

Reflections of a First-Time Coach

How Odyssey of the Mind Helped to Put My Life In Perspective

As I entered into my first coaching experience with Odyssey of the Mind, I often asked myself what I could possibly have been thinking . . . I had a team that consisted of:

- Three children with parents who spoke no English (Chinese, Vietnamese and Spanish)
- One child with severe ADHD
- One child who broke down in tears during EVERY practice
- Two children who were so painfully shy I did not hear their voices for one month
- Two children in the struggles of a bitter divorce
- One child who had a parent diagnosed with a life-threatening illness two days before a competition

Plus, my team fought non-stop for eight weeks. I did not know what I could possibly accomplish with these kids.

Well, the day of the competition, they pulled it all together and took 7th out of 14 teams. (They would have scored higher if it had not been for my misinterpreting part of the problem. Of course, that made me feel even worse!) I left the competition feeling pretty blue but thankful that it was over.

I always heard the little voice in the back of my head saying, "It's the process, not the outcome." It is hard for a coach to keep that in perspective. On the surface, I did not notice very much in the way of greatness during the process, and the outcome seemed disappointing. But, as I met with the kids at school on Monday and I looked back over the past three months I realized that the following had happened:

- The kids whose parents did not speak English (and had not lived in the country very long) were picked up by the coaches and were transported to the performance to watch their kids - we broke down a lot of cultural barriers trying to communicate with each other.
- The child with ADHD learned to interact with a team.
- The child who cried at every performance gained confidence and performed beautifully.
- The painfully shy kids were running around the competition laughing and interacting with other children.
- The parents going through the bitter divorces were at the competition enjoying their children's performance - as a family.
- The child who had an ill parent spent the day with us and was thankful it took his mind off troubles at home.

The best part of the whole experience: On Monday morning, one of my shy kids asked, "Is this the end of Odyssey of the Mind? Am I really going to go the rest of the year without seeing you?"

I realized then that Odyssey of the Mind had made a huge impact. It was not the scores, it was not the performance, it was the process of getting there. It was the POSITIVE changes that I saw in all the kids. It put my life in perspective.

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