

The Self Improvement Bus



The Art of Solving Problems

**How To Be Mentally Prepared To Deal With Life's
Obstacles...**

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The Art of Solving Problems

You likely use problem solving everyday. It is often taken for granted. People do not realize just how wonderful and important problem solving is. Most people do not even recognize it as a skill. In fact, most of the time problem solving is just second nature.

Problem solving can actually be defined as an art. The art of problem solving is something that we learn at a very young age. It helps us through life and is something we could not live without. Being able to solve problems is a life skill. It is important and it should be taken seriously to get the best results from it.

Looking at problem solving as an art can help you to become more appreciative of it. You can begin to use problem solving to its full potential and really respect that problem solving is important. You just need to learn more about problem solving as a skill and an art.

The Importance of Problem Solving

Problem solving is a fixture in life. You have to be able to solve problems. Problems pop up everyday. Sometimes they are small and sometimes they are large. Sometimes solving a problem is a matter of life and death and other times it is merely a matter of keeping your sanity. Regardless of why you need problem solving, you can not deny that you need it.

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If you are a parent, then problem solving is a skill you no doubt could not live without. Children are full of problems and as the parent it is up to you to help them find the solution. Sometimes you have to be creative because problems that come up can sometimes be quite difficult to solve without a little creative thinking.

The same can be said in business. Businesses have plenty of problems and it is up to the employees to find a way to solve those problems. Again, sometimes simple problem solving techniques just are not going to work because some problems require more problem solving skills.

You run into problems everyday, from flat tires to saving a failing product line. You are a problem solver and you probably do not even realize it. You should pay attention to your problem solving skills, though.

It is common for people to take problem solving for granted. We do it so much that it is not hard to believe that it becomes second nature. It is this familiarity with problem solving that leads up to take it for granted and to not be creative with our problem solving anymore.

If you think about how you solved problems when you were a child, chances are that you were much more creative then. Now you likely go straight to the tried and true methods instead of trying new things.

The problem with this, though, is that taking problem solving for granted can make you a lazy problem solver. You may no longer spend time trying to solve a problem but rather go to a tried and true solution. It may not be the best solution but since you are a lay problem solver you do not take the time to actual use your problem solving skills to try to come up with a better solution.

Problem solving can be an amazing process, but it is up to you to make it that way instead of just something you do because you have to. You have the ability to become a great problem solver, but you have to begin looking at it as an art.

Problem Solving from a Child's View

As mentioned, children solve problems much differently than adults. That is because children have less skill in problem solving and far less experience with problems and problem solving. The way children solve problems, though, can teach you a lot.

A child approaches a problem with an open mind. That is probably not something you do. You probably approach a problem with some preconceived notions about how it is all going to end. You probably come at it with a negative attitude and look at the problem as an annoyance. A child, on the other hand, looks at it as a challenge. They think of a problem as a great mystery and are excited about solving it.

You likely become frustrated when you can not fix the problem right away. A child, though, will become more excited. They will try different things until they find what works. They will experiment and they will just keep at it until they succeed. Adults are more likely to give up or just ask someone else to do it for them.

A child solves problems with wonder, amazement and persistence. Adults want problems to solve themselves because they do not want to take the time to solve them properly.

The difference between how adults and children solve problems speaks volumes about how much we take problem solving for granted. Adults tend to be so worried about the time a problem will take to solve than actually being happy about succeeding at solving a problem.

If you can simply imply child like problem solving techniques you will find that solving problems becomes easier and more enjoyable. You will begin to be able to see problem solving as an art not an inconvenience.

Aspects of Problem Solving

The art of problem solving involves more than just jumping to the easiest solution. You have to really take time and analyze the problem. You have to come up with various solutions so you can find the perfect solution. You have to really make a conscious effort to solve a problem in a new way or the best way.

Here are some aspects of problem solving that you should start to use. You should take these aspects and apply them the next time you have a problem, no matter how big or small it is. You will then be able to understand the art of problem solving.

