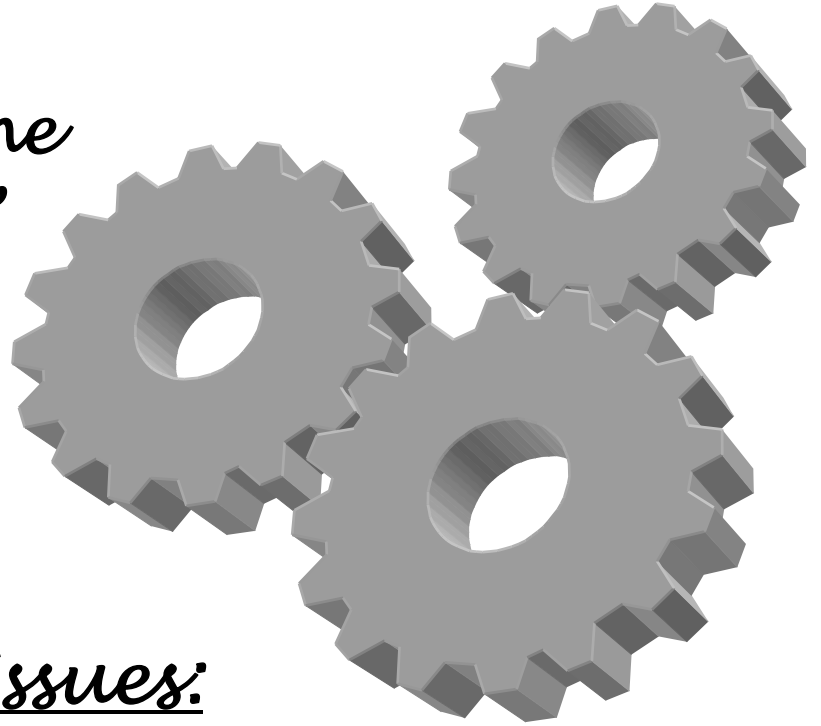


Dream Teams:

*Managing the
“Dirty Dozen”
Universal
Problems*



Common Issues:

- *Time management*
- *Internalizing team work principles*
- *Parent participation*
- *Revision process*
- *Lack of structure*
- *Public relations*
- *The “duh” phase*
- *Team/coach “meltdowns”*
- *Negative environment*
- *Audience choice*

*Alone we can do so little,
Together we can do so much. ... Helen Keller*

Dream Teams: Managing the “Dirty Dozen” Universal Problems

Most team managers want to experience the pure joy of working with harmonious teams that sizzle. Having had the privilege of coordinating/coaching/managing 51 lively teams, all with unique personalities, I know that certain issues are consistently present with most teams. Learning how to manage these issues is invaluable.

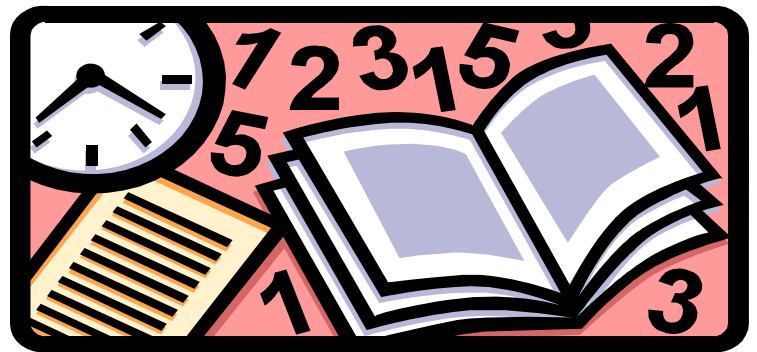
The following outline of challenges is designed as a framework for a brainstorming session. If Destination Imagination leaders collaborate and use this list in the beginning of the school year, it can serve as a launching point for building a shared vision.

Process: The group facilitator might begin by introducing each issue, discussing the already listed strategies, and then calling for a discussion of additional ideas from the audience present. This collaborative approach is likely to produce a rich list of possible ideas that can be used to address the challenges in a proactive way.

Issue #1. TIME MANAGEMENT: Team members often lead hurried lives. Getting them to attend meetings, keeping them calm, centered and focused is often the goal here.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Teach them to prioritize tasks—homework, extracurricular, social events.
- ❑ Have them create and publish their meeting schedules well in advance, supply an extra refrigerator copy for parents.
- ❑ Use an agenda at meetings so time is spent productively, begin with a calming exercise.
- ❑ Divide and conquer ... Remember “wherever two are gathered” a meeting can occur; it is not necessary for everyone to be present.



OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue # 2: INTERNALIZING TEAMWORK PRINCIPLES: Teamwork requires a style of behavior that students were not born knowing. So teach it to them. Re-enforce the teaching ALL the time. Give them positive strokes when you see them struggling to achieve it.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Ask the team to write their original list of agreed upon teamwork rules (i.e. all team members are treated with respect, when one team member is speaking, the others are listening attentively, there is no I in teamwork, etc.). Post the rules and publish the rules in future memos, etc.
- ❑ Conference individually with students and ask them to evaluate their team on teamwork skills and to discuss ways of possibly improving teamwork.
- ❑ Teach them about teamwork through anecdotal information. Example: Lance Armstrong's astounding Tour de France victory made possible by a dedicated medical team fighting almost impossible odds and his loyal American bicycle team that rode ahead of him to absorb the fierce wind for him.
- ❑ Encourage team rituals: team tee shirts, jackets, hats, logos, mottos, songs, etc.
- ❑ Promote bonding exercises: humorous instant challenge exercises, sharing of snacks, food, birthday parties, field trips, etc.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue # 3. PARENT PARTICIPATION: Sooner or later everyone runs into the "impossible" parent. While you cannot control the serious personal issues a parent may be juggling, much can be done to mold parent behavior so that it is largely constructive.

