

A Step-by-Step Guide to Getting Stared as a New Destination Imagination (DI) Team Manager

By Scott Dalgleish, August 2015

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Introduction

This is my 7th year as a DI team manager. Last year was unique, though, because my two older daughters “graduated” from DI and I started a new team with my 4th grade son. So, I was a 6-year team manager with a first-year team. Because of the lessons I learned from past teams, starting this second new team was much easier than my first team. I wanted to put together this guide and share what I learned to help new team managers get off to a better, easier start.

I made some common mistakes my first year that I think can be avoided with the advice in this guide.

There is a high demand for team managers – and we want this first year to be fun and rewarding so that you have a good first experience and come back again. I hope this document will help you get off to a good start on a long and wonderful DI journey, like mine.

Hello, This is Kate Donelan, the Executive Director of Destination Imagination Colorado. Scott did an amazing job with this guide. From time to time I am going to interrupt to give an alternative perspective. One of the key things to remember is that everyone team manages in a unique way dependent on their personality and the personalities of their team. Use this guide as a starting point for managing your team. Being a successful team or a successful Team Manager is self-defined. It doesn't necessarily mean advancing to the next competition, but could mean learning amazing skills and teamwork.

Thank you to Scott for taking the time to share his perspective and advice.

I'm Already Overwhelmed, Why am I Even Considering Managing a DI Team?

Every year I ask myself, “Why should I manage a DI team when I'm already overwhelmed? I try to be a good father to my 3 kids, a good husband, my job now requires 60+ hours a week. Why add another major time commitment?”

This is why:

- Unlike any other organization I've come across, I see that DI teaches extremely valuable real-world skills that will give my kids, and the kids on my team a major head-start in life. They don't get these valuable skills in school, and very few other organizations are effective at teaching and encouraging them. More than ever, the engine of our economy is “American Ingenuity,” and I want my kids to enter the working world with strong skills in this area.
- Being part of DI is very satisfying – and worth my time.
 - This isn't a leap of faith. In my 6 years, each year, I see huge growth, learning and development of an extremely valuable and unique skill set in the kids on my team (which include MY kids).
 - It is *so cool* and personally rewarding to see that you can teach these valuable skills – then watch your kids do truly amazing things!

- I've developed a much deeper and meaningful relationship with my kids (and other DI team members) through DI. DI has prompted some great "kitchen table" discussions with my kids on very practical real-world issues. It's also allowed me to play a major increased role in their lives and in their development that I know they value.
 - _____ Optional Task: I have a blog post on this that you can read at your convenience: "Wow, Yet Another "Love and Logic Moment" at Our DI Meeting"
<http://www.dicolorado.org/wow-yet-another-%E2%80%9Clove-and-logic-moment-at-our-di-meeting/>
- I like being part of the DI family. I like being around kids, families, and other volunteers who value creativity, are thrilled with innovation, like to teach kids real-world skills, like getting off the beaten path and like to be around other free-thinkers. Unlike many other adult gatherings, I feel really comfortable in the DI World.
- I feel like DI offers a much much richer real-world learning experience for the kids (and team managers) than any other activity – and if I'm going to coach one of my kids' teams, DI is where I get the biggest impact for the time I invest – by far.
- My kids and the kids on the team have gotten to know me much better. Several years ago – two of the kids on my team wrote their essay on "The Everyday Hero in my Life" about me, their DI team manager. I consider those essays one of the most prized possessions in my life.

As you evaluate if you want to be a team manager, I think it is also important to point out that **managing a team is a lot of work**. In the past, I don't think the amount of work that is involved with managing a team was effectively communicated to new team managers – and it wasn't always a pleasant surprise when new team managers discovered this.

So, yes – managing a team is a lot of work on top of everything else you are doing – but it is very, very rewarding and beneficial for kids. I always planned on coaching my kids' basketball team, but when I discovered DI, I knew my time would have a much much larger impact with DI. So, I let another parent coach basketball, and I focused on the activity that I felt had by far the largest impact for the coaching activity I do with my kids.

This is Your Team – Manage it Your Way.

New team managers have been requesting a step-by-step guide to getting started – and I'm going to provide that. Please keep in mind, though, that this is your team, and you should manage it your way. I've seen team managers with dramatically different styles and approaches have great experiences.

So, keep in mind that the checklists that I've provided work for me and my style and my personality. Use them as a starting point and **don't hesitate to edit them** to work for you!

Also, keep in mind that a happy team manager results in a happy team and a team that returns for many years. As you start setting up and running your team, keep *your* needs in mind. We want you to have a great experience and come back next year! (More on this in the following pages).

While it is true that as a team manager, you can't help with the solution to the challenge – you are allowed to MANAGE the team. I manage my team with the underlying principle that “I'm overwhelmed, and my time is valuable and it is not to be wasted.” (More on this, too, in the following pages.)

When I manage my team, I also think about the advice I received when I got out of college and started as a manager for Procter and Gamble. I was told, “Pick a manager in the plant that you admire, then imitate them.” When I manage my team, I try to be a good manager role model that the kids can use when they are mature enough to start taking on management tasks. Good managers are inspiring and encouraging. Good managers also make the tough decisions such as removing team members that can't be constructive and halting a DI meeting that has turned into a goof-off session. I feel like I'm doing the kids a great service by demonstrating good management skills – even when that means doing management things that are very difficult and sometimes unpopular.

As you get started, please also know that because this is your team, in most cases you can play an active role in determining what kids will be on your team.

If by chance a parent, teacher, or other person has issue with how YOU are managing YOUR team, send them this guide and suggest they start their own team where they can manage it THEIR way.

