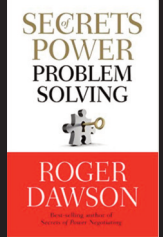# Skillsoft

Secrets of Power Problem Solving

Book by Roger Dawson   Published by Career Press | © 2011

Synopsis

The workspace can be an incredibly chaotic environment. With so many conflicting styles, personalities, and priorities at play, it's inevitable that some issues will arise. To keep moving forward, it's imperative that companies fix these problems quickly and effectively.

Secrets of Power Problem Solving (Career Press, © 2011) provides the framework and skills that businesspeople need to create a more effective workspace, free of both money- and people-related problems. This book will show you how to:

- identify problems and the tools needed to solve them
- brainstorm, understand, and follow your gut to find a solution
- discover and hone your problem-solving skills to make bold decisions for your business leadership

The key concepts of *Secrets of Power Problem Solving* can be distilled into the following practices:

Understanding that All Problems Fall into Two Categories

Most problems usually have to do with people or money. Once you've figured out the source of your problem, you can apply the appropriate tools and tactics that will work best to solve it.

Using Different Tools and Tactics to Solve Problems

Knowing when and how to attack a problem is imperative to keep balance in the workplace. Everything from timing to technique can affect the outcome and solution.

Using Logic and Intuition in Problem Solving

Understanding that you can follow your gut or choose more logical methods allows you to be open minded about the problems you face, and how you can work to solve them.

Combining Your New Skills to Become a Great Problem Solver

Once you've explored the tactics and tools for problem solving, and analyzed problems to go deeper into a specific situation, you can combine this knowledge to become a great problem solver within your business and personal life.

> "...stop focusing on the problem itself, and concentrate on the problem-solving process. With a problem-solving process on which you can rely, you will have the confidence that you're making the right choice, every time."

Based on *Secrets of Power Problem Solving* by Roger Dawson, we discuss the frameworks and methods needed to understand problems, the tools needed to fix them, and the processes to create effective solutions. Our interpretations of *Secrets of Power Problem Solving* are shared in the following pages.

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Defining Your Problem

According to Roger Dawson, there are two categories of problems: people problems and money problems. These two categories are the basis by which you will plan out your problem-solving process, as the strategies used to solve each of the problems will be different. When trying to solve a problem, it is important that there is a clear categorization of that problem from the very start. This ensures that the problem solver is not wasting time with techniques that aren't geared towards the problem at hand.

People Problems vs. Money Problems

People often think that their problems are based on the people involved, instead of the financial situation that they're in. While there are sometimes genuine people problems within a business, these are often confused with money problems. For example, suppose an employee carrying out landscaping tasks is taking very long to mow clients' lawns; initially you may believe the employee is lazy or just wasting time. However, upon further investigation, you find that there's an issue with the self-propelling lawnmower, one that hasn't been fixed due to cutbacks. If you didn't look further into the problem, you might have blamed the employee, and the problem would have continued unresolved. Instead, you allocate money to repair the lawnmower and the problem is fixed.

The Rules of Solving People Problems

Dawson outlines nine rules for solving people-based problems:

1 **Don't Just Ignore the Problem:** Sweeping the problem under the rug is no way to make the situation better. Taking action allows you to take control of a situation, preventing the problem from resurfacing in the future.

2 **Make Sure the Problem Is Real:** Sometimes we overreact to a situation and make things worse. Make sure that the problem isn't just a random issue before jumping in to fix it—that may only add drama to the situation and make it even worse.

3 **Be Open with Communication:** People want to feel heard; if there's a problem and you try to solve it without being transparent you could make it even bigger. Take the time to keep people up to date about the issue and how it is being solved.

4 **Make Small Compromises:** To keep the momentum going in a tough situation, make small compromises to make sure that you don't get stuck in a deadlock.

5 **Ask for Help:** If a resolution can't be found, ask someone else to come in and act as a third-party negotiator.

6 **Work Even After the Solution Is Found:** You can't depend on the solution to work magic. Working long after the problem has been fixed can help keep it from coming back.

7 **Don't Solve the Wrong Problem:** Make sure you are solving the actual problem and not what you think is the problem; otherwise, the issue is just going to arise again later.

8 **Be Prepared for Consequences:** Don't forget that any changes you make can affect other activities, processes, or projects. Be prepared for a ripple effect.

