

## Awards Panel Discussion - Kathy Laukzemis' Input- MRA Mentor Seminar 2 June 2018

1. Background
  - a. I was a mentor for five years- 2012-2016- with FRC team 2537.
  - b. Have been volunteering with BAA/MRA since 2013 or so.
  - c. This season was my first time judging, I was a Team Attribute judge at the Oxon Hill competition.
  - d. The panel coordinator thought that "impressions of a mentor turned newbie judge" might be useful for this session.
  
2. My first takeaway was surprise at the range of FIRST experience among the judges.
  - a. Some a lot, others were new to FIRST.
  - b. While they were trained, this range of experience is something to think about as your students are prepping for the competition.
  
3. My second takeaway - and my key point - reiterates one of Grant's points.
  - a. Message Message Message. What is your team's story? What makes your team unique? What are you good at and how did you get there ? What are your values (in addition to the FIRST values)? Give me examples that exemplify those values on and off the field.
  - b. Really work with your team to craft that story and then package it into an elevator speech.
  - c. We WANT to find a way to give you an award, help us!!!
  - d. I related an anecdote, describing that this part was the hardest thing for me in judging. I knew some of the teams, having been involved in this community since 2012. I admired and respected them for what they have done. They have great stories! But the students couldn't tell those stories, no matter what questions we asked. Without that, I could not make a case for those teams during judges' deliberations.
  
4. All students on your team should know the story and be able to speak to it .
  - a. It's great experience to be able to talk to a judge- learning how to answer questions, make key points in a concise and clear way is a skill they will need. Coaching all your students to be able to do that is time well spent.
  - b. Teams handle this differently-
    - i. Some teams have designated spokespeople who are trained to present to judges. They know the story and can speak to it.
    - ii. Others are less practiced but that can also be powerful. I related an anecdote about one team who surrounded me and my fellow judge in the pit. They were finishing each other's sentences, vying to tell us more about the team, what they did, what it meant to each of them. We didn't get the story in a practiced message but we saw it in action - their enthusiasm and love for FIRST inspired us.

5. To another of Grant's points, FIRST uses awards to recognize to and to inspire teams. Recognize is obvious, but inspire? I had to think about what that meant, but then it hit me. Team 2537, March 2014. So I related the below anecdote- which , as it turned out, addressed a few of the questions during the discussion time.

At the end of the 2013 season, Team 2537 had been competing for 6 years, with one award in 2010. As we entered the 2014 season, the team did some soul searching and asked itself- what do we want to be? A robot building club- where we put a robot on the field that can compete? Or do we want to try and be an award winning team that embraces the FIRST message, focusing on robots AND outreach.

This was a decision point for the team, and the decision was to change the culture of our team. Led by our Business and Outreach Team lead, the team started a rebranding activity. It addressed everything from increasing our efforts in the community to the color on the shirts, including mission and vision statements, values, a strategic plan, a new logo, new uniforms, and, of course, the Space Unicorn! It was a change in our culture, in priorities and focus and in activities.

Fast forward to the 2014 competition season. After a disappointing day on the field, the team was revitalized by winning the Entrepreneurship Award. The next day they went on to become Finalists. And at the next competition, we had a Dean's List finalist.

These awards were validation that the team was on the right track, and that we could be an award winning team. Winning the Entrepreneurship Award really inspired the team to double down and do better- "what can we do NEXT year?"

So here we are in 2018. Since 2014 the team has sent four Dean's list Finalists to Worlds. In Its first trip to Worlds, in 2017, 2537's alliance won its subdivision. During those years, 2537 won off-season competitions, and a District event. The team won several more Entrepreneurship Awards and one Chairman's award at a District event.

Would that all have happened without that 2014 Entrepreneurship Award? Quite possibly. But I believe that winning that award was a turning point, in that it made the team realize that "we CAN be an award winning team". Had we done all that work and it not been recognized, would we have given up with a "why bother - look at all we did and we still got nothing"? Who knows? But I do know that winning that award motivated and inspired team members to continue on that path and work even harder.

6. This led to a few good discussion points.
  - a. Being competitive for an award is a team decision. It does not just happen by luck. Read the criteria, think about what your team might be competitive for, and focus on that.
  - b. It's okay to tell the judges "we are so proud that we have won the xxx award three years in a row, and that has inspired us to raise our game to focus on

making ourselves competitive for the yyy award” Letting the judges know what you are shooting for and then explaining why you think you are competitive for it is not a bad thing.

- c. As a rookie team, it can be hard to build that culture. It generally takes several years to mature to the point where you are competitive for an award.