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## How To Build Team Chemistry

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When I asked my third-grade team what they liked most about Destination Imagination (DI) last year, I expected them to say “winning medals” or “going to Global Finals.” What they told me instead got me to thinking about team chemistry and the payoff that’s even greater than winning at Global Finals.

The word *team* is defined as “individuals coming together to accomplish a common goal.” Makes sense, right? Our DI teams pick a Challenge and work together relentlessly to accomplish that goal. But what makes a team great or successful? What makes a team stay together year after year? Chemistry. Developing chemistry with a team happens over time and with various shared experiences. Making memories together gives the team members a sense of unity and bonds them together. Here are a few tips for building chemistry with your team.

1. **Share a Meal Together.** Because I’m also a teacher, I often allow the students on my team to eat lunch in my room and work on their Team

Challenge together. Sitting around the table and talking about their lives promotes a sense of family. It's around that table they share ideas, laugh about what's going on at home or in class, and ultimately become friends.

2. **Play Together Often.** We always try to do something fun with the team to start off the practice and to get them loosened up. A lot of times, I'm trying to get their squirming out too. Sometimes we have dance parties, sing karaoke or play games for a few minutes before practice. Nerf Wars, park visits, movie nights and swim parties are also ways for teams to spend time together outside of practice. This also allows you to get to know your team members better. As the Team Manager, don't be afraid to have fun with your team. They'll feel more connected to you and will feel safe enough to take creative risks without a fear of failure.
3. **Team-Building Games/Experiences.** While it may sound cliché, team-building games can be a great way to assess your team's strengths and weaknesses. These experiences are necessary for them to learn how to communicate. They're also beneficial for you, as the Team Manager, to see what types of natural roles your team members take. If you've got older students, try conquering a ropes course together. Or, set up an obstacle course in the room and have them navigate each other through it blindfolded. If you really want to put their problem solving skills to the test, try an escape room and see if they can get out before their time expires. There are tons of ways to bond your team together. Just be creative!
4. **Celebrate Both Successes and Failures Often.** Regardless of their ages, kids love to be recognized for doing a good job. We always give compliments to the team when they do really well on an Instant Challenge and try to find good things to say even when they fail. Sometimes we bring treats like candy, homemade cookies or slushies to practice as rewards for accomplishing goals. Each little victory we celebrate together as a team, but we also celebrate our failures. In the past, when our team didn't do as well in competition as we'd hoped, we started a tradition to "shake it off" and went for milkshakes. Giving the team autonomy and permission to take risks without fear of failure allows them to be vulnerable with each other. It develops chemistry and a sense of belonging.
5. **Deal with Conflict in a Timely Manner.** It's inevitable. Where there are individuals, there is conflict. And where there are *multiple* tiny individuals, conflict can often be constant. Let's face it—humans are innately selfish and stubborn. Collaboration doesn't come naturally to

us. Teamwork is a skill that is developed. It's up to us to teach them how to work together and how to resolve their conflicts constructively and in a timely manner. When you have a conflict on your team, begin by asking questions. Model appropriate behavior and conversations for your team. Have the students brainstorm ways to handle conflict and work through it. Where there is constant conflict, chemistry cannot exist. One way we squelch conflict on our team is to have well-defined roles during Instant Challenge. This allows everyone to feel like a part of one bigger machine, working together to accomplish the task. Once your team members realize their strengths and use them regularly, you will have fewer conflicts and chemistry will begin to naturally occur

6. **Keep Focused on the Bigger Picture.** So, you might ask *what* exactly is it that my students liked best about doing DI? When asked this question, these eight-year-olds answered: "We started out as strangers, but we became a DI family." And I wholeheartedly agree. Creating chemistry with your team isn't only important to completing your Challenge; it's an essential part of the chemistry puzzle. If you focus on building a sense of belonging and shaping their shared purpose, you will likely end up forging friendships that will keep your team together for years to come.

***About the Author:** Kim Moss is a parent and Co-Team Manager of the DI-nomyte DINOS from Midlothian, Texas, where she works as a gifted and talented teacher and DI Coordinator for the school district. As a teacher, she enjoys challenging students to be use their imagination to solve problems together. In her free time, she enjoys reading and spending time with her awesome DI family.*