SI-7   ## Seven-Step Problem Solving

As a high-impact, teaching-for-success instructor why not begin an experiment today? See what happens when you adopt a systematic, seven-step strategy for solving tough and not-so-tough teaching problems? I think you'll be impressed with how quickly and effectively you can solve some of your most pressing problems.

We recommend an organized approach recommended by international business consultant, Brian Tracy. The following steps are designed to transform intractable teaching problems into opportunities for finding solutions that may even grow your character or serve as means to advance more rapidly toward your desired instructional outcomes.

Seven Easy Steps for Solving Problems

Here are the steps for a well researched and well practiced orderly approach to problem solving that will work with teaching, learning, managing, and life problems. And every win-win teacher's students should have the opportunity to learn these seven steps:

- Prepare—for the really difficult problems, first enact confidence building affirmations. Repeat to yourself as many times as you need until you feel a lift if your personal energy. Affirm these or make up your own: "I can do it," or, "I can handle it." Share this resolve with whomever constitutes your personal fan club.
- Accurately define the problem—it may not be what you first think Keep digging deeper by asking, "What is the real problem here?"
- List all the possible causes of this problem—try to write as many alternatives as possible—think on paper.

- Free-Form Associate solutions, let your thinking run free and loose, be creative, extreme, even a bit wild. Get your ideas on paper!
- Analyze and Choose the possibilities; choose your course of action and make a firm decision to act; allow no procrastination—do it now!
- Act firmly, decisively following a well-conceived practical plan that specifies exactly what you need to be accomplished.
- Estimate a deadline; get data; reflect on how well your solution fixes the problem: begin a new solution cycle if your solution does not work as intended

Things go better with confidence

Approaching an undesirable situation or difficulty with confidence is crucial. Sometimes, we choke as soon as a problem arises as if the appearance of the problem suddenly defines us as a failure.

Problems are a part of personal and professional life, and the top-performing people in all walks of life have just as many or more problems than we have. The only difference is that they have developed skills and strategies for positive coping and successful transformation of problems into personal benefit.

To unleash your creativity, strike the word "problem" from your vocabulary today and mentally prepare to meet your challenges with strength and confidence.

What is the situation?

When a worriment arises this term, take immediate action to define it in detail. Write the who, what, where, when, and why of the situation. Go beyond the negative emotions that leave you upset or angry, and prepare instead to take action.

Get the whole story logically and analytically; you'll feel better, and you'll be on your way toward a solution. Write the details. When you think on paper, you are much more likely to reveal the specifics. In addition, you may discover that the real problem is something other than what you first thought.

You'll know what the challenge encompasses. Success aficionados decide that the seeds of greater benefit are hidden somewhere in each problem; they are successful finding the hidden solution often using great tenacity to find it.

Causes — don't take them lightly

Sometimes we are too quick to pinpoint a cause and jump on the obvious-but-wrong reason. You may need to fight this tendency to see and cease on mere surface causes. Are you seeing the forest, or just individual trees? Don't stop short; brainstorm as many possible antecedents to the problem as you can. Go to the extreme, the ridiculous; assume everything you are currently doing is completely wrong. If so, what would you do? What could you do?

Solutions, solutions, solutions

This is the fun stage: fire up those neurons and produce as many solutions as possible. What next, do you choose the best solution and act? Well, not so fast; sometimes no decision is better than a rushed and poorly thought-out decision. Determine what's the worst thing that could happen if you choose not to act, or if your solution is in error. If you can live with the worst outcome, your good to go; time to act and put your solution to the test. Procrastination is your enemy; don't delay, and success will come your way.

~John H, (Jack) Shrawder, Exec. Director
TFS National Faculty Success Center

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