

SOFT SKILLS - PROBLEM SOLVING

When employers talk about problem-solving skills, they are often referring to the ability to handle difficult or unexpected situations in the workplace and even complex business challenges. Organisations rely on people who can assess both kinds of situations and calmly identify solutions. Such skills are traits that enable you to do that. While problem-solving skills are valued by employers, they are also highly useful in other areas of life like relationship building and day-to-day decision making.

What Are Problem-Solving Skills?

Problem-solving skills help you determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem-solving is often identified as its own separate skill, there are other related skills that contribute to this ability. Some key problem-solving skills include:

- Active listening
- Analysis
- Research
- Creativity
- Communication
- Dependability
- Decision making
- Team-building

Problem-solving skills are important in every career at every level. As a result, effective problem solving may also require industry or job-specific technical skills. For example, a registered nurse would need active listening and communication skills when interacting with patients but would also need effective technical knowledge related to diseases and medications. In many cases, a nurse would require to know when to consult a doctor regarding a patient's medical needs as part of the solution.

Examples Of Problem-Solving Skills

To solve a problem effectively, you would likely use a few different skills. Here are a few examples of skills you may use when solving a problem.

Research

Researching is an essential skill related to problem solving. As a problem solver, you are required to be able to identify the cause of the issue and understand it fully. You can begin to gather more information about a problem by brainstorming with other team members, consulting more experienced colleagues or acquiring knowledge through online research or courses.

Analysis

The first step to solving any problem is to analyse the situation. Your analytical skills might help you understand problems and effectively develop solutions. You would also need analytical skills during research to help distinguish between effective and ineffective solutions.

Decision-making

Ultimately, you would require to make a decision about how to solve problems that arise. At times (and with industry experience), you may be able to make a decision quickly. Solid research and analytical skills can help those who have less experience in their field. There may also be times when it is appropriate to take some time to craft a solution or escalate the issue to someone more capable of solving it.

Communication

When identifying possible solutions, you would require to know how to communicate the problem to others. You would also require to know what communication channels are the most appropriate when seeking assistance. Once you find a solution, communicating it clearly would help reduce any confusion and make implementing a solution easier.

Dependability

Dependability is one of the most important skills for problem-solvers. Solving problems in a timely manner is essential. Employers highly value individuals they can trust to both identify and then implement solutions as fast and effectively as possible.

How To Improve Your Problem-Solving Skills?

There are several methods you can use to improve your problem-solving skills. Whether you are searching for a job or currently working, improving your problem-solving skills and associated abilities would help make you a strong candidate and employee.

- **Acquire more technical knowledge in your field.** Depending on your industry, it may be easier to solve problems if you have a strong working technical knowledge. You can gain more technical knowledge through additional coursework, training or practice.
- **Seek out opportunities to solve problems.** By putting yourself into new situations, you are more likely to be exposed to opportunities to solve problems. You may find there are opportunities to volunteer for new projects in your current role, on another team or outside the workplace for another organisation.
- **Do practice problems.** Practice and role-play can be useful tools when learning to develop your problem-solving skills. You can find professional practice books for your industry and problem-solving scenarios online. Practice how you might solve those problems and determine if your potential solutions are viable.

For example, in customer service, you might find a scenario like, “How would you handle an angry customer?” or “How do you respond when a customer asks for a refund?” Practicing how you might handle these or other scenarios common in your industry can help you call upon solutions quickly when they arise on the job.

- **Observe how others solve problems.** You may have colleagues who are skilled problem solvers. Observing how those colleagues solve problems can help you improve your own skills. If possible, ask one of your more experienced colleagues if you can observe their techniques. Asking relevant questions can be helpful in applying them in your own career.