

NEW JERSEY COACHES' TRAINING Beginning Coaches' Information

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This was created with the help of ideas, suggestions, comments, and feedback from many coaches, team members, alumni, judges, problem captains, and board members. Thank you to Odyssey of the Mind ® participants everywhere, for your enthusiasm, creativity, and willingness to take risks.

SOME GENERAL COACHING TIPS

1. Help the team to set time tables.

A lot goes into an eight minute Odyssey of the Mind performance. There is always a lot to make and build. Your team will need plenty of practice on their skit. From the start of your season, you should help your team to break down all that you need to do into different tasks and determine when each task should be completed. This list can be ongoing but you need to help your team stick to tasks. Questions your team needs to answer early in the season can include: “When should the script be finished?”, “What props should go into production first?”, “When will we work on costumes and/or will each character do their own costumes?”, “When should we have our first dress rehearsal?” If you can set up a REALISTIC schedule early in the season and stick to it, you should have fewer headaches as your first tournament approaches. As a coach you need to help your team understand this concept. Reminding your team about their time tables and helping them to stick to them is important. The demanding and often unpredictable nature of Odyssey of the Mind will make the week before the tournament interesting enough. Any late night practices to finish things that should have been done weeks before will only increase the team’s stress level.

2. Plan objectives prior to every practice.

When your team arrives at a practice, they should know why they are there. There should be little to no debate or discussion about what they are suppose to accomplish that practice. This should be decided in advance in order to not waste time. **As their coach, it is your job to remind them of that and keep them on task.** Have them tell you in advance what materials and tools they think they might need and make sure everything is ready for the practice. Assign individual team members the job of getting materials and/or tools and follow up before the meeting with them. Providing structure for your team and keeping them on task will help them to get a lot more done. Remember that Odyssey of the Mind is freedom but it is freedom within structure.

3. Try practicing with fewer team members when possible.

When tasks for a meeting only involve a few members, allow the others to skip that meeting making sure that everyone gets opportunities to skip. It is not good to have team members at a practice who have nothing to do. Also allow team members to work on things when not at a practice and to bring them to a practice to share with the team. Always remind them about Outside Assistance.

4. Do all that the rules allow you to do.

If there is something you can do for your team that is not Outside Assistance, then you should probably do it. You can help keep track of paperwork for the tournament until it gets to the performance area. You can help supervise the packing of props, equipment, costumes, sets, and any repair tools before a tournament. It is not good to be that coach yelling at a team member at

the tournament because something was forgotten. Help the team to come up with a checklist for the tournament.

5. Learn more about your team members and utilize your people skills accordingly.

We are all different. Your Odyssey of the Mind team will have many different attitudes, values, and personality traits. **As a coach it is your job to manage the team members.** You will do it better if you learn more about them and watch how they react to different situations. What motivates one member may not motivate another. Learn their strengths and weaknesses and help them to shine. Compliments and criticism need to be used on an individual way. You should be able to make a strong point whether positive or negative without hurting any feelings. Remember always that you are dealing with kids so try the “soft touch” first.

6. Keep it fun and keep the stress level low.

If the Odyssey of the Mind experience is not fun for your kids, they will not perform to their best and they might even quit altogether. **Having fun should be one of your main goals.** It should be something that you plan to do and something you make a legitimate effort to bring about. Also keep the stress level as low as possible, and put any conflicts within the team to rest as soon as they appear. Help your team to appreciate and respect each other so that the longer you are together the closer you all become. If you do make it fun and low stress, your team will make it something important in their lives and put their heart and soul into it. Whether they win or lose, they will keep coming back.

7. Get help.

An Odyssey of the Mind team has a great many needs, and it is often more work than one person can handle well. Make use of your team parents and other colleagues when applicable. Also, don't be afraid to contact CU in NJ Board members with questions.

8. Don't overextend yourself or your kids.

Coaching one competitive team is quite a lot. Allow yourself time for yourself and your family. Also keep that in mind for your team members. Remember they are just kids and they need time for themselves and family too.

HOW DO I RUN A PRACTICE SESSION?

The number and length of practice sessions is not set. It relies upon a number of factors specific to coaches and their teams. The minimum suggestion is to start with one or two sessions a week for one-and-a-half to two hours. Add more practice sessions as the team progresses and the need becomes apparent. Honestly, to expect the teams to work on their own away from the watchful eye of a coach does not happen very often...get to know your team.

