



## **"Don't Panic."**

Thanks to Dee Tomczak, *FIRST* Senior Mentor for VA

- The tone you set for your team carries far beyond this season. If deadlines for submissions are given equal importance to the robot project, then the team's focus broadens beyond the robot. Remember, you can pack up a crate of loose parts in February and leave the regional with a working robot (it HAS happened), but if you let the deadlines slide for awards submissions, or hotel arrangements, or grant proposals - even building your crate, then a very wrong message conveys to the students, and missing those deadlines can really cost you.
- Find out who your regional director is. Every state has one, and part of their job is to help you identify and marshal the resources available in your unique community.
- Ask for help from your colleagues. Establish a relationship with your school's administration that will make your life easier in the long run. Know what the procedures are for purchase reimbursements, or travel arrangements, or student activity expenses. Help with the robot project can come from really unexpected places. Ask the art teacher (many of them learned welding in sculpture class). Ask the school custodian to stop by. Many of them are terrific tinkerers, and their support is invaluable for making after-hours work sessions possible.
- Ask for help from your team parents. Don't make excuses for your team parents - and don't be afraid to ask for their help. Invite parents to your team's work sessions - whether or not your students approve. If you can get help from just one of your team parents, that is one more than you have right now.
- Even a "student led" team needs adult guidance. No sane corporation is going to put a \$10,000 grant - or even a \$2,000 grant, in the hands of a 17 year-old.
- You can call your team leaders anything you want, and divide up the work among as many folks as you can, but every team has to cover four main areas of equal responsibility: administration, communication, resource management, and project management. As you work with your students, you will find that strengths in one or another of these areas become apparent. If your team is weak in one of these areas, then look beyond your team members for potential students and mentors to fill in the gap.