

SECTION 5

Problems and solutions

1 WHERE DO OUR PROBLEMS COME FROM?

Many verbs collocate with the noun *problem* (see Unit 1, Section 6 for an introduction to collocation):

Problems can arise / crop up / present themselves / recur. A recurring problem is one of the worst!

- We can also use other verbs and phrases;
We encounter / experience difficulties. Sometimes we hit a snag. We come up against a brick wall and find something (like money) a stumbling block.

2 WHERE ARE WE WHEN PROBLEMS ARISE?

We use several common phrases to describe a problematical situation. Here are some examples:
in a quandary in a dilemma in dire straits in a predicament

- More informally we can use:
a bit stuck in a jam in a fix in a hole in trouble

3 HOW TO FACE PROBLEMS

We use many verbs and common verb phrases to talk about how we face problems:

One solution is to run away from them, ignore them, bury our heads in the sand, hope they'll go away. We may wash our hands of the matter, shirk our responsibility, pass the buck. But then this may come back to haunt us one day.

No doubt the best solution is to confront the problem (head on), tackle it, deal with it, sort it out on the spot / there and then. Perhaps we should take the bull by the horns, say 'The buck stops here', stand up and be counted, shoulder the responsibility and sort it out once and for all.

4 SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS AND THEIR OUTCOME

We can also use many verbs and common verb phrases to talk about how we deal with problems:

If there is uncertainty and doubts, we must dispel them. Standards must be maintained.

Deadlines and demands must be met.

The mission must be accomplished and success must be achieved.

Minor details can be ironed out later.

1 Fill each of the gaps with one of these verbs.

overcome averted reached struck restored

- Agreement can be...
- A deal can be...
- These obstacles must be...
- In this way a disaster would be...
- Confidence will be...

5 IDIOMATIC PHRASES

English is full of idiomatic phrases relating to problems and solutions:

He's been a fly in the ointment / a real headache / a pain in the neck.

2 Underline the option that best completes the idiomatic phrase.

- Let's bury the *axe* / hatchet.
- We've turned the *corner* / switch.
- You'll rise *above* / over it.
- We've got our backs to the *wall* / sun.
- We're in a tight *corner* / bend.
- Don't put all your *shopping* / eggs in one basket.

6 INSOLUBLE PROBLEMS

Sometimes problems can be so serious that there is no apparent solution:

His behaviour is incomprehensible.

The operation is irreversible.

3 Use the following adjectives to complete the collocation.

insurmountable unfathomable incurable irreparable unavoidable indecipherable

- an delay d damage
- an disease e obstacles
- handwriting f reasons

Practice

1 Complete each sentence with a suitable phrase.

- We must these obstacles.
- I was at a loss respond.
- You shouldn't try to run problems.
- I'm afraid she's made a real life.
- Don't bury sand; face facts.
- I'm confident these final details out.

2 Fill each of the gaps with one of the adjectives listed.

Example: O *incomprehensible*

*unpronounceable incompatible unworkable insoluble
unmanageable (incomprehensible) inscrutable
unapproachable illegible unintelligible uncontrollable
irretrievable inconsolable*

- (0 His sudden outburst at the mention of 'Linda' was totally)
- 1 I think you'll find ultimately that your plan is totally
 - 2 With his grunts and sideways looks the boss gives the impression of being extremely
 - 3 What was written on the fax from Mongolia was almost totally
 - 4 Though they had a few hobbies in common, the couple acknowledged that they were
 - 5 With the bad line, what she said was virtually
 - 6 We tried our best but the problem proved to be
 - 7 A Polish name with eight consonants and a 'y' is practically for an English mouth.
 - 8 I've been to almost every salon in town but my hair is still
 - 9 I sometimes have this almost urge to run down our street with no clothes on.
 - 10 He just sat there throughout the whole conference with an impassive, look on his face.
 - 11 She burst into tears when he left and was for some hours afterwards.
 - 12 Any expenses will have to be deducted from the refund you receive.

3 Rewrite each of the following sentences in two different ways using the prompt words that follow.

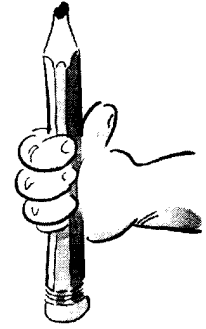
Example: He's suffering from some sort of depressive illness at the moment.

depression depressed

He's suffering from some sort of depression at the moment. He's very depressed at the moment.

- a He said that what I had was incurable.
cured cure
- b This injection will be quite painless, I assure you.
hurt pain
- c The ageing process is regrettably irreversible.
impossible reversed
- d It's high time this dispute was settled.
enough solution

- e You can't duck your paternal responsibilities.
back run
- f In the event of something going wrong, just contact me.
arises should
- g We'll no doubt learn how to solve our problems.
difficulties answer
- h This pencil is too blunt to write with.
sharpening being
- i This will only exacerbate the problem.
worse worsening
- j Your direct intervention might alleviate this problematical situation.
improved better



4 Underline the option, a, b, c or d, that best completes each sentence.

- 1 He's been going through a bad for some time.
a streak b mess c front d patch
- 2 I'm between two courses of action.
a stretched b torn c ripped d suspended
- 3 You really must yourself together.
a grip b pull c sort d draw
- 4 Perhaps we could try and our little misunderstanding of last week.
a work out b polish off c clear up d wear off
- 5 The wound will in a week or two.
a heal b cure c remedy d cover
- 6 You'll be as good as before you know it.
a rain b new c gold d an ox
- 7 He's experienced something of a in his fortunes lately.
a hole b snag c dip d hitch
- 8 Sooner or later you'll have to your problems head on.
a tackle b overcome c clear d settle
- 9 I think there's only one person who can with this problem.
a handle b solve c deal d tackle
- 10 One of us must ensure that standards are
a accomplished b retained c maintained d followed