

STEM SESSION TRANSCRIPT

MAY, ENGINEERING

Jenny Kopach

Hi I'm Jenny Kopach, CEO of Science Olympiad and I'm so excited to be part of the final month of MY SO for the 2020-2021 Science Olympiad season. As you know, May is always a big month for us. A month when we host our National Tournament and the season wraps up. For May, we thought there would be more perfect topic for the lesson plans, activities, STEM Session & STEM Showdown than Engineering, one of the most vital letters in the STEM alphabet.

One of my passions is breaking down barriers and bridging gaps in STEM, but I've noticed the Science community still struggles with moving the needle on disparity. Women and people of color are still vastly underrepresented in the sciences, but mostly in engineering. At Science Olympiad, we give a great deal of thought in providing experiences and opportunity for those interested in STEM. We feel that by giving students the opportunity to choose their Science Olympiad events and topics, we create a platform on which they can display their talents. I hope to work with many of you during this upcoming Science Olympiad season to make our program more impactful & inviting, and to expand its role as one of the largest and most successful STEM and CTE workforce development programs in the nation.

Speaking of success, I'm very lucky to be able to introduce two incredible women in STEM today. Both are Science Olympiad alums and both combine two talents we don't talk enough about - engineering and entrepreneurship. There's plenty of focus on getting kids into STEM and CTE careers, but there's little discussion about taking an idea and turning it into a business. We're hoping that both Tish and Shinjini inspire you today to follow your dreams and become a CEO yourself. So first, let me introduce you to someone who's been inspiring me lately - Tish Scolnik, CEO of GRIT Freedom Chairs. Tish saw a need in the market and used her mechanical engineering background to design a better wheelchair for all terrains. Some say it's the mountain bike of wheelchairs. She built her company from a startup to a force in the accessibility market. Let's hear from Tish now.

Tish Scolnik

Hi there! I'm Tish Scolnik, and I'm the CEO of GRIT and I'm a proud Science Olympiad alumna. I had the great fortune of getting involved in Science Olympiad in high school. My older brother had been a Science Olympiad competitor, so I had grown up attending his events. I still remember the New York State statewide competition, and my events back in my Science Olympiad days were Disease Detectives, which I've been thinking about a lot these days as we've been making our way through this pandemic. I also was a big fan of Write It Do It - such a fun event. I can still close my eyes and picture some of those crazy pipe cleaner contraptions that my partner had to describe to me and I had to put together.

I studied technical engineering at MIT - I was really inspired by my Science Olympiad days to pursue a career in technology and engineering. I got to MIT and wasn't quite sure exactly what my major would be but I knew I was in the right place. I had an interest in medicine that I kind of got from my interest in disease detectives, and I also had worked on my hometown ambulance corps when I was in high school. I fell into a class seminar on wheelchair design and got really passionate about the opportunity to use my engineering skills to help people with limited mobility to be able to help get around better. Whether it's for getting to work or to school or it's just being able to get around outside and go for a hike. So I ended up working with a couple of my classmates in college and the instructor of the course



and we came up with this concept it's called the Grit Freedom Chair. It's a lever-propelled wheelchair that uses bigger upper body muscles so it's more ergonomic when you're pushing and the physics allows you to change your gear ratios depending on where on the levers you're pushing.

It's been a wild ride for the past few years - getting our startup off the ground, getting our first round of manufacturing done, working with vendors and now kind of switching gears into sales and marketing. We're growing really rapidly - we've got customers all over the country and it's been really exciting to use those engineering skills in such a meaningful way to be able to help people do all those activities outdoors that a lot of us take for granted.

I'm super excited to see the first virtual Science Olympiad competition coming up this year. I can still remember a lot of crazy nights in the time leading up to the competition and some really great memories with teammates of mine. And I actually, believe it or not, found my Science Olympiad Team shirt when I recently moved across the country and was unpacking. I'm thinking of all you that are competing this year and I hope you all really enjoy it.

Jenny Kopach

Tish that was wonderful - I'm so proud that you're a Science Olympiad alum. I'd encourage everyone to check out her company at gogrit.us. Next up is an engineer by degree who turned her skillset into a powerhouse media company using her platform as a sought-after speaker to empower young people to follow their own path to success and not let anything hold them back. Please welcome my friend Shinjini Das of the Das Media Group.

Shinjini Das

Hi Science Olympiad students! My name is Shinjini Das, and I am the CEO and Founder of the Das Media Group, which essentially is a media platform to motivate you to become a go-getter. What is a go-getter? A go-getting honestly is you and me. A go-getter is someone who has a goal and who makes the first move to go get that goal. It is not someone who waits for life to come to them. It's someone who literally makes the first move to go get your goal. And guess what? You are a go-getting and I'm a go-getter too. How do I know this? Because I was exactly in your place in middle school.

I'm a proud alumni of Fulton Science Academy, a private school now, but when I was there it was a charter school. All throughout middle school, sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade, age eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, that entire time I was actually in Science Olympiad. A very, very proud member. A very, very excited member of Experimental Design. Honestly that's probably my most memorable event - I did some others, but that really stands out to me for a couple of reasons. When we think about Experimental Design, you're given all these strange materials to create an experiment and write up a lab report in at the time, 60 minutes, and you have to work in a team and you have to solve a problem. If you think about it, that is entrepreneurship except the only addition is that you have to make money in entrepreneurship, which is my life today.

How do you sort of monetize media? How do you monetize content? How do you make money, and ultimately how do you motivate people by doing that to take action to better their lives, self-help etc, etc, and honestly to this day, I'm 29 now, Science Olympiad and that time in Experimental Design - I won fourth place in state with my team and a lot of different medals and awards - that is who I am today. I am a proud industrial engineer from Georgia Tech, I'm a proud Science Olympiad alumna, and that quality of how do you sort of create experiments and monetize that, that's all I'm doing today as a media entrepreneur. So I encourage you all to start businesses. I encourage you all to be go-getters. I encourage you all to involve science in every part of your life because guess what? That's what Science Olympiad teaches us to do. We are problem solvers, we are Science Olympiad enthusiasts. I wish you all the very best today and in the future and I really hope that you continue being go-getters who really make the first move to go get your goals in science, math, technology, entrepreneurship, all these different exciting assets in America and beyond.



I am speaking to young women here today. I encourage you to pursue science. I encourage you to pursue engineering. I'm a proud industrial engineer. Entrepreneurship, build a technology platform like I'm doing my own media platform, because we need young women scientists and engineers in this country today. Thank you so much for having me here today Jenny, I am so appreciative. Thank you so much go Science Olympiad.

Jenny Kopach

Shinjini that was amazing - no wonder you have 170,000 followers on Twitter. Your journey really exemplifies the Science Olympiad alumni spirit. You took what you learned in the program and applied it to your leadership skill set, empowering others along the way. I hope that like Tish & Shinjini, you'll take what you learned in Science Olympiad and in MY SO and use that as a launch pad for further exploration. Let your interests guide you and don't let anyone tell you what you should be when you grow up. You get to decide, and I just hope that Science Olympiad helps you light up the pathway of your choice.

Remember that all MY SO lesson plans and resources from this season are available for download anytime. You will have nine new challenges ready for Science Olympiad come fall of 2021, and I hope that you'll join us on our next chapter. Thank you to all the participants who have played along with MY SO this year and also to all of the selfless volunteers who provide time and talent by writing tests and activities and starring in our STEM Session videos. Have a great summer and keep learning. See you in September!