# Job Savvy

# How to Be a Success at Work

Sixth Edition

# Chapter 11: Problem-Solving Skills

## Video Transcript

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# Title Card

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# Chapter 11 Problem-Solving Skills

Problem solving is a highly marketable skill. Knowing how to solve difficult problems is important to your success on the job because employers need people who can think on their feet, adapt to new situations, and apply new problem-solving techniques.

While it appears that the temperament and learning styles of some individuals makes creative thinking easier, there are skills everyone can practice that will help them be more creative. This chapter explains how to develop skills that will help you in analyzing situations and produce creative solutions, and how to interpret data to solve problems.

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# Management through Teamwork

Managers in today’s business world rely on employees and work teams to help solve many problems—a leadership approach called **employee involvement**. Studies about employee involvement show that when employees are trained, recognized, and rewarded for their work, the quality of their problem solving improves.

Employee involvement in problem solving has increased as businesses have made drastic cuts in the number of managers and supervisors they employ. The complexity and constant change in the business world require employee involvement in making decisions. While employee involvement motivates workers, business gains from the problem-solving done by those who work closer to the problem.

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# Problem Solving

Employees who develop good problem-solving skills become valuable members of the team. Would-be problem solvers adopt three basic assumptions - the foundation for good problem solving. Problem solvers believe that:

Problems can be solved. This belief has motivated great problem solvers throughout history despite repeated failures.

Everything has a cause. Before seeking the solution problem solvers look for the cause.

Problem solving is a continuous process. After finishing the last step in the process, they return to the first step and begin the process again to evaluate and improve.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

This seven-step problem-solving process can develop in a number of ways, but the steps and order that you follow are important. Leaving out any of the steps or doing them in a different order will limit your problem-solving abilities.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 1: Identify the Problem** Begin by identifying the problem. The biggest mistake you can make in solving a problem is to work on the wrong problem. What appears at first to be the problem may not be the true problem. Take time to discover what the real problem is.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 2: Gather and Organize Data about the Problem** Gather and organize data about the problem. The best way to collect data is to observe what happens. Other good methods include talking with people affected by the problem and reading reports.

Organizing data, a process called “data analysis,” requires some mathematical skills. You can analyze data with three simple methods: frequency tables, percentages, and graphs.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 3: Develop Solutions**

Develop solutions. After collecting data about the problem, you can use many ways to develop solutions. Talk to coworkers and friends who have experienced the problem. Brainstorm in a group discussion to come up with as many ideas as possible.

Change places with other employees. Spend four to eight hours in another department. Visit other organizations with similar problems. You can learn a lot by discovering how other organizations solve their problems. Read about the problem. Trade journals provide valuable information about how organizations like yours have solved problems.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 4: Evaluate Possible Solutions**

Evaluate possible solutions by asking a number of questions. Is the idea logical? Look for a direct relationship between the problem and the solution.

How much will it cost? A great idea that is not affordable won’t help the company.

Does the organization have workers who know how to implement the solution? Some solutions require specialized knowledge and without employees who have that knowledge, the solution won’t work.

Is the solution timely? Some ideas are good but take too long to implement.

Sometimes, you must choose two solutions: one that works immediately and another that will be a better solution in the future.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

Another way to help sort ideas is rating and ranking. Applying both rating and ranking uses the strengths of both and omits their weaknesses.

Rating evaluates each idea separately. All four of the preceding questions are applied to each idea. The ideas are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being a great idea and 5 being a terrible idea.

Ranking involves looking at all ideas, choosing the best, and ranking it number one. The remaining ideas are compared and number two is selected. This process continues until all the ideas have been ranked.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 5: Select the Best Solution**

The best solution may not be the top idea but it is usually among the top three to five ideas. When selecting a solution, remember:

The best idea should be practical. Select an idea that will solve the problem, can be done in a timely manner, and is cost-effective. If the top two or three ideas are fairly equal, select the most practical one.

Problem solving always involves risk. No solution will be foolproof. You can try to reduce the risk, but you can’t eliminate it.

Don’t worry about being wrong. Think about what to do if the solution fails. Planning ahead for errors enables you to correct them more quickly.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 6: Implement the Solution**

A good idea can be ruined if you fail to implement it correctly.

Believe in the idea. Believing an idea will be successful will help overcome difficulties.

Convince others to support the idea. “Sell” the idea to your supervisor and coworkers. A group solution will help convince your supervisor to support the idea.

Don’t let fear hold you back. It’s normal to be afraid of failure. Don’t wait too long before implementing it. Remember inaction can kill a good idea.

Follow through. Don’t reject a solution immediately because it doesn’t work. Continue trying the solution until you know why it isn’t working before taking a new approach.

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# Problem Solving (continued)

**Step 7: Evaluate the Solution**

Within a reasonable period of time, evaluate the effectiveness of the solution and decide whether it’s working. One good way to evaluate effectiveness is to repeat the analysis step (Step 2). For example, go back and do another frequency table to find out whether customers are happier or whether production or quality has improved.

Observe what has changed since the solution has been implemented. Talk to the people who have been affected by the solution. Read current reports that may offer additional information since the change has been made.

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# Creative Thinking

Organizations realize that they must be innovative to compete with other businesses, so employers want workers who think creatively. Creativity is the ability to think of new ideas. This might mean applying old ideas to new problems or coming up with entirely new ideas.

To be creative you must not let the problem limit your thinking. In other words, you need to think outside the box.

One way to do this is to look at the problem from different viewpoints. For example, list ridiculous solutions to the problem. Then turn those ideas around and ask how they might make sense. What seemed ridiculous can become doable.

Hazy thinking may help you avoid being very specific and thinking too literally. Joking about the problem will give you an entirely different view of the problem.

Take time to think. Relax and look at the ideas you’ve come up with. Get away from phones, customers, coworkers, radios, televisions, and computers. Write down or audio record your thoughts during this time.

Then work on something else that is not related to the problem, or have a social break with coworkers. Often this relaxation frees your subconscious to come up with more possible solutions.

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# Conclusion

Because they have a direct connection to the problem, employees involved with production and services at the basic level of a business are a valuable source of information to their employers. When communicating with clients, employees learn about customers’ needs or dissatisfaction. In day-to-day work, employees may observe ways to increase efficiency in the workplace. Their knowledge is useful in correcting problems.

Problem solving is an important skill for employees in modern business. Many organizations expect every worker to contribute solutions to problems. You should practice your problem-solving skills whenever you get the chance. These skills will improve as you apply the techniques in this chapter.