

MOCK TRIAL FOR DUMMIES

(Troy's Tips Volume 2)

This really is not rocket science. Anyone can be a good coach if you just understand some basic strategies and rules. This time I have five general tips not directed to anyone in particular, five tips for students and six tips for coaches (remember attorneys go to law school because they can't do math). I have tried not to repeat anything from my first list. The most rare thing in the world (especially in law) is an original idea. Therefore, some of these tips are blatantly stolen from others in an attempt to avoid reinventing the wheel. I hope they are somewhat helpful or at least mildly entertaining.

GENERAL

1. See if the school paper will write a story about mock trial to get the students fired up about the process.
2. Invite parents to a late season practice and then hit them up to either help with transportation to regionals and/or state or to help with really important things like coordinating lunch for students during regional competition.
3. If you have a criminal case make sure the students realize that ideally the prosecution should NEVER win because the case should be balanced close to 50/50 which is well short of the "beyond a reasonable doubt" needed for a conviction. Drill into their heads that it is performance not winning on the merits that counts.
4. This is half law and half drama, don't skip the drama—actors can make killer witnesses so raid the drama department!
5. Keep it light, keep it fun with pregame rituals (guilty, guilty, guilty).

STUDENTS

1. Witnesses: read the material, rinse, repeat. Learn your lines and be ready for your close-up.
2. Witnesses, who is your character? Develop a personality—age, occupation, attitude, and emotional state.
3. Attorneys: know what game you are playing.
 - a. Direct exam play catch or throw batting practice. Do NOT play ping-pong.
 - b. Cross-examination is dodge ball—fire when ready!
4. Attorneys doing direct and cross, coordinate with your closer, make sure you hit the points they need for their argument. Your closer is typically your best attorney like any anchor leg.
5. Alternates are great and can really save you. Understudies do perform on occasion so keep them involved.

COACHES

1. Don't have the same person doing the direct and cross of the same witness, it sounds like a good idea but really screws up practices.
2. Designate someone as the prop person, in charge of stopwatches, exhibits, judges' packets, etc., so you know who is responsible for this stuff.

3. The first meeting/practice have students get out calendars. Make sure then who has conflicts with the competition date so you can concentrate on the people who can be there for you. You may lose an important student, but better to know up front then two weeks before competition.
4. Create a tryout script to have students read (only about 2 minutes at most). I use a closing argument. You should have about 4 of these and rotate them so no student ever has to tryout using the same script twice.
5. Have the drama coach sit in on the tryouts if possible; they can identify who is a good performer (good witness).
6. Like any team sport/activity, nobody is above the team and attendance at practice is critical—cogs in a wheel.