

UN-WANTED:  
ERRANT COACH

?

AKA "Overly Helpful Parent," "Resident Consultant/" "Interfering Sibling," "Over Zealous Friend," "Generous Teacher," etc.

**CRIME: OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE**  
(Aiding and abetting a problem solution)

**Sentence: 1 to 200 point penalty, disqualification, or suspension of the team from the program**

RESULTS: The team is the **BIG** loser in this sad scenario, but the perpetrator suffers anguish, guilt and humiliation. Team members may find themselves "Guilty by Association."

REMARKS: This crime is highly correlated with adult competitiveness, lack of appreciation for the true value of the Odyssey program, and inadequate understanding of the Odyssey of the Mind philosophy and rules.

WARNING: Avoidance and restraint advised. These coaches are **ARMED** (with too much information) and **DANGEROUS** (to the Spirit of Odyssey).

**COACHES:** The above may be a bit heavy-handed, but unfortunately, Outside Assistance is a **BIG** problem. Outside Assistance can and should be avoided by all coaches through adequate training, familiarity with the Odyssey of the Mind rules and strict adherence to the principles that underlie the program. Parents and supporters also need to be told what they can and cannot do to "help" the team.

The foundation upon which Odyssey of the Mind rests is the belief that the solution that the team presents for judging at an Odyssey competition is "pure." This means that the team members, *and only the team members*, have been the sole contributors to their solution of that problem. Stated another way, it means that the solution has not been "*tainted*" by any outside influences.

The most difficult job for every coach is to step aside and *allow the team* to do the thinking, to work through the problems, to find the solutions, and to *make the mistakes* all by themselves. It is critical that the coach understand that his or her role is to be a facilitator and perhaps a go-fer for the team, but not a participant in the solution process, *not a resident expert waiting to share knowledge*.

It is perfectly appropriate for team members to want to do well or even to win, and to work hard and strive toward that goal. However, when it is the coach who wants to win, many inappropriate things can happen. At that point it is the coach's desire to do well that takes precedence over, *not only the team's creative efforts, but the process of learning and discovering*. **THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE**. Odyssey is first and foremost an **educational program where the students learn by doing**. When the coach becomes more than a facilitator of the process and begins participating in solving the team's problems, the spirit of the program is violated and the value of the process has been radically compromised for that team.

#### **COACHES:**

- help a team understand that it is the *team* who has the answers to their questions.
- sit on their hands and bite their tongues.
- give encouragement, not assistance.
- collect team-selected materials.
- provide a safe and nurturing environment where creativity can flourish.
- facilitate the team's cooperative interaction.
- make lists and schedule meetings.
- question the team to higher and higher levels of creativity.
- find the unique and diverse talents of EVERY person on the team so that the solution comes from and belongs to ALL of them.

**Odyssey of the Mind, in its simplest form, means that the kids do all the work, come up with all the ideas, and use their own ingenuity to solve the problems.**

If you are an expert in some area that ties in with your team's problem, or you think you KNOW how it should be done, *you are at risk of influencing your team's solution* unless you practice **extreme vigilance**. There is a fine line between providing information of a general nature - like what a team could read in a book or get from another similar resource - and providing information not generally available to all teams, information which is custom tailored to the team's problem. Watch out for this - ask yourself often if you are stepping over that line! A coach of a technical problem is truly *at risk* here, but any well-meaning "expert" eager to share her or his talents and skills can also be **Public Enemy #1** to the Odyssey of the Mind process.

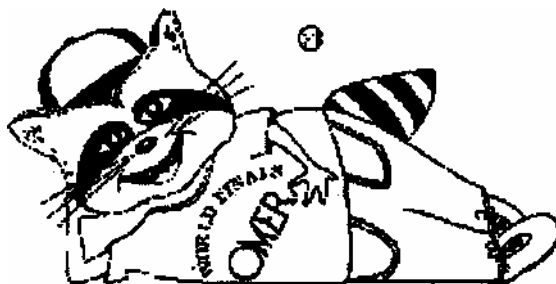
**Be the coach, not a personal trainer for the team.**

A consultant that a team invites to a meeting shares some general knowledge and information *and then leaves*. If the coach becomes the resident expert, and is constantly monitoring and correcting team errors and continuously teaching, *then he/she is probably guilty of intervening* and an Outside Assistance penalty should be levied against that team who was not given the opportunity to solve their problem alone.