Start a practice session with some spontaneous problems. Have all team members participate. You can also practice a spontaneous problem at the end of a session. The point is you should practice spontaneous problems all the time.

You should think about allowing the team members to have a snack break at some point in the session. How you accomplish this is up to you.

Always read with the team and reread. Be sure the team is clear on what is expected.

Organize with the team the approach to the problem. Guide them to work on parts rather than the whole problem. Small groups can work on the parts rather than the whole team working on every part. If there are things to work on away from the practice, get the team to be specific on who and what will be done; get a commitment. Notes should be taken and used as reminders as to what has been discussed and agreed upon. You can have all team members take notes or have them choose someone and they can either give everyone a copy or have that person read it at the end of the session and at the start of the next session.

IS THERE A MINIMUM COMPETENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN A TOURNAMENT?

Short of not having a solution, there is not any specific requirements on the quality of what a team will be presenting. Of course, it helps a team to be prepared. It is important to gain experience and sometimes participants need to get to a tournament for this to be accomplished. Basically, the team's efforts and work should not be put aside just because the solution which has been developed may not be a "winner". First of all, you never can count on what a team can accomplish on the day of the tournament. Second, there should be some reward for the work. Third, how else will they learn? Fourth, who knows what makes for a well-thought-of-solution until it is presented at the competition. Fifth, you should reward the effort.

PROBLEM CLARIFICATIONS?

Problems are written to provide just enough guidance to solve the problem without limiting creativity. If the problem does not specify something that CANNOT be done, most likely it CAN be done. If a team questions the interpretation of a limitation for a problem, or it may be unsure that an aspect of its solution is allowed or meets the problem's requirements, then it may ask for a Problem Clarification. There are two types of clarifications:

1. A general clarification amends or further explains a problem's limitations. These can be found on the Odyssey of the Mind website (<http://www.odysseyofthemind.org>) as they are updated. All teams have access to these even if they did not request a clarification.
2. A team-specific clarification pertains to a particular team's solution. These are confidential and only sent to that team since teams must describe details of their solution to receive an accurate reply.

If the answer is not found, then the team may submit general questions electronically. Team-specific clarifications are submitted on the Problem Clarification Form. Remember, most answers you need about the basics of the program can be found in the Program Guide.

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ODYSSEY OF THE MIND, BUT DID NOT KNOW WHERE TO ASK...OR WHY IS THE PROGRAM GUIDE SO IMPORTANT?

The Program Guide contains information regarding the rules for the solution of problems. This is the team's main reference guide for the rules of the competition. It is updated every year. Basically, the Program Guide explains: the three parts of the competition, membership and team members participation, scoring for each part of the competition, program rules (including, but not limited to, what constitutes outside assistance, material values, what's allowed or not during a presentation and reasons for disciplinary actions and penalties), Ranatra Fusca Creativity Award and OMER's Award, basic coaching guidelines, and copies of the competition forms (Style, Outside Assistance, Material Values Form, and Problem Clarification).

THEREFORE, YOUR PROGRAM GUIDE IS SOMETHING TO REFER TO OFTEN. USE IT!

HOW TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Step 1. Read the Problem (start each meeting with a reading...have team members read daily on their own)

Go through each section of the problem carefully.

Make sure each participant understands what is required

General ideas are OK, but don't focus on Brainstorming solutions yet

Understand how each of the parts interact

Figure out the requirements of the problem (and the scoring elements)

Step 2. Brain-Storm Possible Solutions

Generate lots of ideas (keep track of them on paper, chalkboard, or whiteboard)

Don't evaluate ideas yet... just list them

Break the problem down into manageable pieces

Encourage wild, creative solutions

Step 3. SCAMPER

Use SCAMPER and other Brainstorming techniques to come up with more ideas

Change the ideas, generate even more

Step 4. Refine and Evaluate Ideas

Which ideas does the team like best?

Discuss and evaluate ideas, but don't criticize.

Modify ideas to make them better.

Select a preliminary solution.

Step 5. Determine Tasks & Timeline

What types of tasks, skills, props, contraptions, needed to complete this solution?

Who and how will they do these things?

Determine a basic time-line for completing the solution.

Continue to evaluate the solution and refine/revise as needed.

Do the items decided upon fit the problem specifications?

Step 6. Begin Construction

Start building things and writing a script. Evaluate new ideas as they arise.

