



Management For The Rest Of Us

## The Art of Problem Solving: 5 Steps to Success

By Lyndsay Swinton

Legendary problem solver Albert Einstein was onto something hot when he said "No problem is solved from the same consciousness that created it". He knew about the art of problem solving and if he'd written about it, he may have broken it down into these 5 easy to follow problem solving steps.

*Side-note - of course, being on an intellectual par with Einstein, I consider myself capable of writing on his behalf ;>)*

### **1. Flexible mind, flexible solutions**

"Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one you have". Now I'd like to claim that for myself, but a good lady called Emile Chartier said it before me. Beware when you only have one solution to a problem. It either means you don't understand the problem or you've not taken the time to figure out more creative, more likely to succeed, solutions.

### **2. It's all in the mind**

Your mental state is inextricably linked to your physical state, so if you've reached mental gridlock, take a physical break to get the thought traffic moving again. Go for a walk, listen to music, tidy up your desk or do whatever it takes to free your mind and open up your mind to creating new, innovative solutions to your problem.

### **3. Why oh why oh why?**

Ask yourself, why is this a problem? And ask again. And again. Like a stuck record, repeatedly asking why, allows you to pin point with much more precision and accuracy why the problem is a problem. And it busts myths and assumptions until all you're left with are a few lonely, useful facts.

### **4. Rose coloured glasses**

Describe your problem to your mum. Then describe it to your 6 year old nephew. And do another version for your boss. Bet the problem was different each time you talked about it. Taking a different perspective on a problem can lead you to a solution (particularly 6 year olds, as they are some of the most straight-talking

magical thinkers around!). If you want to get fancy, you can call this problem solving step "re-framing".

#### **5. Dream a little dream**

You probably wrote fantastical stories as a child that ended "and then I woke up!" You crossed rivers, fought dangerous fights and saved the day. In dream-land there are no limits, no boundaries or limits on resources. If there were a magic wand that would solve your problem, what would that be like? Describe in great detail what you see, hear and feel about this problem free state. It's an engaging and powerful mental game to play, and increases your chance of solving the problem many times over.

Okay so these aren't steps in an ABC, logical sequence sense, so sorry for misleading you. There are no hard and fast rules for problem solving, that's why it's an art.

These 5 problem solving steps are pieces of the problem solving puzzle, and will help guide you to successful solutions to problems.

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