

What Do I Do With These Guys for an Hour and a Half?

A Guide to Running OM Meetings

A common complaint coaches have regarding their teams sounds like this:

"All they do is goof around at meetings."

If this sounds familiar, *read on*.

Left to their own devices, it is unlikely that 5, 6, or 7 Elementary, Middle School, or High School kids will accomplish much at an OM meeting, particularly in the initial stages of the team's progress. Making the most out of that hour and a half depends on how you structure it. Here are some suggestions.

Primary teams (K-2)

Elementary school teachers know that young children in these grades have teeny weeny little attention spans. Plan your meetings so that, from the moment they begin, you have *more (fun) activities than you need so that there is little or no 'down' time*. In other words, Hit the Ground Running.

Tips: Allow 10 to 15 minutes per activity. That's right. Remember those attention spans

Start with Brainstorming, and wait until they're really warmed up before you work on the long term problem.

Keep the meetings fairly short, especially at the beginning.

Try to end the meeting with a silly just-for-fun activity that has nothing whatsoever to do with the long term problem.

This way they will leave the meeting feeling great about OM, and about their team. (That's why they joined OM, after all.)

Above all, remember that these are kids. Kids do not do things like grown ups. That's why we don't call them "adults."

Division I teams (grades 3-5)

The biggest difference between Primary teams and Division I teams is the 'Competition Factor.' Now that they've hit the big leagues, there are *real, honest-to-goodness deadlines, and the work they do will be judged*. So Competition + Deadlines + Judges = BIG TIME STRESS for some kids. The key with these kids is Perspective. As a coach, your biggest job is to help the kids keep their perspective~ After all, this is supposed to be FUN. The world is not going to end if things aren't letter perfect, And whatever they create will probably not really look like they envisioned it, and this will disappoint some kids. If you have ever worked with perfectionists, and there are a lot of them in OM, you know that they are never satisfied with their creations. Your job then, is to help them maintain the playfulness and fun that is so important in OM.

Tips: Plan your meetings much as you would for Primary teams above. The attention spans are only marginally longer.

De-emphasize the competitive aspect of the program, and do not forget the FUN team-building by going on field trips, having pizza together, choosing an item for team identity, such as a team hat, pin, etc.

As the Regional tournament date approaches try to exude confidence that everything will be done in time, they will be wonderful, etc. In other words, LIE!

Communicate with the parents: They can be invaluable, but they can't read your mind. Tell them what you need.

Keep the meetings tightly structured so that their time is not wasted.

Make a special effort to draw out the strengths of the quieter kids and insist that everyone is involved and mutually respected.

The last two weeks before the BeOional can be very intense - Help them relax by holding a dress rehearsal for their parents, followed by a celebration. Tell them they're wonderful. Let the inconsequential stuff go - it's not important.

And above all - Never, never let them see you sweat!

SUGGESTED GOALS FOR THE FIRST FIVE MEETINGS

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

First meeting

Meet with students (and parents for middle, elementary and primary)

1. Explain the OM philosophy (see program handbook).
2. Describe the OM process and give dates of Regional and State Meets.
3. Discuss the time commitment necessary, and the responsibility of every team member to ensure a team effort.
4. Enlist parental assistance for transportation, refreshments, helpers, etc.
5. Explain outside assistance. Help parents understand that they can be valuable resources for knowledge and skills, but they cannot volunteer solutions.
6. Set up practice schedule appropriate to your group.

Second Meeting

1. Incorporate team building activity.
2. Inventory team skills and preferences. "Things I'm good at.... not good at...", "I like to do.... I don't like to do..."
3. 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!
4. Review brainstorming rules. (use brainstorming frequently and at length!)
5. Explain spontaneous problems. Plan on practicing a few problems at every meeting. Can be used as a device to start meetings as a warm-up and to put them on task.

(HW - choose favorite problem and prepare to explain to the rest of the team why it is the best choice.)

Third Meeting

1. Incorporate team building activity. Brainstorm ideas and strategies on how we CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AS A team.
2. Practice spontaneous.
3. Discuss/ choose problem. Brainstorm kinds of knowledge and skills needed to solve this problem.

(HW - research the problem, can assign topics and areas of knowledge)

Fourth Meeting

1. Incorporate team building activity.
2. Practice spontaneous.
3. Brainstorm 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.
4. Discuss questioning techniques with your team. "Nothing new is learned until a question is asked." Refine this art over the course of the year.

(HIW - 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.)

1. Continue team building.
2. Continue spontaneous practices.
3. Brainstorm lists of tasks to accomplish. Assign tasks.
4. Make lists of materials needed and how to get them.
5. Make a team generated time line. Discuss team member responsibility for doing what they say they are going to do, and when.
6. Carry on, good luck, and ask for help if you need

