

Member's Quarterly

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President's Message

Problem Solving: Think Differently

The same approach doesn't always work

Some problems just won't go away. No matter what we try to do, they seem to come back up like weeds in our well-tended gardens or workplaces. The good news is that there may just be a way to resolve that problem once and for all. In fact, there may be many solutions. Sometimes, it's actually thinking about the problem that prevents us from getting to a workable solution.

One thing is certainly true. To solve a problem, you must first understand it. You can do that with any problem by asking questions and getting more information. The five "W" questions help: who, what, when, where and why. They may provide answers or clues that lead to a resolution of the problem at hand.

Applying the KISS principle helps. Keep it simple, stupid. How do you eat an elephant? It's one bite at a time. How do you solve a big problem? Focus on the smaller elements that make up the larger whole so that the task is manageable – one piece of the puzzle at a time. Select one aspect of the problem and solve that piece. Continue the process until each element is resolved and the puzzle is then complete.

Sometimes we cannot find the answer to some problems on our own. On those occasions, we should consult an expert advisor for insights and perspective. There may also be manuals or guides that can help or even tools or technology that can diagnose and solve the problem. Another strategy that works is to start with possible solutions and then work backwards through the problem to reach the solution. This sounds convoluted, but it shifts your thinking away from the problem to free up brain power on the solution side.

Some approaches can even help you think better while you are trying to solve a problem. Brainstorming is popular and often highly effective. It can be a useful tool to bring a team together, giving rise to plenty of ideas – some of which may provide a viable solution. If your head hurts after thinking about a problem, then give it a break. Try not thinking about the problem for a whole day. You may be surprised at the results.

Finally, give it your best effort but let go of the result. Some problems are easy and you will solve them in a snap. Others take time. At the end of the day, be satisfied with your efforts. Tomorrow is a new day and there will be new problems to solve.

Always remember Albert Einstein's advice: "Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them."

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