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Practical Problem Solving

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The ability to solve corporate problems can save a company from strikes, walkouts, lost revenues, worthless setbacks and numerous other devastating conditions. Each condition mentioned is not fictitious but happens daily in companies around the world.

Controlling or preventing these conditions from taking place relates totally to how one participates in solving problems when they arrive. There is no question as to whether or not problems will come. The question is how and what direction they will appear.

Steps to the Successful Problem Solving Process

When a manager or company has a problem, someone is influenced by it. For many it might be the employee; for others it is the customer. Whoever is affected really doesn't matter. What does matter is how the problem will be examined and solved.

Step #1 Define the problem or state what is wrong

Gathering detail as to what is wrong helps to give a proper definition. This process helps with detail, by pointing out signals or signs and testing each signal for validity. To bring this about, the following process helps to define the problem.

• Give Detail

Before a problem can be examined thoroughly, it must be defined with great detail. It is a shame for someone to invest many hours trying to solve a problem which is distorted or slanted by one's view. The definition enhances the problem and gives detail to the real situation.

• Explain and expand the problem

Each problem must be expanded to include other information than the normal details. Information must be gathered to pinpoint the problem at particular times. For example, answer these questions:

1. Specify and explain exactly what is happening and to whom.
2. Locate exactly where this is happening.
3. What is the occurrence of each problem? Is there a particular time of day when this happens more frequently?
4. Is this problem serious?

• Test each sign for validity

Testing each sign or signal can expand what is known about the problem and help to eliminate some of the potential causes. Every signal listed, even though it is specific, is only a possible signal. To test each means moving away from generalities into deep detailed facts. We must become fact finders and rule out those items which are not.

Step #2 Collect data and gather information

Potential risks are the bottom line to any solution given to solve a problem. These risks can be minimized only after information has been gathered concerning the problem. Some of the data gathered should involve what decisions have been made thus far concerning the problem.

Step #3 Seek and coordinate opinions

Seeking opinions from others allows you to gather ideas which are missed during a problem situation. Opinions should be gathered from all levels of contact to the problem if the problem cannot be solved quickly. For example, if a company is having a problem with shipping out widgets from the shipping department, then every manager involved in the process should give input. This input might be gathered quickly and should be listed, tested or discussed. Then those ideas not workable can be discarded. However, it is foolish to not seed out input from capable on-site employees.

• Gather input from each group leader

Contact each participant and receive the requested information. This process should avoid putting down any opinion. This phase seeks input and lots of it. All non-appropriate options can be discarded at a later time.

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*The biggest problem today is that
everybody's fixing the blame and
nobody's fixing the trouble.*
E.C. McKenzie

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- **List in detail each alternative**

Listing each alternative prevents the loss or misrepresentation of any solution. Listing in detail, or asking those suggesting the solution to explain in written detail the alternative, will document the solution for further evaluating.

Step #4 Analyze each alternative

Analyzing each recourse can take on many directions. Each solution will have risks. These risks can come in the way they are carried out and its future success.

- **Play the “what if” game**

The “what if” game means to ask yourself what if we do this? What will be the outcome, the price tag, the effect on others? Will this change make the present problem go away?

- **List why the alternative will not work**

Listing all the reasons why the alternatives will not work can be beneficial toward solving the problem. In many cases, the situation will not be solved quickly due to its complexity. Looking over all the reasons each solution is not workable can give new insights. It is possible to solve some of the small concerns and then be able to implement the entire alternative.

Step #5 Make a decision and gain commitment

In any situation there comes the time to make a decision. The best decision will normally float to the surface and can be distinguished from other fatal solutions. In order to bring this about, the following process will be followed.

- **Gaining commitment concerning best decision**

Gaining commitment from those involved can help implement this in the company at a faster rate and increase the potential for success. Each decision had strengths and weaknesses. But to make this problem go away, it will take the help of numerous others.

- **Discuss worst possible outcome**

Knowing the worst possible scenario can help one mentally prepare for the future. It is hard for one to make a decision unless they have weighed each decision by the potential outcome.

Step #6 Make plans to implement the new strategy

Executing the new solution will require a great amount of coordination. Coordinating this situation means gathering the needed manpower to bring about the change in a quick and painless process. Many will put together small groups or committees who will oversee different aspects of the task. To implement change, the following must be accomplished.



- **Dates must be set**

Bringing about a specific change in a company will not come about by accident. It must be given priority by clearing the dates to allow optimum penetration in implementing the solution.

- **List all the steps to the process**

Listing all the process allows every detail to be accounted for and nothing to go undone. This element of brainstorming also points the decisionmaker toward other directions such as supplies needed and checks and balances.

- **How will process be monitored or followed up**

Setting up a monitoring process with target dates for follow-up puts in concrete the future plans. These plans and dates can be changed or altered if needed, but they will not be forgotten.

Step #7 Evaluate and make adjustments

Evaluating and making adjustments is a never-ending situation. Once a problem has been solved, one must make sure this problem has not been replaced with another one of equal or greater depth.



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