I agree whole-heartedly with Scott, however some schools assign students to DI teams based on like interests or lottery. If you have less control about picking your team you can still demonstrate and teach great project management skills and teamwork skills using many of the Destination Imagination philosophies. Many team managers in these situations have a wonderful experience managing their team.

Bringing Yourself Up to Speed on What You Do as a Team Manager

Whenever I learn a new board game, the first question I ask is: What is the objective of the game?

With DI, the foreground objective of the game is: Go to a tournament at the end of the season and

- 1) present your solution to a “Central Challenge” that you have been working on for months, then
- 2) complete an “Instant Challenge” that is given to the team at the tournament

On the journey to compete at the tournament, your team will be accomplishing these more important, very valuable background objectives of developing these skills:

- Creative thinking skills
- Innovation skills
- Presentation skill
- Self-confidence
- Technical skill
- Thinking on your feet
- Project management

- Teamwork – leadership and being a good team member
- Independent learning skills
- A new self-learning process – try, fail, learn, try again until it works.

Skim these blog posts that I wrote about the unique and valuable skills kids learn through the DI experience to help you “sell” the DI experience to potential team members and their parents.

- Why I’m a DI Manager – Because My Kids Won’t Get the Skills They Need in School
<http://www.dicolorado.org/why-i%E2%80%99m-a-di-manager-%E2%80%93-because-my-kids-won%E2%80%99t-get-the-skills-they-need-in-school/>
- Destination Imagination and the Real World: My Parallel Experiences as a DI Team Manager and a NASA Engineering Project Manager
<http://www.dicolorado.org/destination-imagination-and-the-real-world-my-parallel-experiences-as-a-di-team-manager-and-a-nasa-engineering-project-manager-part-1-of-3/>
- My DI Perspective on “Good Colleges”
<http://www.dicolorado.org/my-di-perspective-on-%E2%80%9Cgood-colleges%E2%80%9D/>
- Combating Addictive “Screen Time” to Produce the Next Generation of Innovators
<http://www.dicolorado.org/combating-addictive-screen-time-to-produce-the-next-generation-of-innovators/>
- Eliminating Wood Shop, Metal Shop, and... Innovation in America
<http://www.dicolorado.org/eliminating-wood-shop-metal-shop-and-innovation-in-america/>

_____ TASK: Skim the background skills that kids learn through DI by reading the blog posts so that you can explain the benefits of DI to potential new team members’ parents.

Now, let’s take a look at the Central and Instant Challenge at a tournament so you can get familiar with the “foreground” objectives of DI.

A Real Central Challenge at a Tournament

The video link below is of my first-year 4th grade team doing the Technical Challenge at the state tournament. I’ve added captions to it to provide an explanation of what is happening.

The Challenge is called, “Creature Feature” and the requirements were:

- The team must present a story of adventure.
 - The story the kids came up with is about a group of sailors that get ship-wrecked on Nacho Cheese Island.
- The story must include a creature that the team builds, and the creature must do 3 technical things.
 - The team chose to have a cheese monster on the island 1) move, 2) talk and 3) have smoke come out his ears.
 - For extra points, the creature must repeat the actions a second time.
- The story must take place in a world that includes 2 special technical world features.
 - The team built a volcano that had a cheese ball eruption and a cheese waterfall made out of a treadmill that stood up in the air.
- The presentation must include 2 “team choice elements” that the team wants scored.

- The team chose 1) a song that is played by one of the team members on a keyboard and 2) the boat that they made for their skit.

Watch the captioned Central Challenge Video Here: <https://youtu.be/36l5d-zccQw>

Or, you can search YouTube for: **New DI Team Manager Training - An Annotated Technical Central Challenge from 2014/15**

There are hundreds of DI Central Challenge videos on YouTube. Feel free to watch other central challenges to get a feel for what a DI Central Challenge presentation looks like at a tournament.

_____ TASK: Get familiar with what a Central Challenges looks like at a tournament by watching the captioned video and a few other videos on YouTube.

Now, take a quick glance at the challenges for this year...

_____ TASK: Take 5 minutes to get a quick overview of this year's central challenges. You can see an overview of the challenges on the DI web site <http://www.idodi.org/challenge-program/2015-16-challenge-previews> or in your DI "Challenge Program Materials" book, in the "Team Challenges" section, look at the first page of each challenge and just read the "Points of Interest" section to get a quick feel for each challenge.

A Real Instant Challenge at a Tournament

The video below from Destination Imagination does a great job explaining the Instant Challenge. The first 9 minutes are an explanation of how the Instant Challenge works, and this is then followed by 2 actual teams doing an Instant Challenge at a tournament. You may not want to watch all 29 minutes at this time, but this watch enough to get a feel for what an Instant Challenge is.

Instant Challenge Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9zFm3BatYM>

A copy of a similar "Bus Stop" Instant Challenge is included in Appendix B.

_____ TASK: Become familiar with what an Instant Challenge looks like at a tournament by watching some of this video and by doing a quick review of the Bus Stop Instant Challenge in Appendix B.

Learn About "Interference" and Role of a Team Manager

One of the very most important aspects of the DI experience is that non-team members cannot "interfere" with the team's solution. The kids must come up with all the solution ideas, and the kids must do 100% of the building and creating.

The team manager can manage the team and can help the team, but cannot interfere with the team's solution.

Interference and what the team manager can and cannot do is defined in the "Rules of the Road" section of your Challenge Program materials. The interference rules from the 2015 guide are reproduced in Appendix C of this document – but you should check this year's Challenge Program Materials book for the latest revision.

_____ Task: Review and understand the “Interference” rules and the guidelines on what a team manager can and cannot do to help the team – located in Appendix C.

