

Although all teams work for months to prepare a solution to their long term problem, it is the spontaneous problem that most often determines the most creative teams and advances them to the next level of competition. This can be frustrating to many new coaches whose teams concentrated solely on their long term presentation. It is very important to teach teams how to solve spontaneous problems creatively. This can be done through the use of different techniques and **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!**

Creativity can be taught and spontaneous problem solving is all about creativity. It is worthwhile to take the time to train your team in solving spontaneous problems. This is a critical skill that teams really need to master to be successful in the spontaneous room and in competition in general. In many regions, teams that “win” do so in the spontaneous room. Long term scores are often too close to call, but spontaneous scores can be worlds apart.

In training team members for spontaneous competition, it is important to develop both verbal and hands-on skills. You cannot be certain which type of spontaneous problem your team members will receive. By preparing all team members for both types, you help them develop diverse skills that will make the team more competitive overall.

Some techniques to consider when coaching spontaneous:

- When the team enters the room, the spontaneous judge will say which type of problem the team will be solving. If there are more than five team members, the team will be given one minute to decide which five team members will participate. The remaining team member(s) will sit quietly and watch. If non-competing team members interfere, a penalty can be assessed. Teams often evaluate their team members' strengths and weaknesses and decide ahead of time which team members will compete in each problem type. This gives these “specialty teams” the chance to practice together on a regular basis which will make these teams more effective. Give team members a choice to participate or not but encourage them to participate on the “specialty team” that fits their strengths and minimizes their weaknesses. For example, a team member who takes direction well but is not a creative thinker may be better suited for the hands-on team. And a team member who is a creative thinker but is not a team player may contribute more to the verbal team.
- Arguments wastes time and will lower a score if “how well the team works together” is judged. Teach the team how to disagree without arguing. The team should decide how to handle any “disagreements” that might occur during a spontaneous problem. It is very likely that the team will disagree; how they handle it could help or hurt their score.
- For verbal problems, practice different ways of “taking turns”. This may include turning cards, throwing dice or placing a bean in a container. Look for problems with varied methods and practice them.
- For hands-on problems, organization is very important. To keep organized, the team might elect team members to take charge of various aspects of the problem. A

spontaneous captain can be elected to facilitate the decision making process. This cuts down on arguments that might occur when everyone wants to share their ideas at the same time. The captain will keep order and decide which idea is best. For this to work, it is important that the other team members learn to respect this authority. Teams may also elect a time keeper to remind the team how much time is left and a point evaluator to examine the problem to determine how the team can score the most points. For example, it might be better to use all the materials than to make a structure taller. Each team member can be assigned a job so that the team stays focused, maximizes their time and scores the highest points possible. Assignments can be decided by the team but should be based solely on a team member's strengths.

Some advice to pass on to the team about solving Verbal Spontaneous Problems:

- Form the habit of listening carefully to the directions provided at the beginning of each problem. Time is wasted if directions need to be repeated.
- Speak up! Quiet voices may not be heard by the judge. If the judge cannot hear and asks for an answer to be repeated, valuable time is lost.
- Don't waste time trying to think of creative answers if you have a common one. Give a common answer and your teammates will have time to share their creative ones.
- Do not speak out of turn. The judge will stop you and not score the response.
- Do not argue with a judge. This will only waste time and could hurt your score.
- Use think time wisely. Do not wait for your turn to start thinking. Try to have 3-4 answers ready to go. Devise a method of remembering your answers. For example, you might use your fingers to "hold" an answer.
- Use the judges' example if one was given. It will be scored as a common answer but it's better to answer with the example than waste time thinking of something else if you don't have another answer ready to go.
- Elaborating too much on answers wastes time and is often unnecessary. Elaborations should be clear and concise - for example, "the tennis ball resembles a full moon that might attract howling wolves." Discourage the team from adding unnecessary details - for example, "the yellow tennis ball resembles a yellow full moon that would attract howling wolves during the month of August." Adding some details can score more points; adding too much detail just wastes time.
- Ask questions if you are unsure of the problem. But do not ask unnecessary questions as this will count against your thinking time.