Problem-Solving Guidelines

You might note that these guidelines are similar to those found in conflict-resolution, decision-making, and problem-solving courses.

Relevancy – Does the issue really matter, is it of top importance, is there a customer affected by the hassle? Here you are looking for a pattern of recurring hassles. You can't solve every hassle right away, so you want to look at those that are costing customers and employees the most time or money.

Be Specific – Look back over your hassle lists. Did you write in generalities or list specifics? Some people will list as a hassle communications problems, or interruptions, or having to answer the same questions over and over. However, you can't begin to address these issues without knowing the who, what, when, where, how, and why of these hassles. Being specific also means being careful when using the words "always," "never," and "all the time." In staff meetings, push people to give specifics.

Address the Root – Look at the cause of the issue and not just the symptoms. Let's say you've identified a specific communications problem – in most cases, the standard response is "send out a memo." Rarely does this get to the root of the problem – instead, it serves as a quick fix. One of the best ways to get to the root of the problem is using the "5 Whys" technique. Ask "why" several times until you get to the root cause.

Focus on the *What,* Not the *Who* – You don't want to turn your search into a finger-pointing or blame game. Besides, 95 percent of the time, it's a process problem, not a people problem. However, if all the *what's* keeps leading to the same *who,* maybe you've waited too long and the person has to be let go. But you should still ask "What did we do wrong that caused this person to fail?" Maybe your hiring and training process needs to be improved. If you don't get to the root of the *what*, you'll keep making the same *who* mistakes.

Involve All Those Affected – Rather than run around getting ten explanations from ten people, get them all in the same room to give a truer picture of the entire problem. Getting everyone in the room together also helps to minimize sub optimization – where fixing a problem in one part of the organization causes greater problems elsewhere.

Never Backstab – Never talk negatively about anyone if that person is not present. The only exception is if you need to seek the advice of someone before confronting the individual. In this case, you still need to bring the individual into the conversation as soon as possible. This guideline has its roots in such principles as the right to face your accuser and to be present when being judged. Besides, when you talk negatively about someone to another person, they have the then wonder if you are talking negatively about them behind

their back. If you can be successful in implementing this rule, the level of trusts and openness in your organization will improve immensely. And when the other person is present, everyone tends to follow the first five guidelines more closely.

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