

Member's Quarterly

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Feature

Is Every Good Manager a Good Problem Solver?

The meaningful impact on behaviour approach

We can't imagine how exhausting it is to be the one expected to have all the answers! Many business owners and managers pride themselves on being good problem solvers. In fact, finding solutions has been the key to their success, excelling in every role they've played along their career path and often defines what they see as a manager's purpose – to see problems and fix them.

In the late 80's and early 90's, the person who came to the board table with the most problems won. As energy flows where attention goes, we framed our value to the organization by the number of problems in our departments. In the new paradigm of business where we work to cultivate productive behaviour meeting deliverables, solving problems for everyone is not going to get you where you want to go. The new paradigm calls for managers to *draw out or lead out* the best in employees and to be more collaborative in their leadership leading to more robust decisions. In a global economy, the thinking of multiple minds is essential. We can't have all the answers so the right questions become more important. If we are always the problem solver or the "answer person," there is an assumption that we HAVE all the answers and the temptation to think that we do – acting from a place of false confidence, panic or anxiety rather than from our center.

In our work training mediators and executive coaches, it has been proven that good problem solvers often solve other people's problems thereby creating a dependency. Many managers tell us they spend so much time "managing"; there is no time to "lead". The more you solve other people's problems, the easier it is for them to pass the burden of those problems to you. They begin to expect to use Monkey Up Delegation (MUD) – placing the monkey on your back and the MUD on your face!

Having meaningful impact on behaviour invites managers as leaders to support their employees, to create partnerships with their colleagues to gain mutually beneficial results. Managers become active listeners empowering their workforce to develop solutions, increase insights and awareness of the bigger picture in problem resolution. Performance reviews become team approaches to success.

Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Powerful questions attract collective energy, insight and action as they move through a system. Working with productive behaviours in this way puts the monkey back where it belongs. This approach assists in seeing the monkey as the playful, inquisitive creature that it is. It also taps into ideas and methods that you may not have thought of yet (hard as that may be to admit at times). We begin to see change (the monkey) as opportunity, not as a threat.

Ultimately, it means giving up some control and reframing your contribution from something other than your ability to solve problems. How about getting that feeling from unleashing someone's potential or discovering your own system for high performance? If you don't know the best in yourself, how can you lead or encourage the best in others?

In a world where success requires everyone's potential to be tapped, learning a meaningful impact on behaviour approach to managing is the new strategic imperative.

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