Learn more Details About Managing a DI Team at a Local Meeting or Webinar

Local DI chapters offer **great** training for new team manager that will be a great supplement to this guide.

_____ Task: Look at your local DI web site and put on your schedule to attend the local team manager training. (This will give you the additional details you need to get off to a good start. It will also give you a great forum for Q&A.) If you can’t attend this training, then some states, such as Colorado (www.dicolorado.org) offer live webinar training that you can attend. This training is often recorded so you can watch it later too.

_____ Task: During the training Q&A, ask for a mentor that can help you the first year. (Having an experienced team manager that you can talk with during the year will be a big help.)

Decide Which Central Challenges You Are Willing to Manage

OK, to start, not everyone agrees with me on “Selecting a Challenge to Manage” – so just review this section and decide how you want to proceed. What I discuss in this section is my own personal opinion – which not everyone agrees with.

Please note: DI Colorado advises that you let your team choose their challenge without input from the team manager. There are technical and fine arts elements in every challenge except for the Improv Challenge. Each challenge is designed to let individual skills and talents of the team members shine.

Like I said earlier, happy teams need happy team managers. There may be some Central Challenges you don’t want to manage. For me, I’m an engineer and I love designing and building things. I love teaching kids to use tools – including power tools. I feel like I give the kids an especially good experience if I manage a team that will be leveraging my unique expertise. I know nothing about acting and honestly don’t think I would enjoy managing an Improv or Fine Arts team. So... when I recruit team members, I say, “I’m going to manage a Technical, Scientific or Structural challenge team.” I set this expectation when I start looking for team members. After all, this is my team, and I’m going to manage it my way to assure my happiness through the year.

Most of the challenges have such a diverse set of requirements that usually every “type of kid” will have a great experience with each challenge. When I coached my first team, my daughter loved doing the technical challenge, even though she hates the thought of being an engineer – and is going to college to be a poet.

The counterpoint to this is: I know team managers who let their kids pick from all the challenges. I also know team managers that have absolutely no technical background but did great in the technical challenge.

The main point is: Make sure you are going to be happy with the challenge you manage. If YOU don't want to do a particular challenge, then just list the challenges you are willing to manage as you select your team members.

Some schools choose their teams and challenges based on lottery, and some based on a sign up system. In these cases you may get the challenge you want but not the students or visa versa. Again, I have seen all these types of teams be successful.

___ Task: Decide which challenges you are willing to manage. Review the Central Challenges again to decide.

The Big Problems I Experienced in My First Year

My first year, I got off to a bad start that I want you to avoid. Please don't be intimidated by this list, because I provide simple ways to avoid these problems. The big issues that took me by surprise my first year were:

- Kids are really busy. Many are overscheduled. Trying to find a time when everyone could meet nearly drove me crazy. When you are working hard as a team manager, you don't want to hear, "Oh, John has a soccer game and won't be at the DI meeting tomorrow, and next week he can't make it due to student council."
- As you teach the kids about real-world team dynamics, you all learn that one bad apple can spoil the whole pie. I had kids on my first-year team that didn't want to do DI, and that caused problems all year.
- I also had kids (and parents) that used DI as a babysitting service. These kids liked the snacks and goofing off, but never wanted to do any work. This was frustrating because I felt like these kids were wasting my time.
- Getting a bunch of 4th graders to tackle a big task is like herding cats sometimes. It takes time for them to transition from one thing to another. It also takes lots of time for them to learn new skills and several tries to invent new things. Meetings need to be planned with this in mind.
- The same poor team behaviors kept happening every week, and it took me a while to get a handle on this.
- I had issues with parents wanting to do their kids' DI work because I didn't explain "interference" well at the start of the season.
- Kids get hungry. I learned to feed them filling snacks after school and after they get things done.

Don't let this list discourage you. On my second first-year team, I found ways to address these things that lead to a great first-year experience. Below, I'll share my solutions.

Getting Off to a Good Start - Ways to Avoid the Big First-Year Problems

This is how I avoided these mistakes when I started my 2nd first-year team. (Again, feel free to take these ideas and edit them to your needs and style).

Getting Stuff Done During Meetings – While Herding the Cats

I've always managed teams that did challenges that required them to build things, so this may not apply as much to Improv team managers...

I found that getting the tools out and the paint out and getting the kids set up to build stuff takes time. It also takes time for them to learn to become efficient at building and painting and cleaning up. About 1/3 into the DI season, we typically start building things for the central challenge. At that time, I move to every-other Sunday meetings that typically run from 10am to 4pm. We tend to make good progress when the kids have big chunks of time to work on things. I found it really hard to build things during after school meetings.

Avoid Schedule Problems and Babysitting Through Team Selection

A team is made of up 2 to 7 kids. First year teams often have 7, due to the high interest in DI.

First, I recommend avoiding scheduling frustration issues with the following approach. The general goal is to fill the team with team members who will like DI activities and who don't have schedule conflicts and can commit to every meeting. My objective is to find one day after school (at the start of the season) and two weekend-days per month (later in the season) when all the team members can commit to meet.

The first kid on the team is my kid, and his activity schedule is the first limiting factor in scheduling. My son had soccer on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday – so those days are out for DI Meetings. Period. (Remember, this is your team – manage it your way).

My son had a few friends that we both felt like would make good DI team members, so I talked to each of these kids' parents on the sidelines of the soccer field. I gave a quick explanation of DI, saying that meetings will be on Monday or Wednesday and some Sundays – and I asked if they might be interested. They were interested, so then I had a team of 3 tentative team members. These three could meet on Monday after school and Sundays.