Test the solution. Does it work? Can it be made to work better?

Revise/refine (continuously) and as necessary.

Step 7. Put it Together (At least one month before Tournament)

As props, tasks are near completion, or are completed, test them out.

Continue to refine/revise. Does it work? Is there a better way?

Does the proposed solution still fit the problem? What problems need to be fixed?

Step 8. Finish it Up and Practice (2-3 weeks Before Tournament)

Celebrate major accomplishments as they happen.

Test things out... do they work? Can they work better?

Practice the whole skit. Timing. Explain how they did it? Look for problem spots.

What happens if something goes wrong? Contingency plan.

Revise/refine.

BRAINSTORMING

What is it? A technique used in group problem solving to allow all members of the group to contribute to the development of the solution to the problem.

Listed below are some good rules for brainstorming that all groups should follow:
(note: These rules were developed by Alex Osborne, an executive who is credited with the concept of “brainstorming”.)

#1 - Withhold **judgment of ideas**

The group needs to conceptualize freely. Nothing said in the group should hinder the free expression of ideas. If members are judgmental, the group tends to hold back ideas or spends too much time defending ideas.

#2 – **Encourage wild ideas**

Allowing members to be as creative as possible gives the group a chance to explore ideas “outside of the box”. It helps all members to expand their thinking if encouraged to do so.

#3 – **Quantity counts**

This deals with having as many creative ideas as possible. The more creative the ideas and the more of them, the group has a better chance of solving the problem by the simple math involved.

#4 – **Piggy back on the ideas of others**

Group members need to encourage each other to build up or modify ideas of other group members. This helps to encourage good listening by all the members. It also allows for ideas to be truly looked at from many angles.

As a coach, you can:

- Teach the team members to be good listeners.
- Restate the problem often throughout a brainstorming session.
- Always restate the problem at the end of a session to encourage thinking away from the group time together.
- Help the team to learn to evaluate their ideas as creative or not so creative.
- Help them to pace their ideas. (This is especially helpful for spontaneous.) Snap fingers or tap out time while ideas are being expressed so that each member knows they must respond on a snap or tap.
- Have the team work in pairs and share and then bring each pair back to share with the whole group, and finally use these ideas to piggyback on as a group.

What Should Coaches Do on Tournament Day?

Pick up Your Registration Package.

Take 5 minutes to check through it.

Get your Team to the Staging Area (for long term) at least 15 minutes before your scheduled long term competition time.

Bring your team to the Spontaneous Holding Area about 15 min prior to their scheduled Spontaneous competition time.

Enjoy other performances

Enjoy your team...

Enjoy the day...

Start planning for next year!!

AT the Tournament COACHING TIPS

If You Start Me Up

The Timekeeper will ask the team, “Team, are you ready?”

Many (especially experienced) teams come up with a clever response

What Setup Time?

Don't make the mistake of neglecting to figure in set-up time.

What happens if something goes wrong during setup?

Who handles what tasks during setup?

Is it better to have a complicated setup, or a simple setup and more performance time?

Is there something someone can do during setup to start the performance?

Time does not stop if the team encounters a problem (except for medical emergencies).

Wrapping it Up

In some (not all) problems, the team needs to signal the Judges that the performance is over.

Like the beginning, the end is important. Experienced teams find a “creative” way.

Tell it to the Judge!

After the performance ends, the judges will talk to the team and ask them questions about their solution. This is a part of the the solution. Let the team know to expect it and practice it with them.

Don't forget the Membership Sign... Contingency Plan!

COACH'S REMINDERS OF THINGS TO DO:

1. Register for Odyssey membership (if not already done).
2. Provide team members and parents all dates and locations for competitions.
3. Register team for Qualifying Meet.
4. Pass out to team members: any forms for or about competition program, permission slips (if required) and any other forms as needed when needed.
5. Recruit and register judges...don't forget to let them know of the date commitments and training (once they are registered you need to give them a copy of the problem they are judging)...keep in touch with them and make sure they are fulfilling their responsibility to be trained and to show up at tournament(s) to judge. You should register all your judges for your team yourself. Attached you will find a form that you can use to get information about your judges to assist you in registering them.
6. Have a team member check the website periodically for updates and information such as problem clarifications.

of course...HAVE FUN!!!

