expected of each team member.**
  1. Good sportsmanship is essential.
  2. Students will work on organizational and teamwork skills.
  3. They will provide support and encouragement to each other – and even recognize the achievements of their competitors.
- B. **Emphasize the importance of learning to ask the right questions.** A good coach will teach team members to ask the right questions – not just any question, but one that will address a specific problem or condition that needs to be addressed.
- C. **Get members thinking as a team.** Don't allow team members to waste energy by blaming others. The *team* creates its solution; if something goes wrong, it is the *team's* responsibility.
- D. **The team should have a crisis management plan** so it knows what to do when something breaks down. Remember Murphy's Law: "If something can go wrong, it will go wrong."
- E. **Encourage the less vocal members to participate.** They often have the best ideas but are reluctant to propose them. Thousands of kids have emerged as stars while beginning as overly quiet. Sometimes getting shy kids to open up is the most difficult yet most rewarding experience a coach will encounter.
- F. **Encourage team members to develop pride in one another.**
- G. **From time to time, show the team how it has demonstrated a type of knowledge that is taught in school.** They will enjoy discovering that their solutions apply practical uses of knowledge. For example, one team built every part of an entire vehicle for the vehicle problem, *Balloonacy Cars*, including its wheels. However, the team-made wheels were not the same diameter. To make them the same size, the team put rubber bands around them. Since no two wheels were the same size, the rubber bands had to be different. That team solved the equation:

(diameter of wheel 1 + rubber band A) = (diameter of wheel 2 + rubber band B) = (diameter of wheel 3 + rubber band C) = (diameter of wheel 4 + rubber band D) The results for A, B, C and D provided the size of the rubber bands needed to make all the wheels the same diameter. This creative solution was an application of algebra. By **identifying** how current schoolwork can be incorporated into the solution, the coach will inspire students to show greater interest in their solution and in their classroom lessons.

- H. **Coaches should answer a question with a question rather than giving a direct answer.** For example, if asked, "Which hat do you like better?" the coach should say something like, "Which one do you think goes best with the theme of the solution?" This encourages the team members to think independently.
- I. **Coaches should strive to serve as role models for their team members.** It is important that they remain optimistic and patient. Henry Ford said that there are no failures, just opportunities. Coaches need to be enthusiastic and open-minded to suggestions. Coaches should strive to make learning fun!
- J. **Teach teamwork.**
  - 1. Assign each team member one aspect of the long-term problem and have that individual become the expert on that aspect and share their knowledge with the rest of the team.
  - 2. Have one member study the problem, one the general rules, one the limitations, one the site setup and the check-in/staging requirements, one the scoring, another the penalties, and then have them work together to combine their knowledge.
  - 3. Make sure everyone contributes equally to the development of the solution.
  - 4. Coaches should encourage team members to look to one another for answers and suggestions. This teaches respect for others.
  - 5. The coach may have to act as facilitator when team members disagree with one another.

### III. Building Creative-Thinking Skills

- A. **Hold brainstorming sessions.** Have teams generate as many ideas as possible. You or a team member can facilitate the session and record the ideas. The rules:
  - 1. Allow no criticism.
  - 2. Encourage outrageous ideas.
  - 3. Encourage piggybacking of other ideas.
  - 4. Evaluate the ideas and eliminate those that are not feasible.
  - 5. Teams should know that better ideas often come later. The team

- 6. The coach cannot tell the team which ideas to pursue.
  - 7. The coach should never express disapproval of ideas except in cases of safety concerns.
  - 8. Ask "what if" questions.
- B. Restatement of the problem.** Examine the problem and determine what really needs to be done to find an appropriate solution.
- 1. For example, "Design a new toothbrush" would result in a different solution than "Create a better way to clean teeth."
  - 2. Setting limitations helps teams to focus on the real issue at hand. "Create a new toy" is too broad" but "Create a new pull toy" provides guidelines.
- C. Remove certain mindsets (functional fixedness).** Look at objects for more than the function for which they are intended. For example, using a paper towel as a coffee filter.
- D. Role-playing.** This helps team members go beyond what they are used to and to view situations from different perspectives.
- 1. Have students act out roles of different characters.
  - 2. Present fictional situations and have them improvise.

**BOTTOM LINE FOR COACHES:**

Your job is to know the rules that are in the program guide.

Your job is to keep the team members safe.

Your job is to encourage the team to keep trying.

Your job is to teach them the skills they say they need to know.

**BOTTOM LINE FOR TEAMS:**

Their job is to listen to the coach when it comes to the program guide rules.

Their job is follow all safety rules.

Their job is keep trying to solve the problem.

Their job is to ask the questions and seek the resources needed to answer them.

