

Spontaneous Problem Coach Training_2, Notes

What is Creativity, slide 9

From Odyssey Academy, Lesson 4, Creativity and Brainstorming, by James (Jim) A. Mouray, PhD
Creativity = Original AND Effective

Original: something new, unexpected, or unique

Effective: applies, addresses, or solves the problem itself

E.g. in response to the Verbal problem, “how do you get to school?”, consider the following responses:

1. “I take the Hogwarts Express with my friend Harry Potter”
2. “I take the train, simple and plain”
3. “My best friend is Harry Potter”

Number 1 cites both a fictional character and a “prop” from the Harry Potter series, and the cited prop (Hogwarts Express) is also a mode of transportation. This is both Original and Effective and would be scored Creative.

Number 2 uses rhyme, but it’s pretty simply and doesn’t really elaborate. Although it is Effective, it is not very Original. This would likely be scored Common.

Number 3 cites a fictional character, but fails to address the intent of the problem; describe how you get to school. Although it is Original, it is not Effective. This would be scored Common.

The Spontaneous Process, slide 12

Do NOT overwhelm your kids in the Holding Room. This is not the time to do last minute drills or cram for how to solve problems. You should have been doing that for all the previous months at every practice. Cramming will just wind them up, make them tense, and focus on scoring well; all of which lowers their ability to be creative (see Advanced Strategies: Motivation at the end of the slides). Instead, breath, relax, loosen up, tell jokes, play, have fun, and let the creative juices start to flow.

The Spontaneous Process Cont., slide 14

* Primary teams will receive a synopsis of their problem and the judges’ comments and ratings (Primary problem is not scored in the traditional sense). This is either handed to the teams before they leave their Spontaneous Room, or can be presented to them at the Primary Awards ceremony which is held separate from the competition’s Closing Ceremonies.

Team Behavior, slide 15

Maintain composure. Do NOT FREAK OUT!!! This is why you prepared for every eventuality! We’ll talk more about Andon when we discuss Advanced Strategies.

Team Behavior, Interacting with the Judges, slide 16

Despite what you may have heard, teams are scored on how well they solve the problem and sometimes on the creativity of their solution or how well they work together as a team. They are NOT scored on how well they interact with the judges, or whether they introduce themselves in poetry, or rap, or by number. THERE IS NO STYLE ELEMENT IN SPONTANEOUS! Just solve the problem, that's usually hard enough.

Understand the Problem, slide 17

Creativity and Works Well Together are scored for the team only while they are solving the problem. But, it doesn't hurt to be nice the rest of the time.

Understand the Problem Cont., slide 19

* Andon is discussed in Advanced Strategies: Andon at the end of the slides

What the Coach Can Do Cont., slide 21

Practice by modeling competition conditions to remove fear of the unknown as a factor. Get the kids familiar with the spontaneous process so they can focus on solving the problem instead of what's going on around them.

General coaches tip, take advantage of the parents of the team members. Use them as judges. On a rotational basis, assign them a week to select a spontaneous problem or two and bring all the necessary materials. Don't let them get away with treating OM as an opportunity for free day care/baby sitting once or twice a week...

Note, practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. There's a book on that, "Practice Perfect: 42 Rules for Getting Better at Getting Better" by Doug Lemov, et al. It is not in KDL but is available for purchase on the internet.

What the Coach Can Do Cont., slide 22

Feedback: this is a chance for you (Coach) to Facilitate the discussion (and model Facilitating behavior for Brainstorming). You (Coach) DO NOT identify what was done well or poorly, or who is having trouble or whose behavior or response should be an exemplary model for the team, the team must do that themselves. You only ask the questions to stimulate the discussion. If something was done poorly do NOT dwell on it but be positive by identifying it as a lesson to learn from and helping the team describe what can be done to do better the next time. Note, it is also an opportunity for you to identify future Drills to strengthen weak skills. DO dwell on what went right and who modeled behavior/problem solving skills that everyone on the team can learn from and try to emulate. But, be sure to praise not the person, but the effort that resulted in a creative response. E.g., "that was a great response, Julie, because you incorporated several creative aspects (e.g., citing a character, using an example that directly answered the question, doing it in rhyme, etc.) in your answer." Do acknowledge when your team performs as expected (e.g., "thank you all for choosing to participate in the problem even if it wasn't your favorite problem type"), but reserve praise for work or effort that was above and beyond what was expected.