I next approached other parents of kids I thought would like DI and appeared to have some time to dedicate to DI. I explained DI and said, "I'm managing either the Technical or Scientific Challenge and we are meeting on Monday after school and some Sundays." If they have conflicting activities on those dates, then I explained that it won't work for their child.

This exact method may not be possible for you – but as you form the team, make sure you are verifying that each child can commit to attend every meeting and also try to make sure that the DI activity is a good fit for the child. It may feel awkward to be "filtering kids" for your team roster, but everyone will have a much better experience if you do this. The maximum number of kids you can have on your team is 7 – so make sure that small limited group is made up of the kids that will get the most out of it.

As the Team Manager, you are giving a gift to these students. DI is not a drop off service, and is every bit as much of a team activity as a team sport. As the Team Manager, your schedule is the first one that matters; all other interested parties must be able to commit to this time schedule.

The way Scott formed a team is how most teams are formed, with one or two parents leading the way. However, there are schools that form teams by sign up, lottery, or other methods. In any of these cases, if you are the Team Manager, you get to set the practice schedule and expectations.

____ TASK: Have a plan to assure meetings work around your schedule and all the kids on your team can attend all the DI meetings.

____ TASK: Evaluate your potential new team members. Make sure each child is a good fit for DI activities and will be attending the meetings for the right reasons. Even though it is uncomfortable, discourage or don't allow kids on your team who are not there for the right reasons – or DI is not a good fit for them. [A DI team made up of students whose parents think that it will be good for them, is not going to be a successful DI team; both the student and the parent need to want DI to happen.](#)

NOTE: One other factor to consider is the boy/girl issue. On my very first team, I was really surprised by the boy/girl stereotypes I encountered on the team (and even with some of the parents) – none of which were true. For example, none of the kids had experience with tools – and after teaching them, the girls were the best at using tools to build things, counter to the stereotype. Last year, when I formed a new first-year team, I made an extra effort to have both boys and girls on the team. This gave me many teaching opportunities to confront these stereotypes and an opportunity to expose the girls to technology opportunities. Just consider this as you start to form your team.

[Same gender teams tend to have more conflict than boys/girls teams. But all types of teams have worked very well.](#)

Creating Your Meeting Schedule for Parents and Kids to Commit To

I learned my first year that the school calendar needs to be considered when scheduling DI meetings. The kids get lots of Mondays and Fridays off from school, and often families leave town on these long weekends – ruling out those weekends for meetings. Planning for that up front can save you lots of time and frustration.

I go to the website for my school district and download the school calendar for the year.

I plan my DI meetings at the start of the season by using the school calendar.

- I mark the tournament dates on the calendar. Most local tournaments are in March. You should be able to get your tournament dates from your state DI web site.
- I schedule several extra meetings right before the tournament. (Kids procrastinate, just like adults.) I found that a whole lot of work gets done in the week before the tournament – so scheduling for that in advance really helps.
- I avoid meetings on holiday weekends and long school-day-off weekends. (In Colorado, where I live, many families take ski trips those weekends).
- When we start having long Sunday meetings, I space them out every other weekend to keep from burning out the team (and team manager).

- I think a good start time for first-year teams is October to early November. This seems about the right amount of time to have the team make a good showing at the tournament. If you start later, that is fine.
 - What I didn't realize my first year was that very, very few teams were going to present a polished presentation that meets all the challenge requirements. If you don't have 100% of the challenge addressed, you can still do well at the tournament.
- I schedule optional work-day meetings for when the kids have a day off and probably will be in town. (For my team, this often is a school day off – and I take a vacation day from work).

See my example 2015/16 schedule in Appendix D.

_____ TASK: Use the school calendar to make your DI meeting calendar for the entire year. Have it ready for your first DI meeting that you schedule. See Appendix D for an example.

Schedule and Prepare for Your First DI Meeting – with Kids and Parents

The DI program can be complicated, and I don't want to confuse the kids at the first meeting. I want them to have a good taste of how fun DI can be in the first meeting, so I focus on giving them a relaxed, fun experience in a good first, short meeting. I also use this meeting to try to gain a little insight if each child is a good fit for the DI experience.

I like to schedule a parent meeting after the first meeting with the kids. In that meeting, I give an overview of DI and explain some of the details about how DI works to both the parents and the kids at the same time.

A typical first meeting looks like this (edit at will to suit your needs):

[Scott is about to layout a wonderful plan for a first team meeting. Team Managers can also find 16 team meeting ideas laid out for them in the Roadmap developed by DI, Inc. This book comes with your program materials and walks Team Managers through 16 2-hour DI meetings. All the meeting ideas, teamwork activities, Instant Challenges, skill development tools and timetable can be adjusted to fit the needs of the Team and the Team Manager.](#)

- *Note: during the first team meeting, I do not do anything with the central challenge. The reason is that I don't want the kids to start working on the central challenge until I finalize the team roster – and that won't be until after this first meeting.*
- Potential DI team members ride the school bus home with my son to our house.
- We meet on our back deck. I have a hearty snack ready for them. They have the snack and unwind from school. [Many Teams appoint a snack parent to take the task of feeding hungry students off the DI Team Manager.](#)
- When the snack is consumed, I try to reel them in by jumping right into an Instant Challenge.

