

# Dialogue

## **INTERFERENCE – HARDER FOR ADULTS THAN FOR THE KIDS!**

When team manager training starts each fall, I am asked about interference more than anything else. None of my examples are real people, but are very representative of real questions I receive each year. The DI Team Managers Guide explains exactly WHAT interference is and how to steer clear, for both Team members and Team Managers. Start by going over this with the team at the very beginning and make sure their parents understand, too. Solutions in Destination Imagination are entirely the student's work. ENTIRELY...that's the tough part.

**Question:** I am wondering how much help can we give them. Can we help them paint, color, cut, glue, etc? Or do they have to do it all? I mean if they design the object, can we help them get it's form?

**Answer:** Destination Imagination is a "challenge" for team managers and parents too, because we are really used to "helping" our kids with class projects in scouts or other programs. The short answer is "DON'T!" Helping them do something or showing them how to do it is interference.

That means you can't hold the wood while they saw, but you can't tell them it would be a little stronger if they'd put hot glue in the joint, or suggest painting the cardboard box yellow, etc. etc. One team manager told me that she drew the line at safety. In other words, if the children "needed" to use a piece of power equipment that she didn't think they could safely operate, then she'd do that piece for them. *Is that legal?? BUZZZZZ!* That's a wrong answer. **If the kids can't do something safely, they need to invent or create a way to solve it that is safe and up to their skill level. Or do something else entirely.**

If they determine they need to cut wood, for example, you can give them (or have someone else give them) a lesson in sawing safely and accurately. BUT you may not give the lesson using the exact wood that they will use in their solution. That piece of wood needs to be measured and cut BY THE TEAM ONLY. (You can however, drive them to the lumber yard or the scrap wood alley and drive them back after they pick out what they need. Or they can tell you they need XYZ specific kind/size of wood and you can get it for them.)

I know there is a very fine line here between teaching them a skill and teaching them how to do a portion of their solution. Remind them a lot "this is YOUR solution" and everything the audience and appraisers see will represent their work, their ideas and their creativity. Let the team know they can give you a warning if they think you are stepping over the interference line. The same should hold true for family members. They should feel comfortable telling siblings, classmates or parents to not help them. use a sewing machine for costumes, or how to do other skills that THEY have decided that they need to know in order to create their vision of what they want— but it MUST come from them. It is their experience in DI, not yours— they own this - not you. Think of yourself as their Guide on the Side. I know how frustrating it can be to stand by and watch them do something (while talking and horsing around) that would take you 5 minutes and they are going on three hours. I have had moments when I had to walk outside! But if I had interfered, they would have lost that opportunity to learn time management, and to feel the true satisfaction of "We did it ALL ourselves!"

The trial and error part of this PROCESS is key to their learning experience. Please help them to take these life skills and make them their own. You also have the opportunity of teaching them honesty. When your team goes to competition, please make sure that when you sign the Team Declaration, that you show them that you all honestly write down that their team has had outside interference, and exactly what it was. Even if the team receives a very small deduction for this, they will feel better about themselves.

### **Safety/Interference**

An important point to make here is that it is not the intent of DI to force young kids to do dangerous things by themselves. If they have designed a solution which they cannot build safely without adult assistance, then what they must do is to modify their design (or scrap it altogether) and come up with something which they can build safely. There is a tendency for the adults to want to jump in and help the kids with the sawing or the drilling because the kids are just too young and inexperienced to use the devices safely. You must understand that it is still interference.

Safety comes first, but the correct response to a design which can't be built safely is NOT for the adults to do it. It is for the kids to modify the design or to use simpler tools. You also may be surprised at what the kids can do if you take the time to train them on the tool and how to use it safely. When you're done, not only can the kids be proud that they accomplished a difficult task by themselves, but you'll have taught them a skill they'll use for the rest of their lives.

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## THE BRAINSTORMING PROCESS

Here is how one very experienced Team Manager approaches the brainstorming process:

