

# On Your Mark, Get Set, Go... So How Do We Get Started?



## Read the challenge!!

1. It is vital that you and the team read and reread the challenge. Every team member must understand the problem. It is a team manager's job to help the kids define words and terms as they are written in the challenge. It is not your job to help them understand how to solve it; they must do that on their own. But they cannot solve the problem if they do not understand it.
2. Frequently you must come back to the challenge and reread. At points along the way the facets of the problem the team is solving may change shape, theme, or perspective. But it is a team manager's job to make sure that they are not getting way off track by taking them back to a thorough rereading of the challenge or side trip requirements.
3. Along the way the team must be sure they understand what the scoring elements of their challenge are. Spend plenty of time on the things that your score depends on and add the WOW stuff later! Use the pie chart in the challenge for a visual clue for the team.
4. On the flip side of #3, is that the team should spend enough time up front brainstorming on theme and scoring element aspects so that they get past the OK ideas and get to the really outstanding ideas. It is seldom, if ever, the first idea that is best. Keep brainstorming using a variety of brainstorming techniques until the team hits on THE idea. Try force-fitting more than one idea. You will all know it when you hear/see it!! The team manager's job is to take lots of good notes. If you hear something that you know has great potential and the kids are glossing over it today, keep your notes and refer the team back to them next time – they may see things in a different light!



## Pacing Ourselves

1. Time and energies need to be paced so that the team doesn't suffer from burnout **or** find themselves close to tournament date needing to work night and day to get finished.
2. Set some interim goals for task completion and revisit those goals every meeting or two to make sure you are on track and that they are realistic goals. A new team, or a young one, may not meet the deadlines that you set – so be flexible. But keep an eye on the tournament date, utilize school holidays and schedule in some weekend days for messy stuff when you can spend enough time on those activities without having to clean up after an hour or two!
3. Keep a running list, as thorough as possible, of every conceivable detail or task that needs to be accomplished to properly solve the challenge. This should be a flexible checklist that visually lays out your goals and the things necessary to get there. Team members should help compile and then use this list as a motivator, reminder, and assignment sheet. Assign the most important, and probably most difficult and time-consuming, tasks first – like design of the main element of a technical challenge or the theme and script of a performance challenge. Some tasks will be assigned to one team member, some in small groups and some require the whole team. These are team decisions with only some facilitating from the team manager.
4. Time management involves dividing tasks among team members, prioritizing tasks and allowing time for practicing, problem-solving (with room for failure and trying again), and integration of all

the elements into a consistent whole. These are aspects that most children may overlook. It is entirely appropriate for a team manager to assist in high-level time management and prioritization. Kids can become caught up in one element of a challenge to the exclusion of all others. Helping the kids to create a plan that will allow all the elements to be completed to a level they can feel proud of is an important part of the team manager's job.

5. Remember that the process of working through a creative problem solving activity is what Destination ImagiNation is all about. Try to help the kids understand that DI is much more than just winning a tournament. They are learning life-long skills and developing confidence in their own capabilities. That alone makes most of us feel pretty proud of ourselves!



### Scoring Considerations:

Risk assessment is critical. Some scoring elements don't have to function perfectly to receive a score (i.e. those scored on creativity, innovation, or artistry). However, other scoring elements are purely a measure of whether a task is completed, or based on time or a weight ratio. For the task-oriented aspects of a challenge, a team should spend a fair amount of time considering what might go wrong, how they can guard against these events and what they might do to recover from them. One of the most empowering feelings a team can have is to over-come some minor catastrophe. One of the most deflating can be to have something pop up that leaves them "dead in the water" in the middle of their presentation. Even if nothing goes wrong, having contingency plans to allow the "show to go on" in spite of equipment failures will help a team to feel that much more confident. And that is what gets a team high teamwork scores!

2. If the team is drawn to a solution that solves the challenge particularly well (when it works) – or solves it in a unique way that the team enjoys – the team can go with that solution KNOWING that it might not work in competition! Risk-taking is encouraged and rewarded in the innovation categories in many challenges. Be sure that the team knows to let the Appraisers in on their thought process and design model. In the period after they present their solution, the Appraisers will interview the team for a detailed discussion of the process the team went through to develop its solution and presentation. This is the time for the team to talk up the reasons they went with their unique solution in spite of the risk. For many teams the pride of creating something truly unique is more important than whether it is guaranteed to work at a specific tournament. Encourage them to make these decisions thoughtfully and help them feel proud of their efforts BEFORE they go in to competition.
3. The clarification procedures are available to all teams at the [www.dini.org](http://www.dini.org) website. If your team has a question about what something means in the challenge or how to interpret an element of the challenge, they should ask for a clarification. There is a Master Challenge Expert and a committee of Challenge Experts who read the requests for clarification and then respond at the website. If your team does not have access to the internet you can contact district coordinator or your regional director to request the clarification for you and report back with the answer, or you may be able to use the internet at your school through a teacher's email address.
4. Realize that all rules, deadlines etc. that are specified by Destination ImagiNation are inflexible. A limit of 8 inches does not mean that 8.1 inches will probably be OK. In some cases, missing a critical dimension can mean that the kids will either have to modify the offending item or not be able to use it in the competition. This can be VERY stressful for the kids if they discover it at competition. This is another area that is entirely appropriate for the team manager to keep checking. READ the rulebook and understand the requirements of the problem at every step of