- **Being flexible.** As mentioned, you have to go beyond your comfort zone. You have to avoid the immediate urge to go to the tried and true. You have to be flexible and willing to try something different. You will never know how great a solution may be if you do not try it.
- **Take time to think.** You may need to step back and consider the situation before acting. You should brainstorm a little about the different ways you can solve this problem. Look at your options and stop before taking action.
- **Ask questions.** Part of solving a problem is to create new questions to answer. You may think this is silly and compounding a problem, but really by asking questions you will be led to deeper solutions.
- **Look at the problem in a different way.** Do not approach the problem as you normally would. Try thinking differently about it. Avoid your natural tendencies. This may be hard at first but once you get used to thinking differently it will become second nature.
- **Think unconventionally.** Come up with solutions that make no sense. You might surprise yourself and actually run across an unconventional idea that is the perfect solution to your problem.

By using these ideas you can begin to start looking at problem solving in a whole new way. You will no longer just jump to the obvious conclusion, but rather be able to really find the perfect solution.

All it really involves is stepping back and taking some time. Not all problems must be solved right away. It is those problems that really let you put the art of problem solving to good use.

Skills for Problem Solving

Problem solving involves many different skills. The most important skills are outlined below.

- **Creative thinking.** You have to be able to think in a creative manner and to see beyond the obvious if you ever want to be a good problem solver. You cannot just stick to the obvious because in most cases that will never get the problem solved. You have to be willing to think outside the box, brainstorm a little and come up with a unique solution. Creative thinking can make a person a perfect problem solver. Being able to think creatively allows a person to come up with solutions to problems that others may never even think about. A person is able to come up with good ideas that may not be so obvious. Creative thinking is something that can be a huge benefit to almost any profession because quick thinking is a great skill.
- **Reasoning.** Reasoning has a place in problem solving, but it is important not to let your reasoning overtake your creativity. Reasoning comes in handy, though, because it will help you weed out the good ideas from the bad ones to come to the final solution.
- **Objectivity.** You have to be object when approaching a problem. You cannot have preconceived notions about how the situation will end or how you can fix

the problem quickly. You have to come to a problem with an open mind and the ability to try different things to solve it.

- **Positive attitude.** Your attitude can go a long way in your success as a problem solver. You have to be positive. If you approach a problem thinking that you will not be able to solve it then chances are that you will not be able to do it. You have to think positive and believe in yourself.

These skills will go a long way towards helping you be a good problem solver. The skills listed above are some of the major things you need in order to be able to solve problems in a constructive manner.

If you have these skills then you need to refine them. If you do not have these skills then you need to work on them. If you are committed to becoming a good problem solver then you need to have these skills to help you.

You can build upon these skills too to help you become an even better problem solver. There are also other skills not listed above that can assist you in being a good problem solver. You just need to identify what things you already know or can do that could possibly be put to good use when you are solving problems.

Take inventory of your skills. You will find that many things you may not exactly see as a skill is actually a very nice asset to your problem solving skills. Go through your skills and see how each skill you have can in some way benefit your ability to solve problems.

Finding a Method of Problem Solving

Not everyone will solve problems in the same way. That is just part of what makes us each unique individuals. However, you can often learn from others and how they solve problems. They may use a technique that is new to you or something that really works and that you'd like to use. Watch how others solve problems and see what you can learn from them.

There are many methods of problem solving. You probably use one method and stick to it to solve every problem you encounter. This can be a bad thing. You should try out different methods because sometimes one method works better for a particular problem than another method.

There are three main ways people solve problems:

1. **Questions.** Some people solve problems by asking questions. They look at the problem and ask 'what if' – what if I tried this or what if this happens? Through questioning they are able to see the possible outcomes. This allows them to come up with the best solution that seems to be the one that will work to solve the problem.
2. **Develop a process.** For the more organized individual or the more complex problem it can sometimes help to develop a problem solving process. This usually involves analyzing the problem, proposing different solutions, testing the solutions and then finally, applying the chosen solution. It is a very structured way of solving a problem.
3. **Brainstorming.** For the more creative problem solver, there is the process of brainstorming. This involves just sitting down and coming up with numerous ways to solve the problem. Some ideas may be out there and that is fine. Using innovative thinking and being creative can help a person come up with an unconventional solution to a problem.

Being able to solve problems is a natural thing that we all are born with. It is actually how you approach problem solving that will help determine how good of a problem solver you are.

