

Coaches and Mentors - We need you! And yet, it is a balancing act.

Dear Coaches and Mentors,

Thank you for your commitment to your robotics teams. Your dedication plays a vital role in fostering students' growth and enthusiasm for STEM.

However, sometimes a coach or mentor might get too directly involved. We all know how hard it is to step back and let the kids do things as they find best, when we, with our much broader experience, are sure that the kids' approach is not going to work. We also may be much more aware than the kids that time is ticking away and that the kids really need to concentrate on their tasks.

This can lead to us doing some of the programming, setting up the robot, building or modifying attachments, or constantly telling the kids exactly what to do – like a soccer coach who is yelling instructions at his team from the sidelines during a match.

But that is NOT what we should do.

FIRST prioritizes student-driven innovation, teamwork, and a positive, supportive environment. Coaches and mentors are expected to inspire and guide students while allowing them to make decisions, solve problems, and learn from mistakes. Behaviour that undermines these principles doesn't benefit the kids in any way, either from a learning perspective, behaviour modeling or final scoring at an event.

Yes, an intensively coached team might get a good robot performance score. But ultimately, the team will suffer because if the judges or other volunteers see this much coach involvement, they will not believe that the kids actually did the work, and the team may get marked down in the judging session.

If you get carried away sometimes – you nag your team to get things done, you shout instructions during the robot game, you carry the robot because you think that the kids are too slow, you snap at event volunteers who ask you to stop – please remember that the kids need to do all the work. Your job is to remove major obstacles, to ensure students have ownership of their work, and to model Gracious Professionalism.

Here

<https://www.firstinspires.org/resource-library/fll/challenge/challenge-and-resources>

(under “judging”)

you can find the “Participation Rules”, which, amongst other things, spell out

All work presented at events is the work of the children on the team.

And even

Individuals interfering with, excessively instructing, prompting, or heckling a team or volunteer may be asked to leave.

And

Individuals and/or teams who fail to abide by the Participation Rules may be ineligible for awards at a tournament.

Thank you for your understanding and your continued efforts to support your teams. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at uleslie@firstpartners.org with any questions or concerns. (Yes, I am a coach, too - and I have caught myself sometimes carrying the robot and nagging at my team...)

Uschi Leslie, Program Delivery Partner