## DIAMOND BRAINSTORMING METHOD: A TOOL FOR IDEA GENERATION

Any group attempting to create great things must first start with small ideas and build upon them. Odyssey teams often need to learn how to brainstorm ideas, then how to discuss them, and, finally, how to narrow them down to ones that are practical. At the same time, they must learn to respect each other's ideas and be willing to give up individual ideas for the success of the group.

The Diamond Brainstorming Method is a visual method that encourages as many ideas as possible. Teams build one idea from another, and all ideas are listed as they "pop out" of the team members' heads, no matter how "impossible" they seem. Also, by building up ideas one at a time and narrowing them down one at a time, the method encourages team members to relinquish ownership of ideas, so no one's feelings are hurt by rejection during later discussion. The visual quality of this appeals particularly to younger teams who can "see" their ideas taking shape.

**MATERIALS:** A large chart, newsprint pad, blackboard, or white board; markers or pens; and eager team members wanting to share ideas.

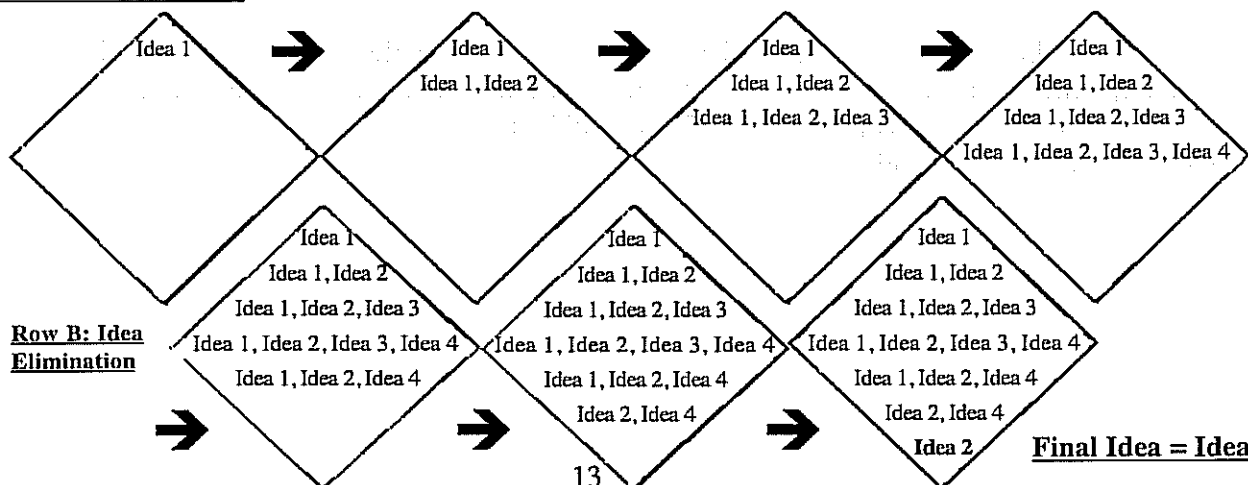
**FORMAT:** Team members sit in chairs or on the floor, with one person recording ideas. (The coach may record the ideas, but he/she must write down the teams' exact words.)

### PROCEDURE:

1. Team members pose a question, such as, What would be the best way to do 'X', or, How can we make 'Y', or, What should 'Z' look like? Note: The team members must generate the questions themselves, and the questions should be general and open-ended. A coach may help the team determine exactly what it is they want to brainstorm by asking questions such as, What is the problem you are trying to figure out?
2. All the team members brainstorm answers to the question, and someone suggests his/her idea, and the recorder writes it down on the board or chart.
3. A second member gives an idea, and it is written down with the first one just below the first idea, so that the ideas begin to fill in the top half of the diamond shape (see Row A). Ideas are repeated on each line; the widest part of the diamond displays ALL the team's ideas.
4. After the team members come up with all possible ideas (as few as 4 or 5, or as many as 10 or 15) they then begin, through discussion, to narrow down the possibilities by eliminating one at a time as shown in Row B. They could even combine two or more separate ideas to determine the final one. Hopefully, they'll come to an agreement on their favorite idea without voting -- and without argument!

**Remember: Only constructive criticism is ever allowed!**

#### Row A: Idea Generation



Excerpts from the "Must Know Handbook" by Vic Fleming  
(This document can be downloaded in its entirety from the Gulf Coast regional website:  
[www.gcodyyssey.com](http://www.gcodyyssey.com))

### **The Committed Communicator**

(Learn this, if possible, before your first meeting of any sort.)

Coaching an Odyssey of the Mind ("Odyssey") team is a commitment of time, talent, and money. As coach, you must set an example early. Stressing the mutual nature of the time and talent commitment. Also the importance of open and frequent communication among everyone.

