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Practical Problem Solving, Part 2

Last month we began looking at the 7 steps to successfully solve problems. As a reminder, the first three steps were to define the problem or state what is wrong, collect data and gather information, and seek and coordinate opinions. As we finish the steps, we'll begin by analyzing each alternative.

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 the question "what if we do this?". What will be the outcome, the price tag, or 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 every situation there comes the time when you must make a decision. This is especially true when a problem needs to be solved. The best decision

will normally float to the surface and can be distinguished from other less desirable solutions. In order to bring this about, the following process will be followed.

- *Gain commitment concerning the best decision*

Gaining commitment from those involved can help implement the solution more quickly and increase the potential for success. Each decision has strengths and weaknesses; however, to make a problem go away, it will take the help of numerous others.

- *Discuss worst possible outcome*

Knowing the worst possible scenario can help you mentally prepare for the future. It is hard to make a decision unless you have weighted 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 to gather the needed manpower to bring about the change in a quick and painless process. Some organizations will put together small groups or committees to oversee different aspects of the task. To implement change, the following must be accomplished:

When something goes wrong, it's better to talk about who's going to fix it than who's to blame.

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- *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 steps allows every detail to be accounted for and nothing to go undone. This element of brainstorming also points the decision maker toward other directions such as supplies needed or checks and balances.
- *How will process be monitored*
Setting up a monitoring process with target dates for follow-up puts the future plans in concrete. 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.

There will never come a time where problems don't exist. Knowing how to effectively handle problems when they arise and using the best resources and solutions will limit the effect they will have on your organization.

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