Practice using one or two sample spontaneous problems for your first spontaneous practice in order to assess your team's capabilities. New teams will be overwhelmed. Don't worry, there's too much to get the first time out. Look to breaking down the spontaneous experience into smaller bites (drills) in future practices to focus on specific skills. With practice your team will be able to build on the small lessons learned and begin to combine them into the whole process. Experienced teams will fare better, but you should still be able to identify areas for improvement in either new skills to learn, or existing skills to improve (use drills). Based on your initial assessment, tailor your practices to fit the team's needs. New teams should probably do drills to learn spontaneous problem solving basics, or practice without time limits so the team doesn't obsess on the time limit. If they obsess on the "time remaining" they will get tense and their ability to be creative will suffer. Let them get used to the Spontaneous process and solving Spontaneous problems first, then after they become proficient introduce the time limits.

Regardless of your team's level of experience and skills, make sure you are using time limits on your practice Spontaneous problems well before competition so they will be used to it before it's needed.

Verbal Strategies, slide 25

* Creative = Original AND Effective

Verbal Strategies Cont., slide 26

If practicing using old problems that contain the instruction, "... you are not allowed to skip your turn. If one member of the team is stuck, the team is stuck", skip over that instruction. Similarly, if the problem says, "Each of you has 7 cards. You will take turns in order. After you give a response, you will place one of your cards in the container", substitute the new instructions, "Your team has 35 items. After you give a response, you will place one of the items in the container". Lastly if the instructions say, "You will be finished when response time ends or when you have used all of your cards." substitute the new instructions, "You will be finished when response time ends or when you have used all of your items."

Verbal Strategies Cont., slide 28

Malaprop, the unintentional misuse of a word or phrase, often with amusing effect. Named for Richard Brinsley Sheridan's character Mrs. Malaprop, in his play *The Rivals* (1775):

- "Dance a *flamingo*" (instead of *flamenco*)
- "I might just fade into *Bolivian*" (instead of *oblivion*, spoken by Mike Tyson, boxer)
- "He's a man of great *statue* in the city" (instead of *stature*, spoken by then Boston mayor Thomas Menino)
- "We cannot let terrorists and rogue nations hold this nation *hostile*" (instead of *hostage*, spoken by our greatest Presidential malapropist, George W. Bush)

Catachresis, the intentional misuse of a word or phrase for comic effect:

- "We'll burn that bridge when we cross it", a mashup of "we'll cross that bridge when we come to it" and "don't burn your bridges before you cross them".
- "Opportunities like that are far and few between"

- "Mow the beard, shave the grass"
- "Pin the plank, nail my sleeve"

Spoonerism, an error in speech in which corresponding consonants, vowels, or morphemes are switched between two words in a phrase. Commonly heard as slips of the tongue, these juxtapositions can be used intentionally as a play on words:

- "The Lord is a shoving leopard" (the Lord is a loving shepherd)
- "A blushing crow" (a crushing blow)
- "A well-boiled icicle" (a well-oiled bicycle)
- "A nose little cook" (a cosy little nook)

Verbal Strategies Cont., slide 29

Maturity in humor is as distinctive as the sophistication the kids bring to building the props, costumes, and sets for their long term problem presentations. Crude and rudimentary (potty humor) in Division 1, increasingly more complex and nuanced as they advance through the divisions and become older and more mature. Judges are trained to be aware of the level of humor to be expected from the various divisions, but the kids themselves may not be aware that something they think is hilarious may not be perceived as such by the judges.