Frequent phoning, e-mailing, postcards, and hand-delivered notes should be fostered and encouraged. Everyone must remain fully briefed on what's happening and when. Reminders should be the rule rather than the exception. A calendar, with meeting and competition dates marked, is useful.

There's a cost limitation on the value of materials used in the long-term problem solution. Unless the team members are superior "scroungers," it's probable that more than this amount will be spent. Materials used and discarded do not count toward the cost of the team's solution. Get an understanding early of where the money is going to come from. All families should chip in a certain amount. You are special for being willing to coach. Parents and team members should respect this and divide the costs incurred by the team.

Also, there is the consideration of feeding these kids snacks and/or meals, which cost money. Get a clear understanding as to how this will be handled. **As much as anything else, a coach must be a committed communicator.**

### **Relax, Enjoy, Ask**

#### **Rule One: "Have fun."**

This applies to you, the coach, as well as team members. Remind them of it repeatedly. Have them remind you of it. The problems are not yours to solve. If you, as coach, keep the kids working and having fun, you are doing fine. Relax and enjoy yourself.

Stress will increase as competition dates draw near. Foreseeable stress can be minimized with good planning. Involve the team to the greatest extent possible in planning, recognizing that they will need some guidance to keep matters realistic. There will be times when "I don't have a clue" will be the inevitable conclusion in a given scenario. Relax. Do not panic. It won't help.

Lots of people are "out there" to offer help – other coaches, school coordinators, Odyssey of the Mind regional and state officers and directors, even unnamed people on the Internet. Learn who these people are, especially your regional and state officials. A sense of humor, especially the ability to laugh at yourself, will serve you well and keep your team happy.

## *How Long is a Meeting?*

How often and how long does a team need to meet? As with many other questions in this program, there is no clear-cut answer and the team should be involved in resolving the issue. Whatever the team, with your guidance, chooses, it should be calculated to achieve goals and objectives established by the team. It also should be such that team members commit to regular attendance and keep their commitment.

How much time you, as coach, spend with the team members depends on you. One or two hours a week is about right, even with newcomers to the program. Getting a late start (early November or later) may indicate a need for more or longer meetings. During “crunch time” – the two or three weeks immediately prior to a competition – you’ll spend a lot of extra time together.

Meetings will be most productive if the kids work additional time by themselves or in smaller groups to accomplish specific tasks that are less feasible when the whole group is together.

## *Rules and Forms*

This program is full of rules and there are a variety of forms to be filled out as a necessity of entering any competition. There may be as many as three separate sources for rules – the long-term problem itself and the Program Guide from program headquarters. Don’t assume anything until you’ve read these materials.

This pamphlet, as previously mentioned, is a Must-Know primer. You must know that you’d better plan early to acquire copies of the rules and the forms in the Program Guide. Introduce the team members to these things. Get ready to get comfortable early with a bunch of stuff that you may not have been used to in life as you know it.

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.)

The forms you will use are the Outside Assistance Form, Style Form, and Material Values Form. Beyond this, there is usually a Staging Area Judge’s document or list that is required by the terms of a problem. Also, Clarification Forms must be used to obtain official clarifications. Clarifications that change something about the problem are published and your team should send for copies of these periodically. Make sure registrations and fees are mailed on time. This might mean doing it yourself or it might mean calling your local officials.

## *Ground Rules*

Establish ground rules at the first meeting. Remind of them frequently thereafter. As coach, make clear your expectations about time commitment.

A very important rule is that negativity and put-downs are off limits. They close things off or out. Odyssey is about opening things up and letting things in. An idea that sounds really strange may spark other ideas. Emphasize that the best ideas often come “later.” Problem solutions are the collection of ideas and adaptations.

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. As coach, create an accepting environment. Reward risk taking! Encourage appropriate humor and good-natured fun.

### Food

Snacks are a must for hungry kids at after school meetings. Meeting through a meal period is a possibility. Spread the responsibility for food service around among parents. It's costly unless divided up.

Have limits on snacks and keep meals simple – *i.e.*, cookies or fruit or items that can be consumed within 10 minutes or so are preferable to bags of munchies that make noise, encourage mischief, and make noise throughout a meeting. A quick pizza and some cookies are easier to finish and get back to work from than a three-course meal.

While Rule One is "Have Fun," it's important to remember that this activity is a competitive learning experience. Thus, a work atmosphere is appropriate for meetings.

### "Uh, generally speaking, what do I do now?"

There is no *one way* to coach an Odyssey team. Most people are nervous about making mistakes. Go ahead; be nervous. Make a mistake or two. Then get over it. Everyone makes mistakes. Mistakes are part of the process. Relax, and everything will go just fine.

