



Mock trial coaching

By **Amelia Ikin**
Law student at UWA

During 2017, I had the privilege of coaching three of the 127 teams in the Mock Trial Competition. As an enthusiastic participant in the Competition during my final years of high school, I was excited to return to my school to assist the younger students.

Having the experience of being a student in the Competition gave me an interesting perspective and assisted me in understanding what is desired in a coach. Although watching the trial without being able to participate was difficult at first, seeing the students grow and improve made this absolutely worthwhile.

Throughout my year of coaching, I have learnt many things which can be useful for first-time coaches:

1. Work with the teacher and school, they will be your best point of contact to ensure your time as a coach is efficient and beneficial. From everything from gaining a Working With Children Check to organising meeting times, the school is grateful for your assistance and will ensure you are prepared for coaching.
2. Guide the students but don't do the work for them. Although it can be tempting to take over writing an

opening or closing address, this will be detrimental to the team in the long run.

3. Assist the students in learning from mistakes, while also congratulating them on things they did well. This can be achieved through having a chat or writing an email to the team after each trial.
4. Ensure that all students, not just the barristers and solicitor, are aware of the trial theory. As a coach watching the trial, the worst thing that can happen is a witness saying something entirely contradictory to their barrister. This can be prevented through spending one meeting pre-trial on case theory, focusing on the main points the team hopes to prove.
5. Court room etiquette is something the students have no experience in and as reinforced by many of the judges, is a vital element of the Competition. Ensure that time is spent teaching participants the order of a trial, when to stand or sit down and common things to avoid in the courtroom.

Overall, the greatest lesson I have learnt through being a coach is how rewarding it is to watch your students learn from mistakes and show confidence in the courtroom. Seeing our youngest team, the Year 10's, get into the top four teams of the Competition was an incredible effort and reinforces the fact that hard work often prevails over trial experience.

Undoubtedly, the highlight of coaching was when our closing barrister was asked a difficult question which we had not discussed a response to. Without breaking a sweat, she began her answer with, "With respect your Honour" and then gave a concise response which was fully consistent with the team's case theory. At that point, all the hours put in as a coach were worth it.

Being a coach in the Mock Trial Competition is an excellent experience and I would thoroughly advise ex-competitors, current students and law graduates to participate in 2018.

