



Transferable Problem Solving Skills

Overview

Everyday, we are confronted with problems in which we need to find a solution. These issues can be small, like where you misplaced your car keys, or larger issues such as finding a job after getting laid off. This program discusses how to develop problem solving skills and demonstrates real life examples.

Discussion Points

There are different types of problems that come up in our daily lives, such as:

- System issues
- Technical malfunctions
- Customer service
- Public relations

Traits of a good problem solver:

- Confidence that you can work through the problem
- Attitude: Having “mental toughness” and perseverance
- Flexibility enables a person to remain calm when a roadblock shows up
- Good judgement

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Discussion Points & Questions

Problem solving on the job:

- Can you solve the problem on the job without going to your supervisor? Even if you aren't sure, ask thoughtful questions; have a suggested solution to discuss with your supervisor. All problems have some solution.
- Employers appreciate a can-do attitude.
- Work with co-workers to find a solution. They are your teammates.
- Take initiative and have a good attitude.
- Break down the problem at hand.
- Research alternatives, brainstorm, put out your ideas.

Problem solving first steps:

- Identify the problem (what are you trying to accomplish?).
- Consider all options to solve the problem.
- Devise a game plan.
- Implement a solution.

How to develop your problem solving skills:

- Keep current in your field.
- Observe others and learn from their success as well as mistakes.
- Gain experience.
- Develop self-confidence.
- Learn how to brainstorm and be open to new ideas.

Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions

1. **Think of situations in your everyday life that need problem solving. What steps do you take to ensure you find a solution to the problem?**
2. **How have you successfully handled a problem recently?**
3. **What skills do you have that can contribute to problem solving on the job?**

Post-Viewing Discussion Questions - These can be done as a class discussion or used as a worksheet (see next page).

Transferable Problem Solving Skills Activities

Activity #1: Group Brainstorming

Assign students to small groups. Have them review the following scenarios under “School” and “Work” and pick one scenario to work through. (Option: you can assign a scenario to the groups.) Using the problem solving steps listed on the handout, they should brainstorm, find consensus, and review with the class their solution.

Activity #2: Essay

Ask students to think of a time in their personal or professional life where they had to use their problem solving skills. They can choose a situation in which the outcome/solution was successful and write down the steps they took to contribute to the successful resolution. Or, they can write about a situation where the outcome was unsuccessful. Have them give a detailed response as to why the situation did not have the desired outcome and what they could have done better as a problem solver. They should discuss the four main problem solving steps, including whether or not they skipped one of the steps.

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Group Members: _____

SCHOOL

Scenario #1: Alicia is failing world history and is in danger of not graduating high school. Her parents both work full-time and are unable to help her. Her friends are busy with their own school problems. What can she do to ensure that she will pass her class and graduate on time?

Scenario #2: Dylan has been busy with his writing essay for two weeks. He needs to get an “A” on it in order to keep his college scholarship. Two days before the paper is due, his computer crashes, deleting his work. What should he do?

Scenario #3: Emma works, goes to school, and has a young child. Her schedule is so full that her grades are slipping. She needs to work to pay her bills. What are her options so that she can continue working, being a mother, and not let her grades slip. Brainstorm the various options depending on the many different conditions that may be available to Emma.

WORK

Scenario #1: Rudy is new to his job at a phone company’s customer service center. He receives a call from an irate customer saying she was overcharged on last month’s bill. She wants a complete refund. This is against company policy. What steps should Rudy take to work through this customer’s complaint.

Scenario #2: Rachel has worked at her retail job as a salesperson for two years. She works hard, is never late, and gets along with everyone. However, two people who have worked at the company for a shorter amount of time have been promoted above her. What steps can she take to try to get the next promotion?

Scenario #3: Dave works at a carpet cleaning company that specializes in large buildings. Due to the economy, the pressure is on to make sure they keep their current customers and to get more clients. What can Dave do to help develop a plan?