- I first do something non-team-based and fun. I put a pile of pipe cleaners on the table and say, “You have 3 minutes to make the tallest tower. Begin now!” After the first round, I let the kids make up a challenge with the pipe cleaners. I go with the flow and let them have fun.
- I then might then have a quick contest to see who can make the funniest face.
- I then do a team Instant Challenge. I don’t try to explain the Instant Challenge – I just jump in and try to make it really fun. It will probably be chaotic and the end result may not be so great – but the focus is to let them have fun doing it. This is effective at giving the kids a taste of DI and letting them see if they like it. It also lets me evaluate if each child is engaged and seem to like this sort of activity.
 - See Appendix E for some good Instant Challenges to do during the first meeting.
- I then do a very important exercise on team work that will help me manage team dynamics for the rest of the year. On some paper or a white board, I write, “Good Team Member” and “Bad Team Member”. I ask each child to list a characteristic of each. We brainstorm until we have a good list. (After just doing a chaotic team Instant Challenge, they will be thinking about what makes a good team member and bad team member).
 - When they start running out of ideas, I ask, “Do you want to change anything on these lists?” We may have further discussion and we may edit the lists.
 - Note: I then review this list at the start of EVERY future DI meeting to set the expectation for good team behavior – using the list of expectations that THEY created. This worked pretty well to solve teamwork problems I had my first year. When a child is not being a good team member, you can stop during the meeting and ask them to evaluate how they are doing against *their own lists*. Peer pressure to stop deviating from the lists tends to be pretty effective in building good team-member skills.
- I then ask what they would do differently in the Instant Challenge to be good team members, and I let them do the Instant Challenges again. I don’t worry about how they do – I just let them have fun.
- After 2 hours, the parents arrive for a meeting where I explain more about DI. See Appendix F for the meeting agenda and hand-outs.
 - During the parent/child meeting, I introduce the concept, “**At DI Meetings, we do DI things.**” I explain to the kids and parents that I’m willing to commit to a lot of time as long as they are coming to the meeting to do DI things – and not goof off the entire time. “DI Things” includes – learning to be a good team member, building things, brainstorming, acting, and *productivity* while working on the challenges. I explain, if you don’t want spend every other Sunday doing DI Things, then this activity isn’t a good fit.
 - During this meeting, I also discuss “interference” with the parents in great detail and set the expectation with the parents not to “interfere” with the kids’ DI work. (See the parent meeting packet in Appendix F for more details).
- I end the meeting promoting DI but also asking the kids and parents to decide if they can commit to the team. If yes, then please come to the next meeting.

FIRST MEETING - PRE-MEETING TASKS

_____ Task: Send an email with the first DI meeting date. Ask the parents to confirm their child can attend. Schedule ~2 hours with the kids and another half-hour meeting with the parents at the end.

_____ Task: Purchase pipe cleaners (chenille sticks).

_____ Task: Pick 3 Instant Challenges from Appendix E and collect/purchase the materials for the Instant Challenge. Buy materials to do each one two times.

_____ Task: Get a hearty snack for the kids.

_____ Task: Edit the parent meeting notes in Appendix F and print them out one for each of the parents to review with their kids.

_____ Task: Print out the school calendar that has DI meetings marked on it.

_____ Task: Print-out the “Interference” hand-out for each child that is part of the first meeting agenda. This in Appendix X.

_____ Task: have a white board or large paper ready for the “Good Team – Bad Team” exercise.

***Save the results from this exercise – you will use this all year. Take a photo with your smart-phone or camera, if needed.

_____ Task: During the meeting, ask the parents and kids if they want to commit to the DI schedule and activities by the next meeting.

POST-FIRST-MEETING TASK

_____ Task: If during the meeting, you saw behavior from a child that indicated that DI may not be a good fit for them, then address this over the next week to see if they should continue with your DI team. (Remember, when you do this, you are being a good manager role model for your team members.)

REMINDER: Just use this document as a conceptual guide. Change it to meet your needs and your style!

Prepare for the Second Meeting

_____ Task: Create an email group of the parents that came to the meeting.

_____ Task: Email the parents and 1) ask if they can commit to joining to the team and attending all the meetings on the schedule. 2) Send a reminder about the second meeting time. 3) Remind parents to send a check for an initial \$100 to pay for the team expenses through the year. [Handling DI Finances: Team Managers handle DI expenses in a variety of ways. \\$100 per student will most likely cover: Team Membership, Materials Costs, Tournament Registration and possibly T-shirts. The use of recycled or reusable household items is encouraged. Some Team Managers collect money weekly, some at the beginning or end of the season. Depending on the Team Challenge selected, the cost will vary.](#)

_____ Task: Have a snack prepared for the kids. You may want to ask one of the other parents to bring a snack for the team.

_____ Task: Prepare a few Instant Challenges for the team. You can use one from Appendix E.

_____ Task: Have your white board or poster board of “Good Team Member” and Bad “Team Member” on display in your meeting/snack area.

_____ Task: Prepare to show the kids some videos of a Central and Instant Challenge so they can get a feel for what they are working toward. You can hook a PC to a television – or just have the kids watch on your computer screen. 1) Show them the Instant Challenge video 2) Show them a central challenge video – it may be the one in this training, or another one you found on YouTube.

_____ Task: Be ready to share the “Points of Interest” for each Central Challenge with your team during the team meeting so your team can start to think about which challenge they want to tackle.