Hands On Strategies, slide 32

* See Advanced Strategies: Creativity at the end of the slides

Hands On Strategies Cont., slide 35

* Creative = Original AND Effective. For Hands-On problems in general, Effective means that when used, a material must physically contribute to solving the problem (e.g., build a tall tower, build a long bridge, support weight, retrieve items for score from target areas, place items for score in target areas, etc.), **NOT** be merely decorative. Unless, of course, the problem states that appearance of the solution will be taken into consideration as part of "creativity of the solution" as can happen in combination Verbal/Hands-On problems.

Hands On Strategies Cont., slide 37

* Creative = Original AND Effective

Cotton balls. Do NOT fall into the trap of telling your team that "using all the available materials will improve your creativity score". IT WILL NOT. Using the materials creatively will. For example, if building a bridge as long as possible, placing the cotton balls on the bridge does NOT add to the creativity of the solution as the cotton balls are merely decorative and are not applicable to the effectiveness of the solution (building the longest bridge). However, what if you pull those cotton balls into long strands, twist those strands together, then incorporate the twisted strands into making the bridge longer or connecting other materials together???

Verbal/Hands On Strategies Cont., slide 43

* Creative = Original AND Effective

Verbal/Hands On Strategies *Cont.*, slide 44

* Creative = Original AND Effective

Motivation and Creativity, slide 48

Daniel H. Pink, “Drive”, published 2011. Is available in the KDL (Kent District Library).

Teresa M. Amabile, PhD: (born June 15, 1950), an American academic who is the [Edsel Bryant Ford](#) Professor of Business Administration in the Entrepreneurial Management Unit at [Harvard Business School](#). Author of (among others): *Creativity and Learning* (1986), *Creativity in the R & D Laboratory* (1987), *Growing Up Creative* (1989), *How To Kill Creativity* (article in the Harvard Business Review (HBR) 10 Must Reads on Creativity) (2021), *Creativity Under the Gun*, in HBR 10 Must Reads on Creativity (2021).

Teresa M. Amabile PhD, “Growing up Creative”, published 1989. NOT in KDL, but can be purchased used on the internet as I did recently for about \$8. Fantastic insights on nurturing creativity in children and balancing extrinsic motivational demands (evaluation, reward, competition, and restricting choice) which can kill creativity and yet are core to the OM competition process, with the very goal of the program itself which is to foster creativity! It’s not *what* you ask your team to do, it’s *how* you ask them...

Motivation and Creativity *Cont.*, slide 49

From “Growing Up Creative”, by Teresa M. Amabile, PhD. Venn Diagram

Domain skills: the raw materials a child has in a particular “domain” like; dancing, singing, sports, writing, painting, building, etc. Children are born with different degrees of talent, but education and experience can help develop even modest levels of talent, and very talented people still need to hone their skills to become highly skilled. People need basic skills in an area (domain) before they can become creative in it. NOTE: ability in one domain does not necessarily relate to ability in another domain. So, in labeling someone as creative, it is necessary to state the domain in which they are creative.

Creative working and thinking skills: the things that let a talented person become creative in their domain.

- Working Styles: dedication to doing the work well, ability to concentrate effort and attention for long periods of time, ability to abandon unproductive ideas and temporarily put aside stubborn problems, persistence in the face of difficulty, willingness to work hard. In short: **Craftsmanship**.
- Thinking Styles: “Breaking set” – breaking out of old patterns of thinking about something, understanding complexities, keeping options open as long as possible, suspending judgement on an idea (particularly during brainstorming), thinking broadly (seeing relationships between disparate things), remembering accurately, perceiving freshly (looking at things in new ways), using “creative tricks” (make the familiar strange or the strange familiar, play with ideas, investigate paradoxes, “think outside the box”).

- Personality traits: Self disciplined, perseverance, independence, tolerance for unclear situations, nonconformity to society's stereotypes, ability to wait for rewards, self-motivation to do excellent work, willingness to take risks. NOTE, even if these characteristics don't come naturally, they can all be developed.