REGISTRATION INFORMATION TO GATHER ABOUT JUDGES BEFORE REGISTERING THEM

NAME:

HOME ADDRESS:

HOME PHONE NUMBER OR CELL PHONE NUMBER:

HOME E-MAIL ADDRESS:

HAVE THEY JUDGED BEFORE?

IF SO, HOW MANY YEARS?

PROBLEMS INTERESTED IN JUDGING...1ST TWO CHOICES

T-SHIRT SIZE

Notes:

1. You will also be providing your membership number along with problem number.
2. This is not a registration form. Use it to gather the information you will need in order to register your judges. (Reminder: It is the coach's job to register their judges.)

AN IMPORTANT WORD ABOUT COMMUNICATION:

- During the year, we are available to, and will, answer everyone's questions: coaches, team members, coordinators, administrators, parents, relatives, etc.
- We will answer general questions of all on the day of a tournament.
- The decision of the judges and the results of the competition stand once the tournament is completed.
- Please make all of this clear to everyone associated with your team.

WHAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE?

- Smile
- Enjoy
- Encourage
- Use the available resources
- Ask questions when you don't know
- Let the team solve the problem
- Be the guide
- Be prepared
- Most of all, HAVE FUN!!
- Read this packet and then you will find yourself looking like the coach on the last page.

HEAD:

Full of ideas to keep to herself!
Also full of information from attending Coaches Training, reading Newsletters, and keeping in contact with Regional & Association Directors, Parents and School Staff.

EARS:

Finely tuned for great listening!

EYES:

Filled with AWE!

MOUTH:

Full of questions ... but no answers!
Also full of encouragement and positive comments! "Game Show Host" smile shows genuine pleasure derived from working with OMerS!

HEART:

Warm and kind ... loves kids!

T-SHIRT:

Proudly proclaims why you coach!

BELLY:

For appreciating humor ... also for filling up on snacks with the OMerS!

CLIPBOARD:

Holds RULEBOOK, OUR MANUAL, a copy of the Long Term problem and LOTS of practice Spontaneous problems!

BELT:

Symbolic of holding everything together... especially the team!

WATCH:

Runs continuously without running down!
For timing presentation, spontaneous, and making sure everyone gets where they need to be on time!

HANDS:

Clean from maintaining a "hands-off" policy.

COACHES SURVIVAL KIT:

Shows preparedness! Contains:
Extra smiles
Duct tape
Hot glue gun
Extras of EVERYTHING!

POCKETS:

Full of shopping lists, schedules, notes and receipts!

PANTS:

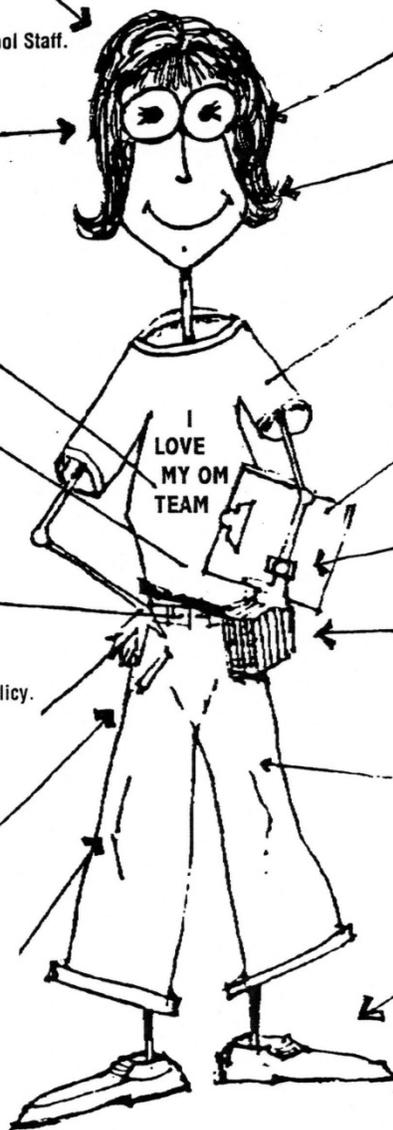
Wrinkle-free for that stay-fresh NO FUSS attitude!

KNEES:

For bending to pick up and carry props ... also a level adjustment for coaches of Primary and Division I teams!

FEET:

Flat for maintaining balance and equilibrium! Sneaker clad for keeping up with the kids! Covered in paint and glue splatters!



THE PERFECT COACH