### Team-Building: Encourage Laughter and Creative Zaniness

Spend time during the early part of the first few meetings making sure that your team members get to know each other. Let them tell about themselves. Make notes of birthdays. Remember them. Celebrate them. Celebrate other things as well. Look for reasons to have team members give each other rounds of applause.

Engender positivism in their every endeavor. Tell them repeatedly how proud you are of them. Reward their smallest accomplishments. Never focus for long on any negative. Never embarrass one kid in front of the others (try to avoid embarrassing anyone at all).

Encourage laughter, make it mandatory. Occasionally make the team engage in 30 seconds of fake laughter. It's relaxing, soothing, and healthy. And contagious.

Encourage creative zaniness. Use simple party games, word games, and verbal exercises to keep creativity flowing during these sessions. Encourage the telling of jokes with appropriate non-toxic humor.

Team building is the basis of a good team. Team building activities may be as simple as an outing to the hardware store or may be a specific exercise. Team building should be fun and promote recognition of each member's strengths.



## **Establishing a Plan for the Year**

Setting up a time line for achievement of certain objectives, help the team be realistic. Some kids, under the influence of a great idea, will tell you that they will write a skit "tonight." A week later you see that they have two pages in longhand and are totally amazed that the skit only lasts 25 seconds.

Plan for editing and rewriting. Observe your team to identify the writers, the editors, the artists, the engineers, the actors, the comedians, the dancers, etc. As coach you must facilitate their deployment of personnel. Otherwise the stronger personalities and the more popular kids will dominate the experience. And potential will go unrealized.

## **Your Team Needs to Understand the Problem**

Teams should be coached to ensure that their long-term solution take into account that one or more members could be absent or otherwise unable to perform on competition day.

Coach teams to divide the labor, recognizing that tasks never divide in a completely equal manner. Team members may be assigned specialties: one is to know the problem inside out; another the rules; another the limitations; another the site set-up and pre-staging requirements; another the scoring.

There are time limits (usually 8 minutes) for each long-term problem. Performance problems usually have penalties for exceeding the limit. Teams should be coached to end in less time than is allowed. Many factors come into play. Have the team brainstorm the issue. Long-term technical problems are usually stopped at the end of the allotted time. Teams should be coached to implement plans for possible technical breakdowns.

Don't be alarmed if long-term technical problems seem overwhelming. Embrace this. Celebrate it. Then coach the team to divide and dissect, comprehend and tackle. Your comparisons of problems' similarities to real life are always appropriate. Someday, they may even be appreciated.

## **Blameless**

Coach the team to avoid wasting creative energy by *blaming*. The team creates its own solution and if something goes wrong, it is the team's responsibility. The team should try to have a crisis management plan so it knows what it will do when something breaks down.

Blaming others is poor sportsmanship. Blaming yourself is noble. Sharing the blame with others is nobler. Coach the kids to be noble.

## **Odyssey of the Mind Scoring**

In each competition there is a possibility of scoring a maximum of 350 points.

There is a maximum of 200 for the long-term problem solution (raw and adjusted), awarded in this fashion: There is usually a finite number of points per line item, with the maximum of all the line items adding up to 200. The team receiving the highest "raw" score gets the 200. All lower scores are

“percentaged” off the top score. For example, if the top score is 150 and the second highest is 75, these two teams would receive scores of 200 and 100 respectively.

There is a maximum of 50 points for Style (raw and adjusted). The team with the highest score gets 50, with lower scores percentaged to the top score. For example, with a top score of 40 and second place score of 30, the two scores would be 50 and 35.5, respectively.

There is a maximum of 100 points for the spontaneous problem solution. Often, spontaneous raw scores have no ceiling; that is, a team may have a raw score of more than 100. Lower scores are percentaged off the highest score, which receives the 100. If the two top scores were 250 and 125, then the adjusted scores would be 100 and 50, respectively.

### **Penalties**

Long-term problems list several types of penalties. They are listed to assure that a team doesn't bend or break rules, cause a safety hazard, delay competition, or misbehave. Study them. Learn them.

The Spirit of the Problem penalty is aimed at teams attempting to circumvent the intention of the rules, in either long-term or spontaneous, ranges from 1-100 points.

Unsportsmanlike conduct penalties can occur if teams (including coaches) are impairing another team, being disruptive, using inappropriate language, and the like.

Outside Assistance penalties of 5-200 points are assessed if a team uses help from someone other than its members. There are other penalties specific to the problems.

### **In Summary**

Relax and enjoy yourself.

Do not panic.

Laugh at yourself.

Celebrate and embrace  
the creativity of the experience.

Be respectful,

open-minded,

flexible,

adaptable.

Be enthusiastic.

***Have fun.***