9 **Don't Get Confused:** Sometimes, you may find that you're dealing with more than one problem. Work on solutions for each problem separately so that you don't confuse them and make things worse.

Understanding Money Problems

Money-related problems tend to be more technical than people-related problems. With people-related problems, you have to worry about emotions and feelings, but with money-related problems, you must deal with cash flow, ensure that your employees are paid, be frugal, and save for the future. Although these seem like basic concepts, they can be difficult to execute, so making a plan of action that helps to reach financially-sound solutions can help a great deal.

Tools for Solving Problems

Sometimes, it just takes looking a little deeper to understand where the solution to a problem really lies. The examples below illustrate some common guidelines for finding effective solutions:

- **Simple is often best.** The solution most likely to work is often the simplest one. Just like with Occam's Razor, the simplest explanation will often be the best and easiest to follow through with.

- **Just ask why.** Get to the root of your problem by asking why. Jeff is being hard on Elizabeth in their shared office. Why? Jeff feels like he doesn't have enough space to work. Why? The office space is too small for two people. Now you have the root of the problem from which you can work to find a proper solution.

- **Control your emotions.** It's easy to get angry in a debate; strong emotions can often make the problem worse, especially if you lose control. Lower your expectations to avoid these outbursts, and then hopefully the solution will end up exceeding the expectations you've set.

- **Follow policies.** If you follow policy, you don't have to worry about finding an entirely new solution to a problem. Update policies if they're out of date, but don't make random exceptions that may only lead to confusion down the line.

- **Does your choice even matter?** Sometimes there are multiple options to fix a problem but neither are better than the other. Don't waste time worrying about picking one. Instead just figure out which fits best within your company's policies.

- **Real vs. fake problems.** Don't waste time looking for a solution until you know that the problem actually exists. You can't fix a problem that isn't really there. Sometimes an individual could be seeing a problem that really isn't there because they have a biased view of the situation.

- **Just hit pause.** If ignoring the problem doesn't make it worse, then try to give it time to resolve itself before you dedicate energy to a solution.

- **Is the problem unique to you?** If this is a problem you've never faced before and you feel overwhelmed, consult someone who has dealt with it so that you can get sound advice on how to proceed.

The Planning Process

Whether it's brainstorming solutions, gathering information, or defining your problem, the planning process is very important to finding the solution that's right for your problem. By planning ahead, you can keep yourself and others on track to finding a fix in a timely manner and without any extra stress.

Defining the Problem

As discussed earlier, defining what the problem is and finding its root cause are two very important factors in being able to fix it. Sometimes you can be too close to the problem to evaluate it without biases creeping in, or too far from the problem to really understand what is going on. Talking with those involved and getting every side of the problem helps you to discover whether it's a financial issue or a people issue, and to see where the root of the problem lies. This is truly the first step in the problem-solving process.

Evaluating Urgency

The next major step is to figure out the urgency of the problem. Is it something that needs to be solved quickly? Or can you take time to think things over and weigh your option? Is it a new problem that needs to be tested to see if it has long term repercussions, or has this been a long-term problem that you're just noticing for the first time? Whether the problem is old or new, you need to decide whether it's something that needs to be fixed in a quick manner or not. If this is a problem you've been trying to fix for a long time and it just isn't working, then you also need to decide if it's time to call it quits or to look for an external opinion to help move you forward.

Brainstorming Solutions

Now that you've defined the problem and figured out your timeline for finding a solution, you need to brainstorm ideas to how you might fix it. You can brainstorm alone, with a group, or anonymously. Whatever method you choose, discuss your options openly and figure out what works best for the group and the situation.

Intuitive and Logical Problem Solving

People often say you should follow your gut when making a decision, but not every situation you meet will be that easy to decide. You need to know when to use logic and when to use your intuition.

Intuitive Problem Solving vs. Logical Problem Solving

Every situation is different. You're going to need to use different methods for each and every problem.

- **Intuitive Problem Solving.** Although for some people intuition is something that they're born with, it can also be developed through practice. By honing their ability to make choices based on previous experience and their gut responses, they'll be better able to focus on the problem and the different options at hand.

- **Logical Problem Solving.** People who struggle to listen to their intuition may be better suited to solving problems using logic. Logical problem solving involves weighing options and looking at the parameters of the problem. Statistics and probability fall into this world of logical thinking and help you to quantify the problems, which can be very easy for some leaders to use when problem solving.

