



## **Eight Steps to Problem Solving**

### **Proceed With A Positive Attitude**

First, approach the problem with the expectant attitude that there is a logical practical solution just waiting to be found. Be relaxed, calm, confident and clear in your mind.

Second, change your language from negative to positive or least to neutral. Instead of the word "problem," use the word "situation." "*Problem*" is a negative word while "*situation*" is a neutral word. "We have an interesting situation", is better than, "We have a problem."

### **Define the Situation Clearly**

The third step in systematic problem-solving is to define the situation clearly, in writing. "Exactly what is the situation?" Then ask, "What else is the situation?" Sometimes stating the problem in different words makes it much easier to solve. Fully 50% of "situations" can be resolved by accurate definition.

### **Identify Causes and Solutions**

Step number four is to, ask "What are all the possible causes of this situation?" Failure to identify the causes or reasons for the situation often causes you to have to solve it again and again. Fully 25% or more of situations can be effectively dealt with by discovering the correct causes.

Step number five is to ask, "What are all the possible solutions?" Write out as many solutions or answers to the situation as possible before moving on. Break these possible solutions down to the 3 or 4 best solutions. Avoid the

"sucker's bet" of "either - or." The quantity of possible solutions usually determines the quality of the solution chosen.

### **Clear Decisions Are Key**

Step number six is to "Make a clear decision." Usually any decision is better than none.

Step number seven is to "Assign clear responsibility for carrying out the decision and then set a deadline for completion and review." Remember, a decision without a deadline is just a fruitless discussion.

Finally, step number eight is to follow-up, monitor the decision, compare actual results with expected results and then generate new solutions and new courses of action.

### **Action Exercises:**

Here are two ways you can apply this technique to think more creatively.

**First**, state the problem clearly, in writing, so that you know exactly what it is that you are trying to solve. Ask, "What else is the problem?"

**Second**, develop as many solutions as you possibly can, including doing nothing, before you make a decision. What is the short term and long term consequence of each of your solutions. Quality of ideas is in direct proportion to the quantity that you generate.