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## Starting A DI Team From Scratch

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Five years ago, our school floated the idea of starting Destination Imagination (DI) to fourth-grade parents. No real explanation, just a line item in a SignUpGenius list of volunteer opportunities. There were no teams formed, no teacher sponsors and no budget. Sounds intriguing right?

### **LESSON 1: DON'T BE AFRAID.**

Now, I had a vague idea about DI as my nephews participated as elementary students in New Jersey years before, but that was it. A few Google searches, a conversation with my sister and a review of materials were enough to entice me to jump in because I knew that DI would be good for my child. While it wasn't easy to start a team from scratch, it has definitely been worth it.

## **LESSON 2: START EARLY.**

Our school is a private, faith-based school located in Lenexa, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. Any extracurricular activities must be funded by the families. The Kansas DI Affiliate was just two years old when we joined the program. We had fourteen kids sign up for the first year - or maybe it is better to say that fourteen sets of parents who volunteered their children to be DI guinea pigs. Extracurricular activities were mainly sports-based; this was really the first opportunity to participate in an academic area for most of the kids.

We ordered materials and we were off and running. Of course, it was October and we didn't meet for the first time until November. If I hadn't been so overwhelmed with figuring out times to meet and what supplies I needed, I might have been more worried about the fact we missed two months of the school year before we uttered the words Instant Challenge.

## **LESSON 3: READ THE MATERIALS. THEN READ THEM AGAIN.**

The majority of the teams in the Kansas Affiliate were located outside of our geographic area. We have a wonderful Affiliate Director, but didn't have local relationships with other teams. Our two Team Managers relied on each other, the DI website, the Program Materials and crossing our fingers. The teams interpreted the Challenges and they kept each other in check, especially when it came to the Interference Policy. I think the kids knew the rules better than the Team Managers!

## **LESSON 4: MEETINGS CAN BE LIKE ONE REALLY LONG INSTANT CHALLENGE. LESSON 4.1: ALWAYS HAVE SNACKS.**

(A side note: the materials have evolved greatly over the last five years, especially those related to project management. What a great benefit to new teams!) Our teams met once a week right after school. The kids were either exhausted or wound up, no in between. While it was convenient to meet at this time, it took us time to figure out how to best get the kids

focused. Sometimes we had to wake them up using different games or sometimes calm them down (fifteen minutes of reading, without touching anyone). It always required snacks. Our meetings weren't always perfect. Dissecting an Instant Challenge might take more time than we had allotted. Sometimes the pressure of working on the Challenge took an unexpected turn and emotions bubbled over. We learned it was more important to go with the flow than to check items off of the list. We eventually caught up, but flexibility was key.

### **LESSON 5: YOUNGER SIBLINGS GIVE THE MOST HONEST FEEDBACK AND ASK THE MOST DIRECT QUESTIONS. NEVER UNDERESTIMATE FRESH EYES AND EARS.**

As we approached the state tournament, my co-manager and I were getting frustrated. The team knew exactly what they were saying, but it was a bit lost on us. There were gaps and things that didn't make sense. There was mumbling and backs to the audience. So we read the rules again. How can we help? Can we help? How should we handle this? We had a dress rehearsal for family members. There were questions from the audience and finally understanding. The slightest changes were made but the changes closed huge gaps.

### **LESSON 6: DESTINATION IMAGINATION TEACHES INDEPENDENCE, SO EMBRACE IT.**

We really weren't sure what to expect at the state tournament. Our team was a little nervous but surprisingly confident. They did great with their performance. Then it was time for the Instant Challenge. As a now four-time Team Manager, I've never seen an Instant Challenge at competition. Given the option of having a Team Manager in the room, our teams have always said "no." I'm not going to lie; it bummed me out to be asked to wait outside. I wanted to see how all of the practice Challenges paid off at competition. But one of the outcomes I wanted from the DI process was independence, so I'll take the rejection and watch the team go it alone.

### **LESSON 7: ENJOY THE MOMENT.**

When it came time for awards, we weren't sure what to expect. To our surprise, our team took third place. Considering that we started two months late, without any experience or idea what to expect, what a testament to hard work, long hours and preparation.

### **LESSON 8: AS LONG AS YOU HAVE FUN, THE HARD STUFF IS FORGOTTEN.**

We met shortly after the state tournament to debrief. What would you change? Where were the surprises? Seeing the notes, what would you do differently? And then we debriefed the year. I asked them what they learned and they spoke about working together, meeting deadlines and having fun. They told funny stories, shared laughs and started talking about next year.

### **LESSON 9: DI EXPANDS YOUR CHILD IN WAYS YOU'VE NEVER EXPECTED.**

But I looked back on the year differently. It was hard. There were many times, even at the state tournament, where I said I wouldn't manage again. It took time and patience and coordination. It was so frustrating to not step in and try to fix things. But I saw confidence grow, laughter shared and friendships deepen. I also saw skills sharpen, problems resolved and emotions tempered. That's why I've been back as a Team Manager every year since.

### **LESSON 10: YOU WILL NEVER REGRET THE TIME YOU AND YOUR CHILD DEDICATED TO DESTINATION IMAGINATION.**

Due to the success of our teams, including one team that qualified for Global Finals that year, we added two additional teams the following year

and have seen continued growth at our school each year since. I'm often asked for advice by new Team Managers. I always tell them the hardest part is not helping and letting the kids take the lead. That is also the most rewarding part.

*About the Author: Jackie Kindred entering her fifth year as a DI Team Manager. As a semi-retired nonprofit and human resources executive, Jackie focuses on helping her DI team, volunteering at school and enjoying life with her family in the Kansas heartland.*