Both methods of problem solving can be of value when it comes to trying to solve a problem, but decision makers should take the time to practice these methods to ensure that they aren't leading people in the wrong direction or making a problem even worse.

How to Become a Master Problem Solver

Being a master problem solver helps you to guide your business and life in a manner that's both productive and positive. It helps you—and those around you—to thrive in your career and relationships.

The Qualities of a Master Problem Solver

The following seven habits when used in combination help to create a master problem solver:

- **Be Ambiguous.** Every problem has more than one side to the story. You're going to need to be able to hear every side of the problem and make unbiased choices based on those details.

- **Don't Let Being Upset Cloud Your Judgement.** Don't get caught up in the pain or anger and end up forgetting your goals. Instead, stay focused on the end game and what you want to accomplish.

- **Listen.** It's obvious that listening to the people involved will help you to find the right solution. Take time to hear out everyone involved so that you get the full picture.

- **Go with the Majority.** Pick the solution that will please the most people involved. When this is possible, you can use the popular solution and follow through on fixing the problem, making your team happy with your choice.

- **Don't Make Assumptions.** If you make assumptions, you may end up hampering the effectiveness of your chosen solution. Think everything through from all aspects to make sure you avoid assumptions and biases.

- **Plan for Costs and Roadblocks.** When preparing a solution look at what it might cost, or what roadblocks might be encountered along the way when implementing it.

- **Don't Be Blinded by Success.** Just because one person was successful with a strategy doesn't mean you should just follow it blindly. Think for yourself and find original solutions that will work for you and your team.

Insights—Turn Yourself Into a Master Problem Solver

Be Clear About What Your Problems Are

Define your problems and make decisions based off the type of problem you have, not the type of problem you think you have.

Create A Plan

Look deeper into your problem. Figure out what the root cause is and create your action plan around the information you discover. Don't make assumptions. Instead, make your plan without bias.

Be Open with Communications

Transparency will help you to keep your colleagues happy and will help to direct you on the right path through brainstorming.

Weigh All Your Options When Making Decisions

Unless you know it will work, don't just pick the easiest solution. Make sure that you've looked at all the possible outcomes and objectives to ensure that you're making the right choice for as many people as possible.

Follow Your Gut While Using Logic to Make the Right Choices

Understand your problems so that you know whether or not you can use logic or intuition to find a solution. Make sure that you use the above techniques to have a clear idea of what the problem is before you jump into one method or the other. That way you can be sure you're using the right one.

Conclusion

Secrets of Power Problem Solving allows readers to see the importance of using proven methods and ideas to find a solution that fits every problem they encounter. In a world where much of our lives are dictated by chaos and disorganization, it is imperative that leaders in every area of life know how to help those around them to come to timely solutions for the problems they face, whether they be people- or money-related. Roger Dawson provides readers with an accessible book geared towards doing just that. His expertise and enthusiasm are clear within the narrative and in the examples he uses to demonstrate his point. Being a power problem solver is within reach when time is taken to hone these skills.

> "Great problem solvers become completely committed to their decisions, and yet they're always willing to pull the plug if it turns out they made a mistake."

If you've enjoyed our insights on Roger Dawson's *Secrets of Power Problem Solving*, we encourage you to access the other *Secrets of Power Problem Solving* assets in the Skillsoft library, or purchase the hardcopy.

About the Author

ROGER DAWSON was born in England and immigrated to the United States in 1962. Within a decade, he gained citizenship and became president of the largest real estate company in California with an overall intake of $400 million dollars a year. In 1982, Dawson began working as a speaker and trainer giving workshops on sales and negotiation tactics across the United States, Asia, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. His corresponding audio program, "Secrets of Power Negotiating," has made over $38 million worldwide.

Also by Roger Dawson

1   *Secrets of Power Negotiating: Inside Secrets from a Master Negotiator*, Career Press, © 2000, 978-1564144980.

2   *Secrets of Power Persuasion: Everything You'll Ever Need to Get Anything You'll Ever Want*, Prentice Hall Press, © 2001, 978-0735202863.

3   *Secrets of Power Salary Negotiating: Inside Secrets from a Master Negotiator*, Career Press, © 2006, 978-1564148605.

4   *The 13 Secrets of Power Performance*, Simon & Schuster, © 1994, 978-0131230354.