Second Meeting Agenda (*again, just use this as a guide – every team is different*) *The DI Roadmap also has an alternative 2nd meeting schedule and handouts*

- Feed the hoard when they arrive. Let them goof off and unwind from school until the snack is consumed.
- Reel in the kids and then review the “Good Team” and “Bad Team” lists that were created in the first meeting
 - During this exercise, **I insist on them taking it seriously**. A few jokes here and there are OK as long as they are focused on the exercise. I use this exercise every week to set expectations about being a good team member – but to also set a tone that I expect them to take “teaching moments” seriously. Remember, this is a DI meeting and **at DI meetings we do DI things** – like talk/learn/brainstorm about teamwork. If needed, re-set that expectation with the kids as you start this exercise. If they don’t like doing DI things, then the sooner you realize this, the sooner you can manage the situation.
 - At every team meeting I ask, “Does anyone want to cross out any of these items off the team member good/bad list?” I also ask, “Does anyone want to add anything to the list?” We have a healthy discussion about team work until the discussion runs out of steam.
- We then do one or two Instant Challenges. (The kids will probably be asking to do this again after the first meeting).
- Review the teamwork lists again after the Instant Challenges. Try to keep the discussion positive and a learning experience. (They probably broke lots of the teamwork rules during the Instant Challenge. That is OK – that is what you will work on during the year. You will be amazed at the growth during the year, but take it slow and don’t let the team members get upset with each other).
- Now, explain that at the end of the year the team will go to a tournament and do an Instant Challenge and a Central Challenge.
 - Show them the videos of the Instant Challenge and the Central Challenge and explain it as it unfolds.
- If there is time, read the “Points of Interest” from each challenge *that you are interested/willing to manage* to let the kids start thinking about which central challenge they want to do.

Prepare for Your Third After-School Meeting

____ Task: Set up a snack. See if another parent can provide it.

____ Task: Get a packet of Instant Challenges. Go the DI store:

<http://resources.destinationimagination.org/> Download “Instant Challenge Volume 6” for \$15. Or Volume 7 for \$39.95. Note: Volume 7 is good because it has a master list at the front that lists all the materials you need to do all the Instant Challenges in the book.

In the Roadmap there are 16 free Instant Challenges. There is also a free online Instant Challenge Pack in the Resource Area of www.destinationimagination.org. You will need your Team Number and a ShopDI account to access these resources.

____ Task: Select a few Instant Challenges for your team to do in the next meeting , based on what you think will help them develop.

____ Task: Collect or purchase the materials you need to do some or all of the Instant Challenges. (Maybe you can delegate this to another parent).

____ Task: Make a copy for each team member of the first page of each challenge that you are considering doing.

____ Task: Review “Building Instant Challenge Skills” section in this document. Start thinking about how you can introduce these concepts to your team members.

____ Task: Be ready to talk to your team about “Consensus Decision Making” which is especially important in the Instant Challenge. Here is one site that discusses this:
<http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>

Third After-School Meeting Agenda

- Snack
- Review Good Team Member / Bad Team Member
 - Ask if there are edits to the list
 - Take a moment and **talk about making compromises and coming to a team consensus** when team members can't come to perfect agreement. (As you make a decision on which challenge to do, it is likely that some team members won't be happy with the decision. If you talk about compromising for the benefit of the team first, then the first big team decision (on what challenge to do) may go much smoother.
- Talk about picking a Central Challenge. Use the sheet you printed out on each challenge to help the kids decide.
 - Discuss which challenge to do.
 - Ok to let this go another week, but set the expectation that next week they need to decide, even if they can't come to a perfect agreement.
- Instant Challenges
 - See – Building Instant Challenge Skills section and start to introduce these concepts if there is time.

Preparing for the 4th After-School Meeting

In addition to the rules in the Central Challenge, there are rules that apply to EVERY challenge. These are called the “**Rules of the Road**”, and you should now become familiar with them.

____ Task: Review the “Rules of the Road” section of your “Challenge Program Materials Book”. You will need this background knowledge when your team starts talking about their solution to the central challenge.

____ Task: **Very Carefully** read these sections of the Rules of the Road

- Interference Section (This section will provide lots of guidance on what you can and cannot do as a team manager).
- Team Budget Section – NOTE: This section outlines many items that you can use in your central challenge that are FREE in your budget. **CRITICAL: Very carefully read the EXEMPT BUDGET ITEMS from this section.** *Experienced teams use lots and lots of exempt items to make more/better stuff and score higher. (You can too, now that you know this trick).*
- Determining the Value of Your Solution section. Read this section CAREFULLY. You will manage the budget for your first year team and you can constantly remind them on how the budget will be calculated. Bookmark this page.
- Safety Guidelines and Restrictions section. Many items are banned from the tournament, so make sure you know what items are banned.
- Copyrights and Trademarks - quick review. Summary: don't use copyrighted material.
- Clarifications – this will be discussed more later.
- Moving Scenery and Props – this section is a few pages later. Make sure you review it.

____ Task: Before you talk about which Central challenge to tackle, **introduce the two simple creative thinking skills that are listed below.** (These seemed to work real well with my first-year kids in getting them to think creatively).

- Obvious solutions are not creative solutions. Avoid obvious solutions in central and Instant Challenges with these two questions:
 1. Use opposites... Ask yourself: What is the obvious solution? Then ask yourself, what is the opposite of that? Then ask yourself, how could I make the opposite of the obvious solution work? Are there related ideas to this that I could use that are creative?
 2. Ask yourself: Do I think another team will present a similar solution? If yes, then it probably isn't real creative. This may be an indication that you need to keep brainstorming to find a more creative idea.

[There are many ways to generate creative ideas,. Please review the Roadmap to learn about these types of tools.](#)

____ Task: Make a print-out for each team member of the page from the one “Rules of the Road” under “Expense Report Categories” that lists Exempt Items.

