Problem-Solving

No matter the obstacles to your success and progress, there is a strategy that can help you to effectively address the issues and develop an approach to help you resolve them. While the strategy itself is straightforward, it may not feel natural at first as you get acquainted with it and it requires practice in applying it to the problems you encounter in order for you to become proficient and successful in using it to resolve problems.

1. Identify clearly what the problem is. Before you can solve a problem, you have to first know what the problem is. Although this sounds simple, people commonly misidentify the nature of their problem. For example, if a man feels anxiety whenever his supervisor walks by his desk, the man might think that his problem is anxiety when his supervisor passes by him. It takes some self-reflection and examination, but he might find that the real problem is that he knows that his paperwork isn’t up to date and he is afraid that his supervisor might penalize him. In this case, the true problem isn’t the worker’s anxiety but the underlying reason for his anxiety—his paperwork is not up to date. Clearly identifying the problem will lead to resolving the true issue and lead the worker to get caught up on his paperwork.
2. Identify current problems, not past ones. The current problems that a person has are really the only ones that he can actually do something about. Sometimes there is a lot of emotion tied to the problems that one has faced in the past, but focusing on the past problems burns up energy and effort that could be better utilized in resolving the current problem. The present needs to be your focus, not the past.
3. One problem at a time. Besides focusing on past mistakes, another factor that hinders a person’s progress is when they overwhelm themselves by trying to tackle multiple problems all at the same time. Do not “multi-task” when it comes to problem-solving. Take one problem or issue at a time, address and resolve that one, and then move on to the next problem to be resolved.
4. Analyze the problem that you’ve identified. Ask yourself:
   1. What needs to happen for this problem to be resolved?
   2. What does successful resolution look like? (In other words, how will you know when the problem has been solved?)
   3. What is the timeframe for solving the problem?
   4. What resources are necessary in order for you to solve the problem?
5. Brainstorm as many possible solutions or approaches as you can think of that might solve the problem and after the brainstorming has taken place, analyze each of the proposed solutions to see if any of them can actually address and resolve the problem.
6. Know what assistance you have available to you. Once a problem is clearly defined, the next step is to search and identify what resources, assets and support you have that can be utilized to help you address the identified problem. The resources and assets might take the form of the amount of time you have available to devote to the problem, articles, websites, books or knowledgeable people. It’s easier to tackle problems when you have help.
7. Once you’ve identified the approach or intervention that you chose from the brainstorming session, implement that chosen approach or intervention.
8. Analyze how well your chosen approach or intervention has worked in resolving the problem. If the approach has not worked as well as you would have liked, repeat this process and choose a different approach.