

In 2014, a team member realized that he would not be able to attend the Buckeye Regional due to financial strain. After finding out about his situation, someone stepped in to ensure that the student's costs were covered. He is someone who believes that every student should have the opportunity to attend competitions. Someone who, as our team describes him, is "the perfect mixture of teacher and friend." Someone who drives us to reach for new heights through his encouraging words and actions. This "someone" is our coach: James Lonardo.

James has taught at Stuyvesant High School since 1984 and officially became coach of StuyPulse in 2003. When he first joined, he only wanted to facilitate the logistics of the team. However, with each passing year, James became increasingly fascinated with robotics and brought his expertise in technical drawing and CAD to our students. Both skills proved to be extremely useful and guided our robot designs to a much higher level.

After watching students become better engineers and better people throughout their four years on StuyPulse, James was determined to encourage more to join. With his help, StuyPulse grew from a team of 15 members to more than 100 members today. He motivates us to become more ambitious in our designs and the execution of those designs. As the only mentor with a technical certification—without him we can't use our machines—James stays with us and gives us his time so we can build our best bot—even if it means receiving no payment for his overtime work. He makes sure that other mentors allow us to make mistakes instead of doing things for us so we learn from our errors. Aside from organizing all essential forms, such as medical forms and trip forms, he goes the extra mile and drives our crucial tools to and from the NYC Regional each year. Without James, we wouldn't even be able to compete!

James' involvement expands our team's reach beyond the school. From neighborhood book sales to robot demonstrations at places like the TriBeCa Film Festival and the World Science Fair to the China Robotics Challenge, you'll always spot his familiar countenance cheering us on. In addition, James actively advocates for *FIRST* so that STEM education becomes more accessible. For instance, he invited the lieutenant commander of the U.S Coast Guard and his students to our school for a mini-competition where robots had to complete various tasks in a water-filled tub. James organized FLL scrimmages at our school cafeteria and, three years ago, an FTC scrimmage to help teams prepare for competition!

According to James, his favorite part of being our coach is “giving [us] a hard time—I mean, working with [us].” He delights in making us laugh by claiming he forgot to register for a regional or that we got red-carded. His lightheartedness reinforces his belief that our ultimate goal lies not in winning, but to reap the benefits competitions bring us—teamwork and a positive learning experience.