ODYSSEY OF THE MIND COACHING REMINDERS

Coaching an Odyssey of the Mind team provides many rewarding opportunities. Among them, you'll:

- see kids grow and become engaged in their learning.
- witness individuals grow as a team.
- become involved in the education of kids.
- learn more about what kids are thinking and what appeals to them.
- watch as kids develop their thinking skills while improving self-esteem and confidence.

Roles of an Odyssey Coach (*Odyssey of the Mind Program Guide*)

- Facilitate a team without doing the work for the team. Stand back and watch while the team members make all the decisions regarding the problem solution.
- Interact with the team to improve the way the team identifies and solves problems.
- Make sure all team members are involved in the process of issue identification, idea generation, solution finding and solution presentation.
- Provide the impetus for the team to develop strategies, generate ideas, evaluate options or reach a decision. This is done in brainstorming sessions and the like.
- Encourage the team members to produce fresh ideas, to think "out-of-the-box," to work cooperatively together, and to better communication among themselves.
- Provide a safe environment with no criticism of team members as they develop their solution.
- Stay well informed of all problem rules and program guidelines and pass the information on to the team members.
- Develop a timeline working backwards from the competition date, including holidays and school breaks, and make sure the team sticks to the timeline.

Tips for Selecting a Team (*Program Guide*)

- Get recommendations from teachers.
- Seek out kids with special skills and interests such as building, singing, acting, and so on.
- Conduct tryouts using spontaneous problems or find enough coaches to allow all students to participate.
- Post a sign-up list. If more than seven students per problem and division participate, have an intramural competition to choose which team will represent the school in official competition, OR purchase additional memberships according to the number of teams.
- Remember that you should have at least five, but no more than seven, team members on each team.

Problem Selection

- Review problems in which the team is eligible to compete.
- Have the team discuss the pros and cons of each problem.
- Let team members vote on the problem they want to solve.

Hold a Parents Meeting

- Explain the program
  - It's a hands-on program for kids and a hands-off program for adults. Review rules for outside assistance.
  - Children are encouraged to take risks without fear of criticism.
- Explain the team's problem, including Spirit of the Problem, Limitations, and Scoring.
- Explain that they can help by
  - understanding that participation requires commitment of both child *and* parent.
  - serving as co-coaches.
  - teaching skills needed by the team e.g., sewing, welding. The rule is: "If you can find it in a book, someone can teach the skill."

- seeking the help of friends that could teach skills the team needs to learn.
- taking turns hosting practice sessions and providing refreshments.
- chaperoning the team at competitions.
- donating materials (paint, cardboard, etc) to be used in the solution.
- providing transportation to get materials, for field trips, and to tournaments.
- serving as judges or officials at the tournaments. (A number of positions are available, from doorkeeper to souvenir salesperson.)

Solving the Problem

- Encourage team members to read and re-read the problem and the *Program Guide*.
- If the team members have problems reading the materials the coach should read and re-read the material to them.
- Assign different team members to be responsible for different parts of the problem (Limitations, Scoring, problem statement). These team members should be able to answer questions about their areas or be responsible for finding the answer.
- **Everyone** must understand the problem. The entire problem may need to be broken down and considered in separate brainstorming sessions, that is, one session to decide on the theme, one for Style, another for props, and still another for the script.
- The team must understand the rules for safety and damage control as listed in the General Rules section of the *Program Guide*.
- If necessary, use the Clarification Process (*Program Guide*). Clarification requests are answered only by Odyssey of the Mind International headquarters. Questions about tournament conditions should be directed to the local tournament director. Check all published Clarifications before each competition.
- Submit all clarifications online.

What is Brainstorming? (*Program Guide*)

- Brainstorming is a process to generate different ways to solve a problem.
- Breaking the long-term problem into individual pieces (e.g. set, costumes, props, skit) provides focus to the session.
- Steps to brainstorming:
  - Set a time limit for the brainstorming session.
  - Team members give their ideas for solving the problem.
  - Write down all ideas for everyone to see.
  - Encourage team members to contribute their ideas.
  - THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO CRITICIZING OF IDEAS! Make sure team members understand that ideas that seem silly at first may prove to be very good or lead to other good ideas.
  - At the end of the session, evaluate the ideas.

Selecting a Problem Solution

- The team needs to determine what qualities the problem solution should have and what qualities various items (e.g. set, costumes, props, skit) within the problem solution should have.
- Once qualities are listed, the team may wish to apply the Teague Approach, which follow.
  1. Each team member should rate each quality on a scale of 1 to 10.
  2. Average the individual team members' ratings and assign the average to the quality.
  3. Each team member should then score each idea regarding each quality.
  4. Average the individual team members' rating of an idea for each quality.
  5. Multiply the idea score times the quality rating.
  6. The idea with the highest overall score will best satisfy the qualities. Continue this process for all ideas and items brainstormed by the team.