You should be willing to try different methods and different ways of problem solving. This will allow you to be able to come up with many options as a solution to your problem. You will then be more likely to come up with the perfect solution.

Putting the Art of Solving Problems to Use

Once you have developed a good understanding of problem solving that goes beyond the basic necessity for it, you can then truly start to recognize and grasp the idea of problem solving as an art.

You are able to start using problem solving in a different way. You can begin to become a master problem solver. People will start to see you as the solution person. They will come to you for advice and help when they have problems.

You will also be able to avoid problems in your life and solve them when they do come up. You will soon find that the art of problem solving is something you can not live without.

Being able to look at problem solving in a different way will help you to approach problems differently. You will not dread them when they pop up, but rather embrace them and start working on finding a solution.

Besides dealing with problems, problem solving will really help make your life much smoother. You will be able to handle adversity easier. In the long run you will start to feel better about yourself and be happier overall.

Problem solving is not just a skill, but an art. It can change your life for the better. Being able to solve problems quickly and efficiently is something that not everyone can do.

Not everyone can see a problem and take it as a challenge. Some people simply break down in the face of problems. These people have a hard time in life and business. You can get on top of the game with your ability to solve problems.

It all starts with being able to recognize problems and put the problem solving methods to good use. You have to remain calm and level headed so you can seek out the solution that works best.

Give up the Negative

One of the keys to becoming a good problem solver is to give up the negative. You have to approach problem solving in a positive way or you will never get anywhere.

Many times people approach a problem with their mind already made up that they will never solve it. If you think you cannot do something then chances are you will fail when you try. You have to think positively. You have to go at a problem thinking I can solve this, no problem.

A positive attitude is about keeping your mind open, which is important to problem solving, in general. When you approach a problem with a can do attitude you are able to stop yourself from getting frustrated easily. You are more open to letting your ideas flow and more likely to try out several solutions.

A positive attitude may just be the single hang up you have. Think about how you approach problems. Are you always going into the situation thinking you will never solve the problem? If so, then maybe simply by changing your attitude you can improve your problem solving skills.

Give it a try. The next time you approach a problem, think positively. Tell yourself you can do it, that you can solve the problem. Do not let yourself go to the negative.

A positive attitude is a major thing when it comes to problem solving. Do not forget that your attitude can be a huge influence. Keep it positive for the best results.

Problem Solving Exercises

There are many ways to practice your problem solving. You just have to take the time to practice. As with any skill the more you work at it the better you will become at it. You have to practice to be a good problem solver.

Here are some exercises you can do to help you become a better problem solver, open your mind and get yourself into the problem solving state of mind.

- **Exercise 1:** Play games. Any type of game, whether it is a board game, card game or even a word search, will open your mind. It gets you thinking. It brings out the problem solving skills and it gets your mind in problem solving mode. Play games often so you can build up your mind and get it used to solving problems.
- **Exercise 2:** Play with a child. Children are free thinking. They use their imagination all the time. They see the world around them as amazing and exciting. They are constantly exploring. They love to tackle problems. Spending some time with a child will allow you to see the world the way they do. You will be able to take away a little of their amazement and wonder that you can use in your problem solving.
- **Exercise 3:** Experience something new. When you try something new you are earning new things, expanding your mind and opening yourself up to new problems that need solved. You will be able to practice your problem solving and learn something at the same time.
- **Exercise 4:** Solve problems that already have a solution. Practice makes perfect so you need to practice your problem solving. The best way to do this is to take problems that have already been solved. Figure out how the solution was found. How did you come up with the solution? By examining the solution to a problem you can learn a lot about the problem solving process. You will be able to take away from this exercise some key information that will help you to solve problems in the future.

These three exercises are not the only things you can do, but you should have a pretty good idea of what you need to do to help yourself start thinking like a master problem solver. It is all about opening your mind and practicing your problem solving methods.

An Example of Problem Solving at Work

The concept of how children solve problems verses how adults solve problems is one that you should fully understand. It is very important because we lose those good problem solving skills as we get older.

