

Steps for Solving Problems

Problem solving is a tool that will help you achieve your goals, but it is also a process that includes several steps. The idea of going through all of these steps to make a decision may seem like a burden. However, as you use the steps to figure out solutions to your problems, you will find yourself using this process automatically.

Step 1: Define the Problem

This step is not as obvious as it appears. It's easy to get distracted by other issues in our lives that are easier to solve. In this way, we end up avoiding the problem that is causing the most stress. As you try to clarify the problem, think about these questions:

- How is my current situation different from what I want it to be?
- What do I truly want?
- What is really preventing me from achieving my goals?

Take the time to write down your answers to these questions. Simply thinking about them is not enough. It's too easy to get distracted by the various thoughts and emotions surrounding your situation. If you are dealing with more than one problem, write all of them down and prioritize them. That will help you focus your attention on one situation at a time.

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

Ask yourself exactly how this problem is affecting you and other people. Focus your attention on noting the facts of the situation and identify your feelings about the problem you are experiencing. Expand your thinking as you gather information about how other people have handled problems similar to yours. Use all of your resources and the network of people you know to gather as many ideas as possible. Don't let your mind eliminate any options at this point.

Step 3: Generate Solutions

Ask yourself, *What is my immediate goal?* Then work on meeting that goal as you consider possible solutions to your problem. As you brainstorm solutions, list each one without judging it. Just get all of your ideas down on paper.

Now analyze each idea and list its risks and consequences. Look into the future and think carefully about the anticipated results of each solution. Pick the one that you can stand behind, not the gut reaction made during a moment of high emotion. Relying on intuition may produce a positive result because intuitive people naturally analyze situations without conscious thought. However, we often regret our impulsive decisions because we don't anticipate the negative results.

Step 4: Implement Your Solution

This step takes you back to the planning and organization stages of goal setting and time management. List the steps necessary to implement your solution. As you complete each step, monitor your success. Are you achieving your goal? Are you satisfied with the results?

Now you can make adjustments or try a better alternative if you see that your first choice is not working. Learn to view problem solving as a cycle. Keep running through the steps until you resolve the problem.