

RQ Dimension – Problem Solver

About this Dimension

What is *Problem Solver* as a component of resilience?

One of the many challenges that people face when confronted with change, loss, trauma, and so forth is sheer “newness” of ground upon which they are now walking. Not having been to this “place” before – whether this place is a new physical space, a new job role, the absence of a loved one, the aftermath of a loss, and so forth – can create challenges for us when we try to keep walking forward. This is where the problem solver dimension is most powerful: it enables resilient people to find a pathway toward their goals.

In the face of uncertainty and stress, resilient people have the ability to analyze their situations and problems, view problems and challenges as opportunities for learning, discover the root causes behind the challenges that they face, and find creative solutions that provide a healthy way forward. Resilient people are also effective at seeing the relationships between the specific challenges or problems they face with other issues, challenges, and problems within a larger system or network of deeply interdependent issues. This awareness of the bigger picture enables resilient people to recognize the limits of their own influence, leverage their insights into greater gains, and to expect (and not be blindsided by) the unexpected.

Why is this Dimension Important to Resilience?

Being effective problem solvers enable resilient people to work their way through challenging situations by discovering the forces that have contributed to the problem or challenge and, through this discovery, finding creative ways to both deal with the challenge directly and prevent future occurrences. Resilient people are not easily set back by difficulty. Instead, they use the insights they have gained from examining a problem or challenge to better understand how to tackle the problem.

Resilient people are challenged by setbacks, loss, trauma, difficult changes, and so forth, but they do not let these challenges overwhelm them. Instead they try to better understand their situation and the forces behind this situation as the first step toward finding a way through or around these challenges. In the face of failure, resilient people use their problem solving skills to examine what had just happened, integrate the lessons from the failure into their psyche, pick themselves up off the ground, and begin walking forward – this time with insight and wisdom on their side.

Without the ability to effectively problem solve, a person is likely to be eternally challenged by set-backs, losses, frustrations, and so forth without the capacity to learn from his or her past experiences or to recognize familiar patterns and the best ways to respond to these patterns. And, without these insights or lessons from the past, the individual is likely to be in a perpetual state of stress and anxiety without a sense of hopefulness at seeing his or her way through the situation.

Problem Solver Quotes

The problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them.

- Albert Einstein, German physicist (b. 1879, d. 1955)

An undefined problem has an infinite number of solutions.

- Robert A. Humphrey

The greatest glory of living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time you fall.

- Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid activist, first democratically elected president of South Africa (b. 1918)

No problem is so large or complex that it can't be run away from.

- Charlie Brown, Peanuts character drawn by cartoonist Charles M. Schulz (b. 1922, d. 2000)

Good judgment comes from experience, and experience – well, that comes from poor judgment.

- A.A. Milne, British author of *Winnie the Pooh* (b. 1882, d. 1956)

Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must first be overcome.

- Samuel Johnson, British author, critic, essayist (b. 1709, d. 1784)

We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.

- John W. Gardner, American educator, activist, and political leader (b. 1912, d. 2002)

Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more upon it.

- Albert Schweitzer, German-French theologian, musician, philosopher, and physician (b. 1875, d. 1965)

Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal.

- Hannah More, English playwright, novelist, educator and poet (b. 1745, d. 1833)

Do not look where you fell, but where you slipped.

- African proverb

It's so much easier to suggest solutions when you don't know too much about the problem.

- Malcolm Forbes, American publisher and philanthropist (b. 1919, d. 1990)

Chance favors the prepared mind.

- Louis Pasteur, French chemist and microbiologist (b. 1822, d. 1895)

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

- George Santayana, Spanish philosopher, essayist, and poet (b. 1863, d. 1952)
The Life of Reason, Volume 1, 1905

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.

- Bertrand Russell, British philosopher and mathematician (b. 1972, d. 1970)

Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that makes the difference.

- Winston Churchill, British statesman, Prime Minister, an author (b. 1874, d. 1965)

Insanity – Repeatedly doing the same things in the same way and expecting different results.

- Anonymous

Strategies for Developing the Problem Solver Dimension

Problem solving involves a combination of personal and situational awareness, insight, and the application of problem solving skills. Any attempt to develop and strengthen problem solving in an individual, therefore, must involve focusing upon and developing each of these problem solving capacities.

