

Problem-Solving Skills

The fortunes of an organization often depend on the quality of the decisions made at every level. Despite this reality, employees receive little or no formal training in problem-solving, and their organizations tend to treat it as if it is less important than other things. Problems that go unsolved, however, have lasting impacts. This One Page Coach® storyboard provides a simple methodology or framework for general problem-solving in four simple steps: PREPARE, ASSESS, SOLVE, and REVIEW. The continuous-improvement model is illustrated to the right.

1. PREPARE



Identify the real problem.

2. ASSESS



Evaluate alternative options.

3. SOLVE



Discover the optimal solution.

4. REVIEW



Review the quality of the solution.

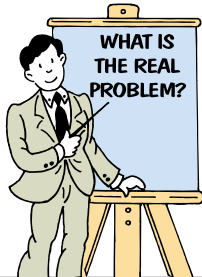


1.

PREPARE

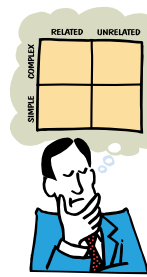
► Recognize and specify the problem.

- ✓ Identify the background to the problem and the circumstances in which it arose.
- ✓ Focus on the facts—not on guesses and assumptions.
- ✓ Collect as much information as possible, including the thoughts and comments of people who are directly involved.
- ✓ Write out a specific statement that describes the problem, without assuming what the solution might be.



► Define the problem.

- ✓ Decide what kind of problem you are trying to solve.
- ✓ Evaluate whether it is simple and routine, well-defined, and unrelated to other areas.
- ✓ Evaluate whether it is complex, vaguely defined, and highly related to other issues.
- ✓ Assess whether the problem is related to the status quo, or related to improvements.



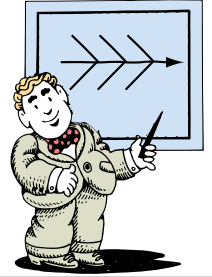
► Break the problem into pieces.

- ✓ To understand any problem, it helps to break it into pieces, like the layers of an onion:
 - ☞ The top layer (the visible and tangible part of the problem as it is presented, often seen through symptoms).
 - ☞ The second layer (the direct underlying issues that give rise to the problem).
 - ☞ The third layer (the indirect underlying issues that give rise to the problem, where the real cause is often found).



► Collate the data and review it.

- ✓ Collate the hard facts and data that have been obtained.
- ✓ Use appropriate methods to illustrate the problem, such as:
 - ☞ flowcharts
 - ☞ fishbone diagrams
 - ☞ "multiple-why" charts.



2.

ASSESS

► Search for ideas/solutions.



- ✓ Use techniques to generate ideas about how the problem can be solved.
- ✓ Utilize brainstorming or similar idea-generating techniques.
- ✓ Maintain a positive, encouraging environment free of negative comment or barriers so people can build on each other's ideas.
- ✓ Do not evaluate any ideas until the creative process has been exhausted.

► Select the most appropriate solution.

- ✓ Based on careful analysis, progressively reject solutions that do not address the real cause of the problem and that do not satisfy the criteria.
- ✓ Use a multi-voting process (such as the Delphi technique) to test support. Beware of group-think).
- ✓ Aggressively evaluate the chosen solution for practicality and fit (play devil's advocate to test robustness).
- ✓ Consider whether a pilot trial of the solution is necessary.



► Evaluate the ideas and solutions.



- ✓ Once all the ideas have been exhausted, evaluate each idea to determine the best solution.
- ✓ To aid comparison, use analysis techniques such as: Pareto analysis, force-field analysis, decision trees, and "six hat" thinking.

► Implement the solution.

- ✓ Develop a plan of action to implement the specific resource needs and where to get them.
- ✓ Formulate strategies to deal with any roadblocks and barriers (including human barriers).
- ✓ Organize any new learning for individuals who will be affected by the chosen solution.



4.

REVIEW

► Evaluate the chosen solution.



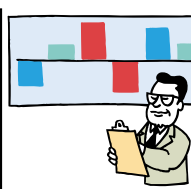
- ✓ Carefully supervise the implementation of the solution.
- ✓ Monitor progress to ensure that it is carried out as planned.
- ✓ Invite feedback and comment on the solution.

► Assess the impacts of the solution.



- ✓ Assess the impact of the proposed solution in tangible terms.
- ✓ Use a consistent methodology to evaluate the solution.
- ✓ Where negative impacts have been discovered, develop a plan to tackle these as soon as possible.

► Assess the real benefits, and document.



- ✓ After a reasonable amount of time, evaluate the real and tangible benefits that have accrued by implementing the chosen solution, in real terms (e.g., time saved, frustration lowered, morale improved, costs saved, etc.).
- ✓ Fully document the solution in clear language to ensure that everyone understands what has changed in the process, and why.
- ✓ Consider the implementation of ongoing problem-solving mechanisms to improve organizational performance, such as focus groups.

Problem-Solving: Template

