

PROBLEM SOLVING

Competency Development Guide

Problem Solving Defined:

The ability to define a problem, not just the symptoms of a problem, generate alternatives, evaluate and select the appropriate alternatives and implement solutions to the problem.

Source: mindtools.com

Fortunately, we know more about how to solve problems effectively today than we have ever known before. By practicing the approaches, skills, and techniques used by other successful leaders, you can dramatically increase your ability to solve virtually any problem that comes across your desk.

Source: Leadership and Problem Solving: The BizLibrary Collection

No matter what your title on the business card, your real job is problem solver. Good leaders don't react to problems with anger or frustration, they look upon problems as the essential defining skill area of their work.

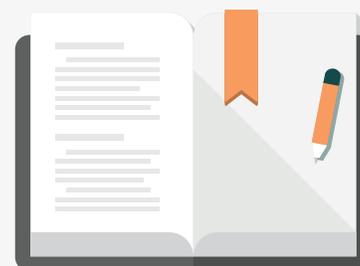
Whether you're a leader or not, you'll make yourself more valuable at your organization by becoming extremely effective at solving any problem that is brought to you, large or small.

Remember, you are a knowledge worker; you work with your mind. Your productivity can only be measured by your results, and what stands between you and those results is always a problem or a roadblock of some kind.

When you are solving problems, be sure to avoid 'blocking assumptions'. These assumptions may not be true, and they interfere with your ability to think clearly.

Top 5 Blocking Assumptions:

1. That there actually IS a problem. Sometimes there is no problem - just facts. For example, the market is down, or interest rates are higher. These are facts, not problems.
2. You are the person who has to solve the problem. Maybe this problem belongs in someone else's court, not yours.
3. No one has already solved the problem somewhere else. Ask, "Who else may have had this problem and come up with a solution to it?"
4. You have to solve the problem by some deadline. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself. Some problems can be delayed or deferred.
5. You must completely solve the problem with a single solution. There are usually many different ways to solve a problem, including not doing anything at all.



"If I had 60 minutes to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes defining it, and 5 minutes solving it."

-Albert Einstein

"Most people spend more time and energy going around problems than in trying to solve them."

-Henry Ford, Founder of Ford Motor Company

"People who believe a problem can be solved tend to get busy solving it."

-William Raspberry, Pulitzer Prize winning Columnist

"Your ability to solve problems and make good decisions is the true measure of your skill as a leader."

-Brian Tracy, Author

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Development Activities and Suggestions

There is a systematic method of problem solving that is used by the most effective executives in almost every organization. It is easy to learn and apply, and it is incredibly effective in helping you overcome obstacles and achieve your goals.

10 Steps to Effective Problem Solving

1. Define your problem or goal clearly in writing. The more clearly you define your problem or goal, the more likely it is that you will find an answer or solution.
2. Once you have defined your problem clearly, ask "What else is the problem?" Never be satisfied with a single definition of a problem.
3. Restate the problem to make it easier to solve. If you settle for a quick definition of the problem, it could lead you down the wrong path.
4. Determine all the possible causes of the problem. Ask the brutal questions.
5. Determine all the possible solutions to this problem. Then force yourself to ask, "What else is the solution?"
6. Make a decision! Any decision is usually better than no decision at all.
7. Assign responsibility. Who exactly is going to carry out each part of the decision?
8. Set a deadline. Set a schedule for reporting on progress.
9. Implement the plan.
10. Check and review later to see if the solution was successful. Did you get the expected result? Be prepared to implement your Plan B if your first solution doesn't work. Always have a backup.

The biggest problem that a company usually experiences is low sales, leading to low revenues and decreased cash flow. When we ask, "What is the problem?" Our clients will say, "Our sales are too low."

We then encourage them to **expand the definition of the problem**. We ask, "What else is the problem?" The answers we eventually arrive at change the entire nature of the solution and the proposed action.

This exercise can go on and on. Its importance is simple. **If you settle on the wrong definition of the problem, you will go off in the wrong direction to solve the problem** and eventually have to come back and start over.

PROBLEM SOLVING FACTS



American workers rank "dead last" out of 18 industrial nations when it comes to problem-solving skills.



In a recent survey - well over 30% of companies listed "problem solving" as one of the highest ranked wants and needs in their business.

SOURCE: FastCompany.com and Computing.co.uk

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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

Summary

When it comes to problem solving, you must put aside ego and preconceived notions, it's important to do all of your problem solving based on facts alone. Remember, that you don't have to solve problems alone. Be sure to involve your team or leadership when a problem seems especially daunting.

Seek out ways to practice this important core competency to increase your value to your team and your workplace at-large.

Recommended Resources from The BizLibrary Collection

Leadership and Problem-Solving

Managing for Success: More Than One Solution

LEAD NOW: Problem Solving

Uncovering the Root Problem

To preview these courses and more, [request a demo today!](#)

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USES LOGIC:

Uses rigorous logic and methods to solve difficult problems with effective solutions.

GETS CURIOUS:

Probes all fruitful sources for answers to questions and facts about situations.

DIGS DEEPER:

Looks beyond the obvious and doesn't stop at the first answers.

Can see hidden problems.

ANALYZES WELL:

Has excellent ability to analyze honestly.