Part of the reason for this is that we become more logical. We no longer want to try to be creative. We want to go straight to what we are sure will work. We do not give anything else a try and if what we think will work turn out not to work, we get frustrated.

Another thing is we lose our sense of experimentation. We just do not want to take the time to try different ideas or even come up with different ideas. We get lazy.

As mentioned children do things much differently. Here is an illustrated example of how a child and adult would approach the same problem.

Situation: Bob and his son, Bob junior, are given a video game system to hook up to a television set. Bob is 28 and Junior is 8. Neither have directions and neither of them have set up a system like this before.

Bob: Bob's first instinct is to get out all the cords and pieces and lay them out nicely. He then examines each piece to see how everything fits together. He determines that there needs to be a cord running from the television to the game system and he picks up one that looks good. He then hooks up all the cords to the spots where they appear to go and turns on the system only to find that nothing happens. He unhooks everything and tries again and again. Eventually he gets frustrated and asks if the system is broken.

Junior: Junior dives right in just connecting cords. He ends up with the system hooked to the television, but nothing happens. He realizes he forgot to plug in the system and does so, but that doesn't make it show up on the television. Instead of unhooking everything he starts messing with the television. He ends up turning the channel and viola the system is working.

Bob was quick to give up and he missed the obvious – plugging the system in. Bob's first instinct was to make an excuse and say the system was broken. Junior kept at it and tried new things until he figured it out.

The difference in how they solved the problem is clear. Bob probably would have figured it out eventually, but Junior was the one to actually succeed. He never gave up and he was willing to experiment. Plus he did not miss the obvious because he was so focused on other things like his dad.

The way children solve problems is amazing. It is really something you can learn from. When you are solving problem strive to be more like Junior and less like Bob.

Summing It Up

Problem solving is an art because it takes a real creative mind to be a good problem solver. It involves creative thinking and it is something you can learn to do. As an art it should be held in high esteem. Problem solving needs to be taken seriously, but not too seriously.

As demonstrated adults tend to lose their problem solving skills. Adults are too quick to just want to get things done. They do not take the time to really think. Thinking is an important part of problem solving. Thinking involves not only looking at the obvious but also considering the not so obvious.

Children are master problem solvers because they are not afraid to try anything. Children will work and experiment and take the time to solve a problem. They do not

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care if people think they are weird for spending so much time to solve a problem. They are having fun trying to solve problems and they see it as a challenge or a game more than work.

Adults, on the other hand, just would rather give up than even put forth some effort. They see solving problems as just one more thing they have to do. It is work. There is nothing fun about it.

They can not see that problem solving can be something fun and exciting – it is just all about the way you approach it and look at it. That is why we have to go back to thinking about problems and approaching them in the same way we did as a child.

You have to approach problems with an attitude that is positive. You have to believe you can solve the problem and not immediately think about how hard it is going to be. You have to believe in your abilities. Self doubt can kill even the best problem solving efforts. If you never believe that you can solve a problem then you probably will never be able to solve the problem.

Your mind is very powerful. You have probably been told before that whatever you put your mind to you can accomplish. Well, the same is true for what you mind against. If you think that you can not do something then you will not be able to do it. It really is that simple. Your mind is that powerful. Mind over matter – that saying says it all.

You have to try different things and work towards a solution instead of just waiting for the solution to become clear. You have to work at problem solving, but at the same time you have to be creative with your problem solving.

Problem solving is something we are born to do. Problems come in every shape and size. They can be small or they can be huge. You have to always be prepared because most often problems come unexpectedly. They will just appear and you have to deal with them.

You can not avoid problems, so it is only logical to become a good problem solver. A good problem solver is going to be an asset. They are someone good to have around.

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Make yourself that problem solver. Be the person everyone loves to have around. Be the person who can look at a complex situation and come up with a solution. Do not be the person that runs away and says I don't know or I can't do it.

There is no room for negative words when it comes to problem solving. Always remember that. Remember also, Bob and Junior. Be a junior, not a Bob. Don't give up or make excuses. Tackle problems and make the effort to solve them. Put your mind to it and you can be a great problem solver.

Put the art of problem solving to work in your life and you will be amazed at how well it works. Stop giving up and passing them onto others. Solve your problems and you will be glad you did.