the journey – it will kill you if they take a lower score because of something that you didn't read carefully or attend to by the deadline!



## **Getting to Square One – What is the challenge we will solve and what is our “Big Idea”**

1. Once your team understands the basic necessities of the central challenge then theoretically the next step is to develop a plethora of possibilities. The team's task is to have plenty of alternatives, so many in fact, that among them is the mathematical likelihood of finding the ideas they need, want and love!
2. The solution concept must be plausible, powerful and useful. Novelty is not enough. The solution concept must be truly original. A by-product of plentiful ideas is that the usable ideas show you where the solution does not lie. They narrow the possibilities. Criteria to use for evaluating solutions include cost, creativity, availability of materials, ease or difficulty, humor, how much the team knows, artistic value time required, uniqueness, originality, audience or Appraiser appeal.



### **How Does A Team Get ideas?**

- Think Tank – brainstorming and recording as free-flowing idea generation – no blocks or filters.
- Collecting – have each team member keep a notebook and record ideas as they occur during the day, prior to sleep, upon waking, etc. Bring them to the meeting and share – keep one big notebook of all ideas.
- Questioning – both the team and the team manager should ask lots of open-ended questions to add ideas. There is a page in this manual on Questioning.
- Raw Data Research – Interview experts in the field, search the Internet, go on a field trip, go to the library.
- Idea Generation – require each team member to come up with 10 – 20 ideas independently then combine, evaluate, reduce the ideas for use as a team.
- Start A BIG BOX – containing idea starts, clippings, articles, drawings or design attempts, great lines to add to a script later, etc.
- Set aside time for thinking – perhaps in different areas of the room so that they can think without distraction. Sometimes this is very helpful after a wild, free-for-all brainstorming session but before questioning or evaluating as a group.

### **Performance Challenges –**

- Keep in mind that the Appraisers and audience will have only one brief opportunity (8 minutes or less) to understand your performance, skit and storyline. Every word, movement, and prop must be crystal clear to them.
- Do research **after** you do some initial brainstorming on theme, concept or direction.
- Brainstorm through LOTS and LOTS of theme ideas until one is really THE ONE. Then adapt, enhance and embellish that. Don't write a script until everyone is sure of the overall theme or storyline and has done plenty of “playing” with it. Only then does it make sense to start narrowing down and distilling into an actual script or performance.
- Write many mini-scripts or stories then choose one and integrate the best ideas or characters from the others.
- Flesh it out with dialog – try characters on and improvise with them before writing an actual script – (hint – set up a videocam and let the kids go – later you and they can evaluate ideas rather than losing spontaneity by writing as they go)

- Research is an important step in refining ideas – make your concept or theme decisions early on and then reinforce with research.
- Don't be afraid to take risks – add, delete and revise the script as needed.
- Make sure that your side trip requirements fit into your theme/concept (or vice versa). The side trips are to enhance and embellish your story.
- If your challenge has a technical side trip or element – look at the kinds of considerations you need to take into account below (technical challenges section)
- Props, costumes, set should all highlight the essence of your theme or concept and your script - not be a distraction from it.
- Have team members practice the performance until it flows and becomes a smooth interaction between materials and performers.

### **Technical Challenges –**

- Don't shy away from a technical challenge just because you or your team don't know how to do it. Get books, watch videos, go look at real life examples, talk to some expert for general knowledge, check the Internet, and learn some building skills! What an opportunity to learn something new!
- First Question – How many ways or methods can we dream up to solve the problem? Pose these as questions.
- Turn these questions into statements and they become hypotheses. Which ones are most likely to work, and why? Experiment with several.
- Take into account the kinds of tasks or obstacles the challenge requires.
- List variables such as speed, accuracy, strength, flexibility, weight considerations, size and accessibility of materials.
- Design, draw, build models and test them. Make adjustments or throw out unworkable ideas.
- Brainstorm as above (notes about performance challenges) to come up with a unique theme, concept or storyline.
- Flesh it out to highlight the tasks.
- Put razzle-dazzle on it like icing on the cake as you near competition date – WOW those Appraisers and your audience.

