



FIRST Robotics Competition Kickoff Workshops
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Mentor Recruitment and Retention

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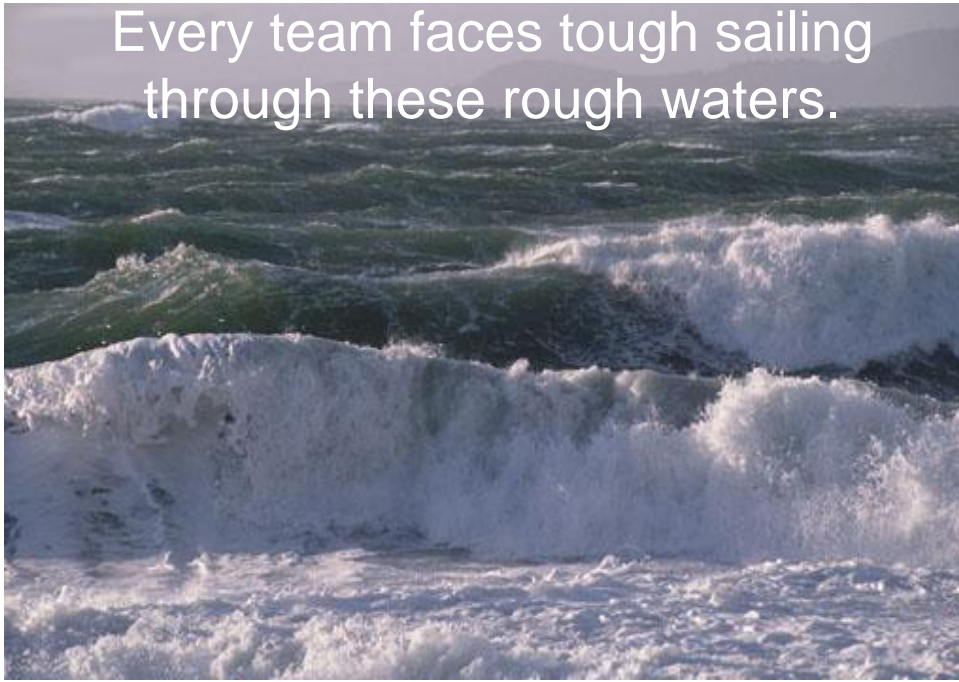
- Kathie Kentfield, kathiek@firstnemo.org
- Co-founder and Director of Non-Engineering Mentor Organization
- www.firstnemo.org
- NEMO provides support to mentors from all FIRST robotics programs in non-engineering areas
- Teams polled: top concern of teams is mentor recruitment and retention

FIRST robotics programs teams
are constantly in a sea of change.



- Team makeup changes from year to year
- Team organization may also change annually
- Game challenge is different every year

Every team faces tough sailing
through these rough waters.



- Each team is unique but shares common attributes – mentors working with students is one of them.



Who's at the helm? Loss of mentors often means loss of team.

- Many teams fold simply because their team leader leaves the team, retires from teaching, etc.
- Schools may require a teacher to be the “club advisor” for insurance purposes
- Lack of engineering mentors may hold back team's progress
- Lack of non-engineering mentors may force the other mentors to take on tasks not suited to them, resulting in burnout

Getting and keeping mentors are within reach with a seaworthy plan.



- Teams can take steps to get the right mentors on the teams and keep them once they are a part of the team

Create your Mentor Plan to sail
there smoothly.



- Teams should consider drafting a Mentor Plan.



Why a mentor plan?

- A mentor plan forces the team to define the mentors' roles, responsibilities, expectations
- A mentor plan encourages the team to determine what types of mentors they need, recruit and interview them to get the best fit
- A mentor plan includes exit strategies that mentors should employ if leaving the team

1. Assists in recruiting mentors



- There are a number of resources you can use to recruit your mentors from... but first the team needs to...

Define goals of team and establish expectations.



- Team organization – how it functions – student-driven? Committee structure?
- Definition of a mentor – is it a “professional” - ie teacher or engineer? Is it also other professionals working with students in their area of expertise? Are parents allowed/encouraged to be mentors (or is a Parent Booster Club in place to support team)?
- What are team goals? (Robot, animation, Chairman’s, marketing, community service, etc.)
- What key personnel are needed to achieve goals?
- Memorandum of Understanding should be drafted to provide guidance to mentors
- Time/Financial requirements should be spelled out (who pays for mentor travel, etc.)



Identify
recruiting
resources and
advertise.

- School – teachers, coaches, support personnel
- Parents – establish communication with them!
- Local businesses – School/Business partnerships; Career Day/Job Shadowing volunteers; Human Resources departments; Chamber of Commerce; Civic organizations
- Local chapters of professional societies
- Local colleges and universities
- Volunteer organizations
- AARP
- Advertise in local newspapers – often have weekly column for volunteer opportunities
- Word of mouth – NETWORK!

Interview!



- Mentor must be a good “fit” to be successful partnership
- Have multiple team members on interview committee – mentors, students, parents
- Ask about expertise, work experience
- Ask about experience working with youth
- Go over Memo of Understanding and ask if there are any questions
- Be sure to communicate the expectations of the team
- Communicate the time/financial commitments and season timeline, include info about competitions and dates
- Explain the benefits of being a FIRST Robotics Program Mentor!

2. Assists in retaining mentors



- Once you've got 'em how do you keep 'em?
- Mentor plan should indicate ways to show appreciation for mentors and how issues will be resolved



Head off problems.

- Address issues promptly; don't hesitate to admit when a mentor "isn't working out"
- Solicit feedback from students and other mentors to head off any problems
- Hold continuous teambuilding sessions to bond mentors and students
- Communicate clearly, often, and in a variety of ways to reach your older and younger team members
- Hold end-of-year reviews with each person on team – find out what went right and how team can improve that person's experience next season.

Recognize
mentors'
contributions.



- Thank mentors often
- Thank company/org they are from; let them know how employee is contributing to team success
- Thank family members
- Invite company & family to competitions
- Be sure to mention mentors in any media releases/interviews
- Presidential Service Awards (<http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov>)
- FIRST Website – volunteer recognition ideas (<http://www.usfirst.org/community/volunteers/>)
- Mentor Recognition Certificate – avail. From Regional Directors or FIRST Senior Mentors
- Thursday, Jan 25, 2007- Thank Your Mentor Day – suggest students prepare a supper or presentation for mentors (<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/wmy2007/index.html>)



Protect against burnout.

- Share work between mentors if possible
- Recognize signs of burnout - When you are on the verge of burnout, you may feel:
Powerless, hopeless, drained, like a candle burning at both ends, frustrated, detached from people and things around you, get little satisfaction from your work, bored, resentment for having too much to do, like a failure, withdrawn, isolated from coworkers and friends, cynical, irritable, anxious
- Plan “fun” activities to do with entire team to relieve stress – take weekend off after ship date OR plan a fun activity to celebrate meeting that deadline. Then take some time away from each other to refresh and regroup. Surprise the team at the next meeting with make-your-own-sundaes. Something fun and unexpected.
- Plan “mentors only” activities



Create your
Mentor Plan
and your team
will make
headway.

- And what if a mentor retires or leaves (and you have advance notice)?
- Be sure to include a section in your plan on exit plans – have each mentor document what they do chronologically as the year progresses.
- Have trainees learning the jobs so they can take them on the following year
- Honor mentors' contributions to the team

Having the wrong mentors
- or no mentors at all -
may sink your ship.



Create a mentor plan.



Choosing the
right mentor –
and keeping
him/her
happy –
equals
smooth
sailing.



Happy mentors = a
happy team!