**The kids on your team will, with good coaching, solve their own problem.  
Their solution may look nothing like you envisioned - but that's the whole point, isn't it?**

**COACH, DON'T ENCROACH!**

- Jill Schoonmaker, NHOM



## **Odyssey of the Mind and OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE**

... Following Odyssey's rules allows everyone to compete on an equal level. Odyssey of the Mind believes it is the process, not winning a competition, that makes the program worthwhile. Odyssey of the Mind encourages team members to do research about their problem. However, the resources used may NOT solve the problem for the team, but merely offer insight or teach skills that can be used to solve the problem. For example, as a resource, team members may have a dancer teach them dance steps, but the dancer may NOT choreograph the team's dance. Or, the structure team may have a civil engineer speak about various methods of construction, but it may NOT have a civil engineer tell it the best method to solve the structure problem.

A basic question to ask when considering whether or not an item you wish to use will carry an Outside Assistance penalty is whether it is available in basically the same form to anyone. If an item the team wishes to use is not a standard item, but one which someone must make or alter to fit the team's design, then the team must make or alter it. Team members must design all problem solutions, props, costumes and membership signs and make them or assemble them from pre-made parts. **IF A TEAM DESIGNS A SOLUTION, PROP, COSTUME OR SIGN THAT IT CANNOT PRODUCE, THEN IT MUST REDISGN THE SOLUTION, PROP, COSTUME OR SIGN SO IT CAN PRODUCE IT.** This applies to all divisions.

... If a tournament official sees an adult or non-team member do anything to prepare for the competition during the tournament, except carrying props and other items, he/she will advise the judges and the judges will assess an Outside Assistance penalty. **This includes fixing hair in special ways, applying makeup, gluing, nailing or otherwise repairing props, etc. Penalties will be assessed only upon the word of a tournament official.** Source: Odyssey of the Mind Program Handbook

As adults we should always try to set a positive example for the young people with which we are involved. We must set an example that holds honesty and integrity in the highest regard. "Winning at all costs" should not be the goal of an Odyssey of the Mind team. It is the **process** and what is learned "along the way" that should be important.

If the young people on the team cannot do something on their own, they should find an alternative way to accomplish the task. Adults and non-team members should adopt a general "**HANDS - OFF**" attitude. If you are not sure if what you are doing could be outside assistance it is best not to do anything or to stop what you are doing.

We must not forget why we are participating in the Odyssey of the Mind program. Saying it's okay to break the rules because "others are doing it" is wrong. When we as adults break the rules and are dishonest, consider the message this sends to the impressionable young people in our care.

Fight against Outside Assistance every day, in every way you know how...

### **REJECTING HELP**

It is your team. You can do it yourself. You can ask for the right kind of help by saying, "Can you show me how the sewing machine works?" "How do we use the computer to make banners?"

You can help your coach and parents and others if they offer help you don't need or can't have under the rules. Tell them, "Thanks, but we want to do this ourselves, our way." Or "We can't have that kind of help, but we would like your help in learning how these tools work. Then we can use them ourselves." Or "Instead of telling us what to do, maybe you can ask us a few questions to get us thinking for ourselves to solve this problem."

Remember, everyone hopes you do well and enjoy Odyssey of the Mind. For that to happen, this has to be all your own doing. **GOOD LUCK** and **CREATIVITY**.

***WE CAN DO IT ALL OURSELVES!!!***  
***We Are a Great Odyssey of the Mind***  
***Team!***

**THE TRUE Odyssey of the Mind SPIRIT**

Odyssey of the Mind is exciting fun and very challenging. You are faced with a tough problem that does not have only one right answer. That makes Odyssey of the Mind difficult, but it also makes it great. By the time you finish with this year's competition, your team will have accomplished and learned a lot. For your team to totally enjoy what you accomplish, it has to be all yours. That is why Odyssey of the Mind rules don't allow help from anyone other than your team members to solve your Odyssey of the Mind problem. The rules say, "All problem solutions and style props, as well as costumes and membership signs must be designed and made by team members."