1. A clear, focused "objective statement" is KEY. If the team makes their "objective statement" too broad (i.e., how do we solve this Challenge?), try to encourage the team to break it into bite-sized chunks (such as having them look at each scored element and even how that element might be broken down into smaller parts, etc.)
2. Spend some time to identifying key measures and key constraints -- for the item getting brainstormed.
3. Write the issue to be brainstormed in big, bold print somewhere that everyone can see. Make it clear that the purpose of the next phase is to generate as MANY ideas as possible, without judging whether those ideas are "good", "bad" or even "feasible".
4. When the pace of ideas starts to slow, ask the group to look for alternative ways to state the objective statement (either more general or more specific). For example, instead of saying "How can we build this costume?", the group might try to rephrase individual words in the objective statement "What do we mean by the word costume? -- can we interpret that word in different a different way that might generate new options?"
5. Again, when things start to slow, ask the group to generate ideas on "How will we evaluate which of these alternatives are the best?". The process of generating measures will often result in new ideas. Don't be shy about flip-flopping between idea generation and measurement generation at this point.
6. Have the group "rank order" the measures -- so they know which are the most important. Be sure to keep the following measures in the mix:
  - When do we need to have this element finished? (especially if it is a component of a larger total solution).
  - Will this solution be *cool* and give us a feeling of accomplishment?
  - Will the process of creating this solution be fun?
  - What is the risk that this approach won't work?
7. Have the group generate some "quick and dirty" experiments they can conduct to test the viability of alternative approaches (i.e. build a "scale model" out of clay or cardboard -- or draw out an idea on paper). If a team can't create a "scale model" out of "easy to work", inexpensive materials, they almost certainly will be unable to build the "real thing" out of expensive materials that take a great deal of time to work into the desired shape.
9. Are there more "in depth" experiments we can conduct for the "best few" ideas. One key here is that if a team considers the things they are building for these "experiments" to be "disposable", they are MUCH more likely to be able to build them quickly (rather than "stressing" that they "aren't perfect"). They are also MUCH more likely to be willing to fold various ideas together and throw out a "work in process" in favor of a better "combined idea". In contrast, if a team begins to build something they perceive to be part of their "final solution", it is VERY rare they will be willing to discard it.

ALWAYS keep ALL ideas that are generated. If a team hits a "dead end", it is VERY likely they will have forgotten all their previous ideas. In addition, it is a good idea to revisit the brainstorming process from time to time, because team members will have "good ideas" pop into their head hours (or days) after the formal brainstorming process is complete.

Brainstorming sessions are a sacred time for ideas to be born and grow. Team members need to feel safe to say whatever pops into their heads. So that the ideas flow freely in a comfortable environment, please take time to discuss these "rules" of brainstorming" and observe the following:

### Ideas are.....

Wild, crazy, outlandish, shocking, hilarious, fun, imaginative, interesting, amazing, inventive, different, clever, complex, incomplete, undeveloped, a framework, a start and a beginning.

Hot Destination ImagiNation News from Destination ImagiNation of New York  
November 2007

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## ***Brainstorming cont'd.***

### **Ideas are not....**

Dumb, stupid, silly (unless that is the idea), insane, impossible, unrealistic, inherently faulty, half baked, boring, "too" anything, wrong, out of bounds, hurtful, negligent, assuming or labels.

### **Ideas can be....**

Added on to, stretched, run with, played with, borrowed with permission, transformed, put in context, celebrated, expanded, admired, run past, saved for another time, tangential, shared, protected, formed around and overwhelming.

### **Ideas cannot be...**

Put down, discounted, ripped on, squelched, trapped, hurtful, exclusive, trampled on, discarded, scoffed, judged or patronized.

## **DI SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE:**

It's time for high school seniors & university level participants/volunteers in your area to apply for the 2008 Destination ImagiNation Scholarships. Deadline is January 15, 2008 for all 3 tracks: essay, presentation, and internet. Complete instructions are available on the Destination ImagiNation Support Committee Scholarship web: <http://www.idodi.org/disc/scholarship/>

## **ORDER YOUR DI CHALLENGE PINS NOW...**

Looking for a little stocking stuffer for that special DI team member, Manager or volunteer? Please take a moment to check out our NY-DI Website at <http://www.nydi.org> and have a look at our 2008 Challenge Pins - they might be just what you are looking for!

You can find images of all of the pins available on our website at <http://www.nydi.org/2008%20CHALLENGE%20PINS.pdf> the order form is on the third page of the document. Pins can be ordered until January 1st - Puzzle Pins will be delivered immediately – regular pin orders will be delivered in February.

*This is a major fund raiser for NY-DI, please take a look at these pins  
and see if there is something here to interest the DI'er in your home!*

## **KEEPING UP TO DATE...**

It is very important that you get in the habit of checking e-mail and our website at <http://nydi.org> often! It is cost prohibitive to do business by mail, therefore it is **CRITICAL** that every team have at least one person who is responsible for checking e-mail at least once a week, but preferably daily, for important information about the Program. All NY-DI newsletters will be posted to our website and an e-mail will be sent to each contact person whose e-mail address we have with any important website updates. If you want to be included on our e-mailing-list please go to our website homepage (<http://www.nydi.org>) and click on "CLICK HERE TO BE INCLUDED IN ALL NY-DI MAILINGS" in the Latest News section of the homepage.

## **AS ALWAYS...**

If I can be of any assistance to you as you begin this journey for the 1st time, or continue on the DI journey for another exciting year, please feel free to contact me at any time – the NY-DI Board members, Regional Directors and I stand ready to help you to provide the very best program to the students of New York....

Committed to Creativity,



Dee Urban, Affiliate Director  
Destination ImagiNation of New York  
73 Minden Drive  
Orchard Park, New York 14127  
Telephone: 716-675-7566  
E-mail: [deurban@roadrunner.com](mailto:deurban@roadrunner.com)