Ideas That Might Work:

- ❑ Call a parent information meeting early in the game and in writing clearly spell out the role and responsibilities of all the involved parties. Indicate that the parent role, while important, is limited to things like cheerleader, pizza deliverer, driver, etc. Parents need a clear understanding that they are not a member of the team or the team manager. Give them a "heads up" so that they know that when the honeymoon ends, and the really hard stretch begins, their cheerleading is very, very useful in helping everyone including team managers get through the tough parts. The mantra "It's the kids who solve the problem," needs to be said 8 million times. Also emphasize the priceless life skills being developed.
- ❑ Put it in writing. Put everything in writing. Expectations. Goals. Types of creativity models and exercises the team will be exploring. Once parents finally "get it," their level of support is often astounding. Communicate frequently in positive tones with them.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue#4: REVISION: In order to achieve their “personal best solution,” students need to revise, revise, revise. Sometimes ego gets in the way of this process, sometimes interpersonal issues kick in and sometimes lack of familiarity with the revision process is the culprit. National bestseller Anne Lamott, in her book on the art of writing *Bird by Bird*, maintains there is an image out there of financially successful writers who sit down daily in front of a computer feeling like a million dollars, confident about their great talent and the great story they have to tell ... “typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter.” But no one in her circle of *famous* writers feels wildly enthusiastic or confident. She, therefore, advises students to see their first drafts as the down draft –you just get it down. She calls the second draft the up draft—you fix it up. You bring more accuracy to it. She calls the third draft the dental draft the—you check every tooth to see if it is loose, cramped, or decayed.

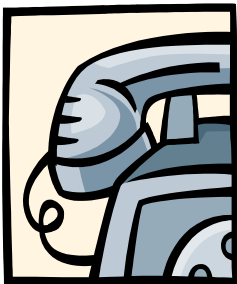
IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Devise an Anne Lamott type matrix at the beginning of the writing process so students can appreciate going into the writing process the likelihood of considerable revision.
- ❑ Show revision models. Keep copies of previous teams revisions so they can see the exciting growth that almost always takes place. I did this with the first team I ever had that placed first in world finals. They had exactly eight revisions. Whenever, I showed the revisions to teams in following years wishing to advance to State and World finals competition, they suddenly were far more open to the revision process once they saw what was involved.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue #5 PUBLIC RELATIONS. Promotion of Destination ImagiNation within the larger community and school staff has a halo effect. It gathers immediate support and enthusiasm for both current and future teams.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:



- ❑ Utilize the Destination ImagiNation resource/promotional materials available.
- ❑ Establish a good working relationship with several media.
- ❑ Be sure all news releases come from one appointed individual.
- ❑ Issue weekly memo updates to teams and parents filled with inspirational quotes, much positive news about team progress, and occasionally obstacles to be overcome.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue #6. LACK OF STRUCTURE: DI is a highly creative process often best introduced and developed when a left brain approach is present. This pleases linear thinkers, and it often moves the process ahead dramatically faster. The absence of a structured approach can result in too many energy draining messes.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Publish monthly meeting schedules, weekly update memos, written “homework” assignments that team members generate. Put it all in writing.
- ❑ Have students create a realistic timeline for necessary tasks to be completed.
- ❑ Use a visible agenda generated by team members at every meeting that begins with either a calming exercise or a warm-up exercise depending on the group, time of day, etc. Include time for snacks, humorous exercises, etc. Have a blast but also push to accomplish many things.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

Issue # 7. THE “DUH” PHASE: The dreaded duh phase, when creative ideas are not flowing from the team, can strike at any time. If that happens, it’s time to shift gears to get the team unstuck.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Go on an idea gathering odyssey: junk yards, theatrical performances, factories, museums, etc.
- ❑ Hold meetings in alternative, unique sites: church basements, local pizzeria, town hall, etc.
- ❑ Focus on idea generating tools like Force Fit, Morphological Analysis, Brain Writing, Guided Fantasy, Scamper, Mind Maps, etc.
- ❑ Introduce new stimulus such as music, colored paper, pens, food, different lighting, etc.



OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

*Issue #8. **NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTS:*** Whining and other forms of negative communication can be toxic. There are many ways to promote a culture of positive and optimistic thinking from the very beginning. This is an absolutely wonderful life skill for team members to cultivate as it will serve them beautifully in the future.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Teach DeBono's *Six Thinking Hats* and encourage them to wear the creative green hat and yellow positive most of the time.
- ❑ Have team create a warm-fuzzy message board where they thank each other for positive contributions.
- ❑ Use PMI evaluation tool when evaluating each others' ideas, work, etc.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

*Issue #9. **MELTDOWNS:*** It is the rare team that does not experience an occasional meltdown where one or more members functions at a very high level emotionally. At times meltdowns appear when they are least expected. Both negative forms of stress and positive forms of creative tension can be the catalyst—determining which is the dominant causal factor can really help. At times individual team members experience stress for a variety of personal reasons. There is also a wonderful *creative tension* present when a hard working team is very close to reaching its goal. This is largely a positive force at work since the team has given its personal best and is very close to the finish line. Usually a “second wind” kicks in here and spectacular results eventually occur.

IDEAS THAT MIGHT WORK:

- ❑ Begin team meetings with a round robin approach where everyone gets one minute to share his or her feelings. This is a super approach to always use at team meetings because it clears the air and allows the team to move on.
- ❑ Counsel team members individually.
- ❑ Allow for time-outs when needed.

OTHER POSSIBLE IDEAS:

*The best team doesn't always win. It's usually the team that gets along best.
... John C. Maxwell*