

SOLVING PROBLEMS: A UNIQUE THREE STEP PROCESS

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Everyday you and I must solve problems, both large and small. And everyday we use the same process—or no process—for getting answers. Usually we stumble around in a thick fog, hoping we come up with something that works as a reward for



our time, energy, and confusion. We may actually find solutions, but are they the BEST solutions? Are they the solutions that optimally serve our employees, our companies, our families, and ourselves?

Consider the last problem you needed to solve. Maybe that was yesterday, this morning, or just a few minutes ago.

Whatever and whenever it was, how did you reach a conclusion? An answer? A strategy for moving forward? How did you get there, and

were you satisfied? Or did you simply breathe a sigh of relief and run?

People in management and leadership positions are expected to solve problems. It's one of the big reasons you get paid. Yet few of us really know how to proactively approach a problem to reach a viable, reasonable, superior solution. If this describes YOU, why not start the New Year on a fresh note and attack your professional and personal problems from a different perspective? A couple of years ago one of MY teachers passed a golden nugget on to ME. Now I want to pass it on to YOU. Integrate the following three critical steps that can lead YOU to better answers:

Step1. ASSESS

The very first thing you need to do is hold up a mirror to your face to see yourself as you really are. Not as you wish to be, not as you delude yourself to be, but who you truly are. Today. This minute. Who are you? What do you like about yourself? What do you dislike? Face the whole of you. Second, ponder how others see you. What strengths and weaknesses do they see in you? How would they describe you? Keep in mind that managers frequently don't perceive themselves as other people perceive them.

Third, dig into your personal history. What were you like as a child? What was important to you at age 5? Age 10? 20? 25? And so on...How were you influenced by your parents or the people who raised you? What is your world view and how did you acquire it? What kinds of decisions were you making at various stages of your life? What kinds of problems were you solving? How did you make decisions and solve problems as a child? As an adolescent? As a young adult? How do you deal with them now? How did your teachers influence you? Your coaches? What lessons did you learn along the way? Figure out how you got to where you are today.

Fourth, mentally walk through the different buckets that comprise your life: physical health, mental health, the spiritual part of you, the financial, your career, relationships with family, friends, and co-workers, volunteer work, etc. Assess your energy level, your stress level, your ability to cope with change. Assess your ability to ask for help and support. Do you even know what you need and want from others? Determine what is working and not working for you. Are you going in a direction that will bring you fulfillment and peace of mind? Get in touch with all of this.

Step 2. OWN

This step asks you to take responsibility for everything in your life. Yes, everything. While you may not have created something initially, you need to deal with it as an adult. M. Scott Peck, the late psychiatrist and famous author, declared that we have mental health to the extent that we are willing to look at the truth about ALL aspects of our lives: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Denial doesn't serve you or the people you lead. Face it head-on. Look it square in the eye. Owning something sad or frustrating or terrible takes a lot of the power away from it. Sort of like letting the air out of a balloon...

Owning our choices and their subsequent consequences can be tough for many folks. When we make a choice that doesn't work out well, we want to shun responsibility. We don't want others to think it was our fault. Admit your failures, and sometimes publically too. While nobody is perfect, learn to make better choices starting now. Know that your thoughts determine your choices. So you need to evaluate your thoughts in order to make wiser choices.

Maybe you are avoiding making certain choices. Is that true? If so, exactly what are you avoiding? Do you understand the pay-offs that you get by avoiding them? You wouldn't be avoiding making those particular choices if you weren't getting something out of it. Something like a false sense of security, comfort in knowing you didn't rock the boat, financial gain, revenge, keeping the peace. But in the long run you only delay what has to be done. Own the fact that you haven't made the choices you know you must make, and commit to making them today.

Step 3. ACT

This step is a call to move forward. To get unstuck, even in a small way. Make that necessary decision. Challenge your management team. Motivate your staff. Revise out-dated protocols. Heal a relationship. Go to your child's concert despite the nudge to work late for the fifth night this week. Schedule an appointment for your yearly physical exam. Call the friend whose friendship you miss. Just do it. What are you waiting for? Maybe you won't have tomorrow. Do it now. What will be the ramifications if you don't? Who loses?

Ignore the past. Step out of your fear. Resist the temptation to blame someone else if you make a mistake. Shed shame. Learn from old guilt. Refuse victim mode. Avoid analysis paralysis. These are stumbling blocks that prevent you from taking the action you need to take. Just jump. See what happens. Trust yourself enough to believe that you can handle the results. As a manager and leader, you are called to act. As a spouse, partner, and/or parent, you are called to act. As a member of a community, you are called to act. Playing it safe is not your purpose. Act to make a difference in the lives of others as well as your own.

In my work as an executive coach I witness a great deal of internal and external stagnation in clients. Much of that stagnation seems to come from thought patterns developed in childhood and/or adolescence. These thought patterns are often unhealthy, outdated, useless, or nonsensical. And yet my clients, functioning as executives/managers of organizations, continue to carry them on a daily basis and allow them to dictate the kinds of decisions they make. They spend a lot of time wondering why they don't get the results they desire, the satisfaction they crave, and the joy they deserve. They don't get what they want because they're relying on old tools that don't work for THEM. You have to build new tools. But first you have to know who you are at the core.



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