Some ideas to encourage people to strengthen their Problem Solver dimension include:

On a personal, one-on-one basis . . .

- Encourage the person to enhance his or her awareness of his or her surrounding environment and his or her responses to this environment. Have the person consider such questions as:
 - *What, exactly, is the problem I face? What are its boundaries?*
 - *What is the relationship between the challenge before me and other issues and challenges in my life?*
 - *What are the forces within me and within the larger environment that helped create or that sustain this problem or challenge?*
 - *What is the “worst-case” scenario for me if this problem/challenge doesn’t turn out right? What might be a healthy response from me if this happens? How might I become stronger and more able as a result of this outcome?*
 - *Who could help me work through/think through this problem?*
 - *Which of my past life experiences has best prepared me for this challenge?*
 - *What are the life lessons that I might take away from this experience?*

- *What might I have done differently to have avoided this problem or challenge?*
- *What are the root causes of this problem or challenge? And, to what extent could I have influenced/can I influence any of these causes to avoid or reduce this problem today and in the future?*
- *What is the “silver lining” for me as a result of this challenge/problem?*
- Ask the person to reflect upon the problem or challenge that he or she is facing and to identify three positive steps that he or she could take to reduce the negative effects of this problem/challenge.
- Ask the person to identify one thing that he or she could STOP doing and one thing that he or she could START doing to prevent, reduce the impact of, or directly solve the problem/challenge that he or she is facing.
- Invite the person to identify the single greatest obstacle that he or she sees to successfully solving the challenge or problem that he or she is facing – and the actions that he or she could take to reduce or eliminate this obstacle.
- If an individual is facing a significant challenge or crisis, guide him or her in reflecting upon his or her personal assets/strengths to guide him or her through the challenge but also to identify one or two changes that he or she could make in his or her life to enable a healthy, learning-centered, positive response to this challenging situation.
- Ask the individual to explore the root causes of their challenge/problem by walking the person through the cause→effect (or fishbone) diagram. In the “effect” box, have the person write the problem result (e.g., “*I didn’t get the promotion that I felt that I deserved*”) and then identify/label each of the major cause dimensions (e.g., *Skills/Knowledge, Work Environment, Relationship with Management, Work Experience, Organizational Culture*, and so forth). Next guide the individual in identifying how each of these cause dimensions has led to the undesirable outcome. Once the diagram is completed, encourage the person to identify key themes, insights, lessons-learned, and so forth and what actions they will take based upon these insights.

Either on a one-on-one basis or when facilitating a group discussion . . .

- Use any of the activities from the one-on-one list above, inviting individuals to first work by themselves and then to partner with another person in the workshop and to share and gather feedback on their ideas for change.
- If the group has identified a set of problems or challenges facing the team or organization, organize the larger group into small discussion groups to identify first the causes of the problem and then, after a reporting out and large group discussion of these causes, invite the discussion groups to identify some possible actions to begin addressing or solving the problem.
- Guide workshop participants in developing a *Personal Action Plan* for making progress at addressing a specific problem that they are facing in their work or life. This Action Plan should identify the problem that he or she is facing, why it is important to solve this problem, the possible root causes of this problem, and the specific steps that the individual will take to address the causes and tackle the problem. Invite participants to partner up with another person in the room with whom he or she can share, discuss, and revise his or her action plan. Following the workshop, the facilitator may want to

check in with participants (via e-mail, phone call, or face-to-face interaction) to inquire as to the progress the person is making toward solving his or her problem.

- Conduct a problem solving skill-building workshop that teaches basic problem solving tools and skills. Some of the more accessible tools include: cause→effect diagram, is/is not diagram, the five whys, affinity/inter-relationship diagram, brainstorming (structured and unstructured), and force field analysis.
- In a workshop setting, ask participants to identify the “upside” or “silver lining” of the problem, challenge, or change facing the team or organization. You might begin by acknowledging the “downsides” of the problem/challenge/change (and even list these on a flip chart), but, after ten minutes or so, shift the group toward identifying potential positives for the organization and for them as individuals as a result of this problem/challenge/change. Guide the group in exploring ways to ensure that these “upsides” are realized and that the “downsides” are also resolved or addressed.