Intrinsic Motivation: the desire to do something for its own sake, because it is interesting, satisfying, or personally challenging. Intrinsic motivation is defined by; interest, competence, and self determination (the feeling that they have made the choices on how to solve a problem by themselves). There are four main aspects to intrinsic motivation: **love** (even obsession), **dedication, the combination of work and play**, and a **concentration on the activity itself** (ignoring extrinsic motivators like earning money, winning a prize, getting positive recognition, avoiding punishment, meeting a deadline (spontaneous time limits), following someone else's orders, or getting a satisfactory evaluation).

When Domain Skills, Creative Working and Thinking Skills, and Intrinsic Motivation overlap, that's where a child is likely to be at their most creative.

Motivation and Creativity *Cont.*, slide 50

"If/then": Expected behavior. Tell your child, "If you take out the trash then I'll give you a quarter", and they'll never take out the trash again voluntarily.

"Now that": Unexpected treat. Tell your child, "Now that you cleaned your room, why don't we go get pizza for dinner?" and they just might surprise you and clean their room again next weekend. But, don't take them out for pizza again, just treat it as something nice they did for the family. Then, the next time they do it again, consider another unexpected reward. Point is, don't keep them guessing, but leave them grateful when you do something nice in return. Treat them to occasional "random acts of kindness".

Practice, slide 51

From Doug Lemov, Erica Woolway, and Katie Yezzi, 2012, "Practice Perfect". Although written with Education and Business Training as the target, an incredible amount of eye opening material is presented in 42 discrete "rules" that will help you rethink what it means to practice and how to practice effectively. Has insights for both those being taught (your team) as well as those teaching (Coaches). This one was on my "must read" list for over a decade and I finally took advantage of retirement to buy and read a copy. As a coach, don't wait like I did, get a copy soon and rethink how you are leading your team in practice so that you can help them practice better. Rules 1 - 8 (Rethinking Practice), 9 - 14 (How To Practice), 23 - 30 (Feedback), and 31 - 37 (Culture of Practice) are directly applicable to practicing Spontaneous. Boy do I wish I had known better how to handle disruptive, inattentive, unskilled team members back when I had coached!!!

As for practice making permanent, even if you practice (drill) the right thing but do it the wrong way, all you will end up doing is ingraining the wrong behavior as the way to respond to a specific situation. You will become very good at doing the wrong thing. Focus on what needs to

be mastered AND the correct way (most creative way) to do it so that you ingrain the right behavior and that becomes the automatic, default response to a specific situation. Do this through repetition.

Repetition will then improve creativity. Athletes call this “being in the zone”. They know the basic skills they need and have refined them through drills so as to be able to perform them automatically without making a conscious decision to do so. Then, through scrimmaging, they have put those well honed skills to use in a variety of settings so that when they see the setting in competition they will automatically respond. Now, without having to make a conscious decision about what is needed and how to do it, they can react by focusing on how to apply those skills in unexpected ways thus gaining a creative advantage over their opponents.

Reminders, slide 56

If you can't make Spontaneous fun for the kids then you will have failed your primary job as a coach; instilling the motivation in them to want to do Spontaneous, as well as want to do the Odyssey program in general, with all the creativity they are capable of. The easiest way to do this is to create an atmosphere of PLAY with all things OM. “Job satisfaction”, self fulfillment, and empowerment all stem from playing in and enjoying the OM experience while also maximizing the creativity of the teams' solutions. Most of all remember Gustave Flaubert who said, “Success is a consequence and must not be a goal.” OM is a journey, not a destination. How you get there determines the success that comes from your efforts when you arrive at competition and present your solution for score.

* When things go wrong, immediately ask if there is another way to achieve the desired result. Is there a different material that is available that will handle the stress that just destroyed the first material that was used (pivot). Is there another way of doing what the problem requires that uses a different technique (pivot again). Whatever the case, don't panic and start futzing with the original solution. Stay calm, step back, identify what's going wrong, reanalyze the situation, and find another way of solving the problem. Stay Calm and Carry On!!!