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**The Mathis Group's**

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# Messenger

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## Problem Solving in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Behaviors that Block Solutions

Last month we looked at seven steps for successful problem solving. Just as important as knowing how to handle problems, is knowing what **not** to do when a problem arises. When we are faced with a problem a plethora of emotions vie for position. We need to examine our behavior toward the problem to see which are acceptable and which need to be adjusted.

There are seven behaviors that will invariably block the problem solving process.

### **1. The inability to distinguish the problem**

In order to solve the problem at hand, you must be able to distinguish what the problem is. You have to wade through everything surrounding the problem so that you can find the root. Only then will you be able to uncover the best solution.

### **2. The inability to detail and clarify the problem**

Once you find the cause of the problem, you still must dig deeper to find all the details associated. You must clearly define the problem in order to be able to solve it. Without a clear understanding of what is going on,

you will not be able to get to the bottom of the situation.



### **3. The inability to take responsibility for a problem**

Without taking responsibility for the problem, it will never be solved. Passing the blame to another person will not achieve the results needed to resolve the situation. It only delays resources that could be used in a constructive manner.

### **4. The inability to do individual thinking**

If you are always depending on others to solve problems for you, you waste precious time waiting for changes to take effect. By taking the situation into your own hands and making the needed decisions, you will be able to solve the problem much faster and effectively.

### **5. The inability to take action**

If you are unable to follow through with the changes that are needed to fix the problem, all your efforts up to this point are futile. Just knowing what the problem is, and even knowing how to fix it, are useless unless you are willing to take action.

### **6. The inability to receive others' suggestions**

Other employees often have excellent ideas that you would not have otherwise thought of. Letting

**(continued on page 2 Problem Solving)**

*Teamwork is a constant balancing act  
between self-interest and group interest.  
Susan M. Campbell  
Consultant and writer*

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Seek out ideas from everyone, not just those who have a direct involvement with the job. Sometimes good ideas come from unlikely sources.

an ego get in the way can be detrimental in solving a problem. Just because you did not come up with the idea does not mean that it should be tossed out the window and not taken seriously. Everyone must work together to solve the situation in the best way.

## 7. *The inability to critically evaluate progress*

While the situation is in the process of being resolved you still must monitor everything carefully. You must be able to see if the suggested solution is working and achieving the desired results. If another solution is needed, you must be able to determine this early on so that time is not wasted.

Besides these seven behavior blockers, what you say and how you act around others can also kill a solution, as well as biases that you have from the very beginning. For instance, the following statements are examples of ways that will hinder or even kill a solution.

- We have never done this before.
- Management won't let us.
- It will never work.
- Why change if we have done fine.
- Do it later when we have more time.
- Our policy and procedures won't let us.

Your body language can also dictate the solution of a situation. How you respond when others come to you for help will affect how the situation turns out. Looking bored or impatient, looking at your watch, shifting around in your chair, letting everyone hear you sigh, or allowing pages and phone calls to dominate your time



signals whomever you are talking to that you do not care about what is happening. The message that you are communicating is that you have more important things to do and that he or she is wasting your time.

There are several biases in solving problems. Recalling frequent bad situations, rejecting personalities rather than ideas, being overconfident about a quick solution, and getting caught up in the hindsight trap are all examples of biases that you may have.

Knowing what behaviors, attitudes, and biases to avoid will facilitate in quicker and more efficient handling of a situation. It will keep everyone's morale up, and there will be trust and communication between employees.



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