**SOLVING THE PROBLEM AS A TEAM**

Your team will struggle with many parts of your Odyssey of the Mind problem. It will be fun most of the time, but not always. You will get frustrated when something does not work right or doesn't seem good enough. You may argue with each other and even get mad sometimes. After hours of work you might reach a dead end and have to start all over with different ideas. But eventually, if you stick with it and trust each other, you will solve the problem. That is the whole point of Odyssey of the Mind. Work hard together to solve tough problems.

It is important that only your team solves the problem. NOT your coach, NOT your parents, NOT your teachers. NOT anyone else but your team. But, some kinds of help are OK for others to give you.

**When help is OK**

Someone shows how to brainstorm different ideas

Someone shows how to use some tools but does not work on your props.

Someone teaches you acting skills. Your team then practices to make you Odyssey of the Mind performance better.

When a part of your Odyssey of the Mind solution breaks, you ask a mechanic what would fix it. You then make the repairs.

**When help is NOT OK**

Someone else brainstorms the ideas that help solve the problem.

Someone helps build your props,

Someone tells you how to change your Odyssey performance.

Someone else fixes your broken part,

### ***Teamwork is...***

- Recognizing your own capabilities.
- Recognizing that often, silence is not golden.
- Making your communications sincere.
- Asking for help when you need it.
- Accepting what cannot be changed.
- Being honest with yourself and others.
- Being sensitive to others' feelings.
- Respecting the skills and opinions of others.
- Learning from the past, working in the present, thinking about the future.

### ***Definitions...***

- TEAM (tem) 1. One or more animals harnessed to the same vehicle. 2. A group of people working and/or playing together. 3. To harness the power of multiple elements. 4. To bring forth. 5. To join in cooperative activity. 6. To harness or yoke together. 7. To pull or draw out.
- TEAMWORK (tem wurk) 1. A joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group. 2. Coordinated effort. 3. Work done by or with a team.
- WORK (wurk) 1. Bodily or mental effort. 2. Purposeful activity. 3. To exert oneself in order to do or make something. 4. To bring about. 5. To mold, shape or form. 6. To draw, paint, or carve. 7. To cause. 8. To ferment.

**Note:** Definitions taken from Webster's New World Dictionary, 1962. These are not the complete definitions.

## **How to Ask Questions Or... How Not to Provide Outside Assistance**

Coaches need to be aware that the WAY a question is asked may limit the creativity of the answers. Here are some general, all-purpose questions you can use with your team(s):

1. Do you think any other team would think of this?
2. Can you think of a more creative way to do this?
3. What other materials could be used to (create this effect, to make this move, to make it lighter in weight, to make it funnier, etc.)?
4. What kinds of things do we need to find out in order to do this?
5. How else could you...?
  
6. Why did this happen?
7. Where could you find out?
8. Is this your best...?
9. Does this meet the standard?
10. Is this job done?
  
11. What do we mean by style?
12. What should be done?
13. When should it be done?
14. Who should do it?
15. Can this be tested?
  
16. Can we combine ideas?
17. Why is it necessary?
18. How else could this be arranged?
19. What should come next?
20. What makes sense? What makes nonsense?
  
21. What could be said? What could be left unsaid?
22. Have you considered where the points are?
23. What are the pros of your solution? What are the cons?
24. Are you satisfied with your idea/work/solution/performance?
25. Do you feel like you are "in the box" or "out of the box"?



26. If you were judging this problem how would you score your solution?
27. Are you respectful of your team members' ideas?
28. What do you think each of your team members strengths are?
29. Are your team members' strengths being utilized?
30. If you were coaching this team how would you handle this conflict?
  
31. If you were coaching this team where would you take the team to have a fun afternoon off?
32. Can you think of a good field trip that would relate to your problem?
33. Will it fit through a door?
34. How many people will it take to move it?
35. How will you get "it" to competition? If we only have a car, will it fit in a car? a van? will we need a truck? a trailer?
36. Can you check out the survivability of the prop?

**Regarding Style:**

1. What would you like to use for your free choice elements?
2. Why are these elements special?
3. What are you most proud of? Why?
4. What is the neatest part of your solution?
5. What makes your performance really shine?

Good questioning can really help elevate your team's solution and enjoyment of creative problem solving, without introducing outside assistance.