# A Recap of Coaching Tips



- ◆ Make a commitment to the team. Ask your team members to make a commitment to each other.
- ◆ Keep time management as a coaching priority. Have team members stick to a schedule.
- ◆ The team manager must be the rock, the motivator, the resolver of social conflicts.
- ◆ Learn to recognize burnout and know when to lighten up. Keep morale high and make work fun.
- ◆ Learn how to ask questions to keep your team thinking and searching for creative possibilities. In fact, become an expert at this skill!!
- ◆ Be a resource person. Be creatively resourceful by providing the materials and people who can teach the skills (not solutions) your team needs.
- ◆ Details, details, details are what help your team excel.
- ◆ Know the Rules of the Road and your challenge and side trips inside and out!
- ◆ Solve the social problems before you solve the DI problems – it’s teamwork, baby!
- ◆ Practice Instant Challenges as much as working on the central challenge and side trips.
- ◆ Set goals. Write them down and place them in clear view.
- ◆ Set norms (team rules and agreements) too and post them where all can see.
- ◆ The team manager is psychologist, parent, doctor, lawyer, friend, team member, kid and counselor.
- ◆ Surprise and reward your team with time off, treats, videos, fun.
- ◆ Keep teams conscious of the TO DO list – that is separate from the “MIGHT DO” list...
- ◆ Always simulate every aspect of a competition and practice this as tournament day approaches.
- ◆ Look at the answer or solution and ask “Is it of high quality?”, “Does it feel right?”, “How original is it?”, “Can it be done?”, “Will it be universally accepted and acceptable?” , “Is this the best we can do by ourselves?”, “Is this truly our own work, idea, etc?”
- ◆ Plan on mistakes, disappointments, and disagreements along the way.
- ◆ Practice mistakes since accidents often happen. Make contingency plans.
- ◆ Keep an eye on clarifications posted to the **idodi.org** website.
- ◆ Bring extras of everything to competition – forms needed, tools, batteries, etc. Have a checklist of everything you will need to bring with you or use that day.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for your team to practice their solution and performance before an audience. Make sure any feedback comes to YOU and not the team so you can avoid interference concerns.
- ◆ Promote sportsmanship at all times – student and adult!
- ◆ The bottom line is that your team will be judged by the challenge requirements and the scoring criteria – all the rest of what you put into your performance is STYLE – and while it definitely raises the overall effect of your presentation in the Appraisers’ eyes it does NOT make up for a requirement you overlooked!



DO teach your team the creative problem solving process and use it at every step of the way.

DO help your team to understand that winning is not the only goal. The process of getting there is the important thing, not just the competition.

DO help your team see and recognize the abilities of all team members and encourage team members to capitalize on the individual strengths of each person.

DO encourage growth through each new experience.

DO help your team get organized and become aware of the importance of keeping a schedule, meeting deadlines, and keeping records.

DO help your team members expand their minds, dig deeper and come up with more creative ideas.

DO work with your team on the extemporaneous part of the DI program called Instant Challenges

DO try to always answer a question with a question.

DO admit that you don't know everything and encourage your team to get info on their own.

DO help team members give and take constructive criticism of ideas and to avoid any insulting or insensitive personal remarks.

DO help them learn how to evaluate their ideas.

DO have team members write, illustrate and design all details of mechanically complex concepts, sets, vehicles, etc. before beginning.

DO invite parents to help out with car-pooling, snack schedules and materials needed.

DO set a good example of adult behavior and by all means be a good role model for your team members and their parents – especially if things don't go your way at competition!

DO let your team members know that you are human and have needs, too.

DO keep INTERFERENCE in mind and out of the question at every step of the way –from you or parents or anyone else!!

DO enjoy seeing these young, creative minds at work!!



DON'T tell team members how to solve the problem but rather ask questions that help them think it through.

DON'T tell your team that they can't do an idea for a solution. Step back and let them try to figure out whether they can or can't.

DON'T limit creativity by setting restrictions which are too tight or which reflect your own, perhaps limited, vision.

DON'T let them be irresponsible – help them understand that this hinders the entire team.

DON'T make them feel like they have failed if they don't win first place. Failure only happens when one doesn't learn and then try again.

DON'T complain about other teams or team managers

DON'T get uptight! Relax and remember that you are the team manager and you are not supposed to produce the problem solution – Live, love and let 'em go!