Implementing the Solution

- Once the team has ideas for a solution to its long-term problem, it is time to develop the solution.
- Help the team develop a timeline for completing the solution. Remember that the team needs time to practice the entire solution before competition.
- During the development of the solution, be prepared to answer the team's questions with other questions. This allows them to think of solutions on their own rather than having you do the thinking for them. You should be prepared to prompt their idea generation whenever they encounter difficulties making decisions. Asking questions such as, "What is another way to connect the parts" or, "How else can you make that work" is good coaching and is *not* considered outside assistance.
- Keep the timeline updated and let the team know how much time is left until they need to finish their solution.
- Keep the parents and the school administration updated on the team's progress.

Practicing the Solution

- When the solution is about 95 percent complete, have the team start practicing the presentation.
- When practicing, have the team start in a "staging area" before proceeding to the competition area.
- Vary the setup so the team is prepared to compete on a site that may be arranged differently than that shown in the problem. Review the 3-minute rule in the *Program Guide.*
- The team members need to consider what they will do if one of them cannot attend a competition for some reason. Keep in mind that this may happen unexpectedly.
- Videotaping a practice and letting the team members critique it is an excellent way to get them to improve their presentation.
- In-school presentations are a good dress rehearsal for the team and may also generate interest for next year's teams.

Cost Limit (*Program Guide*)

- The cost limit is the value of the materials used in the presentation of the solution at a competition.
- This includes the value of all items, including rented, loaned and borrowed items.
- Make sure the team fills out the Material Values Form (*Program Guide* Appendix). Detailed rules for completing the Materials Value Form are in the *Program Guide*, where you'll also find a list of items that are exempt from cost.

Free Choice Selection for Style (*Program Guide*)

- The team should review the long-term problem solution and identify and list items or part of items that are not scored in the problem.
- The team should review the list and select items that it believes are the most creative.
- Be explicit about what the team wants to be scored (i.e., the construction of a costume or the use of materials, rather than the costume itself).
- Identify the items to be scored so the judge can find them easily. (Not "Joe's costume" but "Construction of the clown's costume").
- Make sure the team prepares the Style Form (*Program Guide* Appendix). Style Judges use the synopsis on the team's Style Form as a guide when scoring the team. *It is essential that the team writes its synopsis clearly and expresses ideas succinctly!*

Crisis Management

- Teams should discuss and practice what they'll do if something breaks or does not work.

- Teams should know whether it is better to continue with their solution and receive penalty points, rather than stop to fix something, since the points scored by continuing may offset the penalty points incurred for having something not work correctly.
- During long-term practice sessions, you may wish to remove a prop or other item integral to the team's problem solution. This allows the team to practice how they will handle problems during competition.
- Remember Murphy's Law: "Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong." Be prepared.

Spontaneous Problem Solving (*Program Guide,* pages 26-28)

- Remember that the team needs to set aside time to practice spontaneous. The clue to scoring well in spontaneous is practice, practice, and practice. *Do not let spontaneous take a backseat to long-term.*
- Spontaneous practice sessions are a good place to use a co-coach.
- Make sure the team is familiar with all types of spontaneous problems:
  - Verbal
  - Hands-on
  - Verbal/hands-on
- Include all team members in spontaneous practice even though only five can participate in the competition.
- After practicing a spontaneous problem, give the team time to discuss its solutions. In the case of a hands-on or combination verbal/hands-on problem, the team might want to try solving the problem again.
- Have the team develop a strategy on how they will select the spontaneous participants after the problem type is announced. The team should also decide if the non-participating teams members will remain in the room or leave.
- Stress the importance of absolute secrecy regarding the spontaneous problem.
- Books of practice problems can be obtained from Creative Competitions, Inc., and sample problems can be found in the *Program Guide* Appendix.
- During practice, setting up hands-on and verbal/hands-on problems requires extra effort, so set up several problems at a time.
- Teams should also discuss and practice what to do if they get "stuck" or distracted during spontaneous.

Preparation for Tournament Day

- On tournament day the coach needs to spend time with the team, and not on fixing last-minute problems. Enlist help from the parents.
- Make sure the parents know the location of the competition site and the team's performance schedule.
- Make a check list of things that the team needs (*Program Guide,* page 29-30):
  - Props
  - Repair kit
  - Forms, including clarifications (*Program Guide* Appendix)
  - Snacks
  - Activities to keep them occupied as they wait to perform. It never hurts to rehearse one more time!
- Get parents to take care of transporting the props. Provide instructions on where and when to meet the team.
- Visit the problem site with the team early to become familiar with the layout of the site and the location of entrances, exits, and the Staging Area. The team needs to make any changes to their plan caused by the site setup well before their performance time.
- Unpack and check all props before you go to the competition site.
- Get to the long-term competition site at least 20 minutes early, unless your tournament has different rules.
- Have parents assigned to take care of props after the competition.
- Get to the spontaneous site early enough so the team members can have some quiet time before they enter. Know how long it takes your team to warm up before starting spontaneous and what activity is needed to warm them up.

THE BOTTOM LINE

You are starting a journey that is fun and rewarding to both you and the team members. You may encounter trying times occasionally, but the rewards will far outnumber them. Remember to have fun and that meeting the challenge is what's most important. Every team that does this is a winner!