Member's Quarterly

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Ask the Expert

Problem-Solving Skills in the Workplace
The path to finding the right solution

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Why are problem-solving skills necessary in the workplace?
It is an essential skill for all levels. Those with good problem-solving skills are valuable and trusted assets in any team – they think of new ideas and improved ways of doing things differently. They make it easier for others to understand something or help save customers time and money.

What are some examples of problem-solving skills at work?
- Correcting a mistake, whether it was made by you or someone else.
- Overcoming a delay through problem solving and communication.
- Resolving an issue with a problematic or upset customer.

What makes a good problem solver?
Excellent problem solvers build networks and know how to collaborate with other people and teams. They are skilled in bringing individuals together and sharing knowledge and information. A critical attribute for great problem solvers is that others trust them.

How do you explain problem-solving skills?
Problem-solving skills are identifying problems, brainstorming and analyzing answers, and implementing the best solutions. We encounter problems frequently in our day-to-day lives.

Problem-solving is the method of understanding and defining the problem, brainstorming a solution, finding substitutes, applying the best solution and making modifications based on the outcome.

Steps in Using Problem-Solving Skills in the Workplace

1: Thoroughly understand the problem
The most vital step in solving a problem is to understand the thoughts behind it. Many employees jump to providing recommendations before truly understanding the problem.

A quick way to gauge your understanding is to verify if you can explain the problem to someone else. Employers will measure your capacity to comprehend issues and solutions effectively if you communicate them plainly.

2: Define the problem
The next step in this process is gathering all the necessary information so that you can begin forming a solution. Do not focus on the solution at this time. Instead, focus on defining the question. Based on the information you collected previously, start separating the facts from the presumptions. Analyze the formerly used procedures and make specific adjustments based on your policies.

3: Strategize a solution
Now that you have understood the problem and defined it, start strategizing a solution based on your findings. Workplace solutions can be characterized into tactical solutions and strategic solutions.

A tactical solution is a quick fix. There may not be time to do any tests and the whole attitude is doing whatever it takes to deliver with the least effort.

A strategic solution is a long-term fix for an issue. Strategic solutions involve using an all-inclusive series of steps to completely modify how you approach the problem.

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While strategy is the action plan that takes you where you want to go, tactics are the individual steps and actions that will get you there. In a business context, this means the specific actions teams take to implement the initiatives outlined in the strategy.

Usually, workplaces adopt the following problem-solving strategies into their policies.
• Use logical reasoning
• Recognize patterns
• Reverse engineer the problem
• Try a different point of view
• Consider worst-case scenarios
• Relate to a more straightforward real-life problem
• Organize or reorganize the data
• Prepare a visual representation
• Take all possibilities into account
• Intelligent guessing and testing

Your goal should be to become fluent in these strategies. Once you can narrow down the problem, you can formulate a plan within minutes without having to write anything down.

4: Find alternate solutions
Keeping the goals and objectives in mind, invite everyone associated with the project to a brainstorming session with you. Making sure that everyone gets equal participation is one of the ways you can exhibit your leadership skills while forging strong workplace relationships.

5: Evaluate solutions and document everything
Now that you have found multiple solutions, it's time to evaluate them. You will need to assess each solution based on various factors and list the pros and cons of each alternative you found.

The ability to evaluate solutions quickly ties into your management skills. A manager can quickly measure and implement resolutions based on such factors. Train yourself to find as many likelihoods as possible to analyze solutions effectively.

6: Choose a solution
Your main objective is to find one effective solution out of all the ones provided on the list. The solution you choose hinges on countless factors, which can be one or all of the following:
• Cost-effectiveness
• Duration
• Efficiency
• Practicality
• Company policies and procedures

7: Implement
Implementing a solution does not mean diving in after you have collected the feedback and communicated the answer to everyone involved.

Implement the chosen solution according to the action plan. Then, identify the measurable parameters to track success and failure rates.

Finally, set up communication channels for regular feedback and a contingency plan in case of let-downs.

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8: Monitor progress and make modifications accordingly
The last problem-solving step involves actively monitoring how the solution performs in real life and if it meets the end goal for which it was adopted in the first place.

Gauge how the solution functions compared to how you expected it to perform and document all changes. Check the feedback channel for any contradictions or issues that arise during the process.

If any modification further enhances the process, implement it after discussing it with your team.

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