___ Task: Have a snack ready.

___ Task: Have Good Team / Bad Team sheets displayed.

___ Tasks: Have the print-outs from page 1 of each of the challenges that you are considering.

___ Task: Review the “Instant Challenge Skills” section of this document. Be ready to discuss this in the next meeting

___ Task: Select a few Instant Challenges and pull them together.

___ Task: Consider asking another parent to be in charge of pulling together future Instant Challenges.

4th After-School Meeting Agenda

- Snack
- Discuss making compromises/consensus for the good of the team – because often many teams can't come to complete agreement.
- Good team / Bad Team review.
- Introduce the basic creative thinking skills that are reviewed above. As the team starts talking about solving the Central Challenge, you want them to head down a creative path, not the obvious path.
- Review Central challenges and pick one to do.
 - VERY IMPORTANT - Very carefully read the challenge together. Insist that the team members pay close attention to the requirements! Quiz them about the challenge as it is being read. MAKE SURE THEY HAVE A REALLY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGE REQUIREMENTS – so that they don't spend time on things that are not part of the challenge.

- Instant Challenge
- Start some initial brainstorming on how to solve the Instant Challenge.

Prepare for 5th Meeting

At this point, your team is up and running and ready to start on the challenges. From this point on, it is hard to give step by step instructions – so I'll provide these general guidelines.

___ Task: For the Central Challenge - print a copy of the entire challenge for each team member.

___ Task: Attach the sheet from the “Rules of the Road” that describes the exempt materials that the team can use and not count against their budget.

___ Task: If you have not already, prepare to start dividing your Instant Challenge roles by reviewing the Instant Challenge Section of this document.

___ Task: Make a general project plan to share with the kids. Take your meeting schedule and mark that the last 3 meetings for rehearsal. Then, look at the scoring sheet for your Central Challenge and

think about how you are going to use your remaining meetings (before rehearsals) to divide up your team and start addressing the challenge.

____ Task: Prepare an Instant Challenge to do.

Next Meeting

- Snack, if after school.
- Quick Good Team / Bad Team review.
- If not already done, do a detailed reading of the challenge.
- Look at the score sheet and see what challenge requirements have lots of points and what challenge requirements have lower point values. (Experienced teams usually start with the highest-point-value tasks).
- Review your meeting schedule and show the kids how much time they have to get the challenge done.
- Brainstorm as a team how you are going to address each part of the challenge. (This typically takes 2 weeks).
- Do an Instant Challenge in there somewhere to break up the Central Challenge meeting.

Moving Forward...

Now you are up and running.

Here are some helpful hints from experienced team managers.

- Interference
 - Team managers may NOT contribute ideas to the challenge and may not help build anything in any way. This even includes holding materials while team members cut them.
 - You may NOT ask leading questions or give hints toward a solution.
- Safety
 - You MUST stop team members at any time and may “interfere” if you see something unsafe happening.
- The TEAM MANAGER MAY DO THESE THINGS
 - You may have an in-depth knowledge of the challenge. When your team drifts away from the requirements of the challenge, you MAY remind them of what the challenge says to help keep them focused.
 - You MAY remind your team about the budget rules and ask them to consider how they are spending their budget.
 - You MAY manage the team – meaning that you can help organize the meetings, you can keep the meetings in control, you may make meeting agendas, you may run the meetings, and you may manage the budget. (Over the years, as the kids get older and more experienced, you can hand off these tasks to them).

- You may get materials for the team if they give you a list of SPECIFIC items to purchase. (You cannot provide materials that will lead them to your idea for a solution).
- You may ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS about the solution that the team wants to undertake to help them sort out how/if they will do certain things. (BUT, The questions may not lead the team to specific solutions.) Some of my favorite questions are:
 - Do you think you can get that done in time?
 - Do you think that will fit in your budget with everything else?
 - Can you list 10 different ways to make that? Which of those ten are possible with our schedule?
 - Rather than delaying building it for a week, is there a way you could build it now with the supplies we have here now in the garage?
 - That sounds like a lot of work and that isn't worth many points. Do you want to spend lots of time on something that is only worth a few points?
 - Workmanship (creativity, innovation...) is a judging criteria for what you are working on. How would you grade the workmanship of what you built? What quick and simple things could you do to improve that score?
 - Is this solution obvious? Is it unexpected? Is it creative? Do you think there will be another team at the tournament that has a similar solution? If another team shows up with a similar solution, how do you think your creativity will be scored?
- If your team needs new skills to create their solution, you may help them find ways to get those skills (including outside instructors), but no one is allowed to contribute to the solution with ideas or with work. (See section 3 of the Interference section in the Rules of the Road). When I set up an expert to help (which is a great experience for the kids), I explain to the kids and the expert that they can't share information about the challenge – and can only get new skills or understanding about a subject from the expert.

Next Meeting

- Same routine as before.
- Review the “Exempt List” so that the team members know they can use these materials without counting against their budget.
- Focus on finalizing the plans to solve the Central Challenge. Remind them of the schedule and use this to push them toward making real progress.
 - Divide up everything that needs to be done for the Central Challenge into small groups (or individuals) so you can start making progress on several things in parallel.
 - Get a “materials list” going of things you need to get things built. See if you can get these materials in advance of the next meeting by asking team members to make a specific list of stuff that they want you to get.
- Do an Instant Challenge or two when your team needs a break. Try to start working each team member into different roles to practice.

Building Instant Challenge Skills

One reason is that I love the DI program is the combination of the Instant Challenge and central challenge. Both build different, valuable skills.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In the Instant Challenge ONLY (and not in the Central Challenge) you can actively coach the team and give them suggestions on how the Instant Challenge could be solved. It is OK to do this in the Instant Challenge because at the tournament, the Instant Challenge your team receives will be a surprise – and they will have to solve it by themselves at the tournament. But, in team meetings, anyone can suggest solutions to an Instant Challenge (not a central challenge) to help them build skills

The first Instant Challenges that your team does, they will probably waste most of their time arguing over a solution. I let my team “feel the pain” of failing by wasting all their time arguing. After struggling with this on the first Instant Challenges that they do, they will probably be warmed up to listening about how to work together better.

