My 8-Step Process for Rapid Problem Solving

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Use simple problem solving fundamentals to transform your entire organization into a team of excellent problem solvers

To eliminate the culture of repetitive problem solving, it's important to use a structured approach and share best practices by making results visible.

This step-by-step checklist will show you how to use Rapid Problem Solving Skills to get off of the problem solving merry-go-round that seems to offer solutions but usually delivers only short-lived results.

I use these tools in the order presented as I have found this sequencing to deliver the most reliable and deeply rooted success.

Step 1

Determine What Problem You Are Trying to Solve?

Hone in the problem you aim to solve. Give everything you have to brainstorming the problem at the beginning. Commit to a non-judgmental attitude and refrain making any assumptions.

Don't be tempted to think that stating the background or details of the problem is the answer here. In reality, this first step is the most critical and often requires a good deal of time and attention. It is akin to hashing out your vision, mission, and value statements of your business - we tend to think they're evident until it's time to put pen to paper. Putting in the time now will save you much more than a re-do on the back end.

Step 2

Voice of the Customer

Get the input of your customers so you understand what they need. This isn't necessarily the entity who pays you for your finished product or services. Here, I'm talking about the customer of the process.

This crucial piece lays the foundation for identifying the measurable aspects of your process in the following steps and launches the creation of the new product, service, requirements, and/or approach that you will adopt.

It helps to think about it in terms of COPIS (SIPOC) - Customer, Output, Processes, Input, and Supplier. You have an Input and Output on either side of your Process. The Output is whomever you're handing it to next - either within the workflow or to the ultimate consumer of your goods.

Step 3

Critical to Quality (CTQ)

Determine the aspects of your product/offering that are absolutely required. List here those things that must be 100% error free. Translating the Voice of the Customer into Critical To Quality Requirements is essential for success.

In my observation, this crucial step has waned over the last few years. I would like to revive and reinstitute it universally. Coming up with your CTQs is important but even more so is holding yourself accountable to them.

Step 4

5-Why Analysis

Ask, "What are we not doing that is contributing to the problem?" Answer it. Then ask "Why?" five levels deep.

For example: I like to have a good cup of hot coffee while I write in the morning. The sun is rising in the sky and I have no coffee at my desk. **Why?** Because it sat too long before I poured it. **Why?** I forgot it on the counter. **Why?** I left the kitchen to take a call at my desk. **Why?** I overbooked my early morning calendar. **Why?** I haven't handed off that task to my assistant.

Now, handing off my scheduling to an assistant may or may not be the root cause of my lack of hot coffee drinking this morning but it certainly deserves some consideration. Do this exercise for all factors so that you identify *potential* root causes and populate your Cause & Effect Diagram in the next step.

Step 5

Cause and Effect Diagrams

(Also called fishbone or Ishikawa diagrams)

Take your list of possible root causes and insert them into the diagram to help give you and your team a visual aid as to how the possible root causes relate to each other.

For a long time, I skipped this step. I don't anymore. Often, the mere act of filling in the diagram provides compelling leads. Make sure this step follows directly from the previous 5-Why step or otherwise it will likely devolve into another repetitive brainstorming session.

Keeping yourself and your team disciplined in pulling from your 5-Why Analysis in this step increases the likelihood you will uncover some real breakthroughs.

Step 6

Identifying Waste

This is where Lean comes into the process.

Categorize the Eight Wastes and within them identify where you are having the problem so you can begin to *clear the noise*.

8 Possible Wastes

1. Transportion
2. Inventory
3. Motion
4. Waiting
5. Over-production
6. Over-processing
7. Defects/Inspection
8. People's talents

Step 7

Employ Process Maps and Other Visual Management Tools

Now that you have gotten rid of all the waste possible, go grab some data. Look at the process map for the area under investigation. If you haven't developed one - do that now.

Look at your steps and determine what is in and out of flow and look possible grouping and also for transition points, which often slow things down and are breeding grounds for mistakes. Consider employing some other techniques such as:

- 5S (Sort - Set in Order - Shine - Standardize - Sustain)
- Poka-Yoke (error-proofing)
- 8D (if you are working with a deviation)
- PDCA Approach (Plan-Do-Check-Act)

Step 8

Publish a Comprehensive A3

Put everything you have learned onto a well structured and standardized A3. The value of having everything on one page is great and will be helpful later. This should be visible so that you and others can start to measure progress to goal and begin to see the real value you are adding to the company by going through this process.

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Let Me Show You How to Turn Your Entire Team Into a Lean Mean Problem Solving Machine

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