I usually start with a conversation that goes like this: So, you guys spent over half your time arguing over idea A and idea B. It seemed to me that both were good ideas – but you got NEITHER done. In real-life situations like this, it is best to quickly pick an idea and execute that idea – and not spend all your time arguing. Do you agree? " <team should agree> I then say, “OK, let’s do this again, but I’m going to be the leader, and when the challenge starts, I’ll go around and give each person 10 seconds to give me their idea. After that I’m going to A) quickly pick an idea and B) assign team members tasks to get that idea done. I ask that no one argue with me and the decisions that I make – because there is no time for arguing.

We then do the Instant Challenge again with me as the leader. The kids get to see 1) that it goes much better and 2) how a leader acts where there isn’t much time to solve a problem.

I then talk about when there is little time a team needs to QUICKLY:

- Brainstorm
- Decide on an idea to solve the challenge – even if not everyone agrees
- Assign roles and tasks so the team can work together.
- Divide-up the remaining time
- NOT argue with the leader, or with each other – there just isn’t time for that.

I then talk about assigning roles to each team member. These typically include (in order of importance):

- Instant Challenge team leader
- Challenge reader – reviews the challenge very carefully to make sure the team is addressing all the requirements and getting maximum points.
- Time keeper – asks the appraiser “How much time is left” every 30 seconds.
- 30 second person – during a building challenge, in the last 30 seconds, only this person gets to touch what is being built. (This keeps 14 hands from accidently breaking it in the last 30 seconds).
- Story gatekeeper – when it is a performance challenge, the story gatekeeper makes sure that:
 - There is a problem in the story that needs to be solved.
 - There are clear characters in the story, and each team member knows their character.

- There is a beginning, middle, and end to the story – and the problem is solved.
- Creativity gate keeper – During brainstorming, this person prompts the team to come up with creative ideas.
- Teamwork gatekeeper – this person looks for team members that are not participating and draws them in to help with the Instant Challenge.

Assigning roles.... I let the kids try several roles over several weeks to find what they want to do. I rotate every week who gets to be the leader – and I make sure every child on the team is a leader. After a few weeks, the kids tend to fall-into the role that they like. It is common to have a few kids that want to be leader. What I have done, that works well, is have one leader for a “building” Instant Challenge, one leader for a “performance” Instant Challenge and one leader for a “build and perform” Instant Challenge.

Here is the method most teams use to solve an Instant Challenge:

- The challenge is read to the team. During this time, the “Challenge Reader” on the team gets the extra copy of the challenge and reads it very carefully as it is read to the team.
- When time starts, the challenge reader shares his/her ideas with the team – then goes off into a corner of the room and VERY CAREFULLY re-reads the challenge. It is this person’s job to give the leader input if the team is going off course from the challenge requirements and points.
- The leader then points at each team member and gives them 10 seconds to share their ideas on how to solve the Instant Challenge. The leader needs to keep this moving fast.
- Every 30 seconds the time keeper on the team is asking the appraisers, “How much time is left?” This helps the leader make sure everything gets done in time.
- The leader then picks an idea to solve the challenge and assigns tasks to each team member.
 - !!!No one argues with the leader!!!
 - !!!Team members do the role they were assigned – and don’t argue!!!
- The team members work together to solve the challenge. The leader tries to leave time for a quick rehearsal, if it is a performance challenge.
- When the time keeper asks “How much time” and the reply is ‘less than 30 seconds’ – the leader then says, “30 second rule!” At that time, everyone steps away from the building area and the only person that can touch the thing being built is the 30-Second-Person.
- The preparation time then runs out and the team presents their Instant Challenge solution.

Understanding Clarifications

There are often things in the challenge that are not clear, that require a clarification. DI has a process to give you absolute answers to your questions.

To ask a clarification question, you go to the DI national web site (www.idodi.org) and go to the clarification section of the web site. You get to ask 10 clarification questions before February 15 – and none after that. You will get an official response to your question and all appraisers must abide by that clarification at all of the tournaments. You will turn in your clarifications before your team competes so that all the appraisers at the tournament will know about the official clarifications.

Again, you get to ask 10 clarification questions before February 15th – *don't hesitate to use them!*

You can see some examples of clarifications from past years in Appendix G.

When many people are asking the same question about the challenge, the International Challenge Masters will post a “Public Clarification” on the DI web site. Make sure you check these before you ask for a clarification.

Clarification questions often come in two forms:

1. I don't understand, or it isn't clear, what the challenge is requiring the team to do.

If you don't understand a requirement in the central challenge, you can post a clarification question to the international challenge masters. Before you do this, make sure you have very carefully read the challenge and the published public clarifications.

If there is a “gray area” or something that is open to interpretation, you can ask a clarification question about that and get an official, binding ruling on that question. NOTE: the only way you can get a binding, final, absolute answer to your question is by requesting a clarification from the idodi.org web site.

2. My team's solution is pushing the boundaries of the challenge requirements and I want a ruling to know if we are OK before we go to the tournament.

I have had several cases where my team wanted to do something so creative that it pushed the boundaries of the challenge requirements. To make sure their idea meets the challenge requirements, I'll ask for an official clarification where I ask, “My team want to do X idea to meet Y requirement in the challenge. Does their idea meet the requirement of the challenge?” By asking this, before the show up at the tournament, I know FOR SURE if their idea will meet the challenge requirements.

See Appendix G for some examples of clarifications from past years.