

# 5 Steps (And 4 Techniques) for Effective Problem Solving

Problem solving isn't just a task for the manager anymore. Problems can be solved faster and more collaboratively by the teams themselves with these problem solving steps.

Problem solving is the process of reviewing every element of an issue so you can get to a solution or fix it.

Problem solving is a series of steps that you work through, covering multiple aspects of a problem until you can find a solution. Whether that's in a group collaboratively or independently, the process remains the same, but the approach and the steps can differ.

To find a problem solving approach that works for you, your team, or your company, you have to take into consideration the environment you're in and personalities around you.

Knowing the characters in the room will help you decide on the best approach to try and ultimately get to the best solution.

## Table of Contents

1. 5 Problem Solving Steps
2. 4 Techniques to Encourage Problem Solving
3. The Bottom Line
4. More Tips on Problem Solving

## 5 Problem Solving Steps

No matter what the problem is, to solve it, you nearly always have to follow these steps. Missing any of these steps can cause the problem to either resurface or the solution to not be implemented correctly.

Once you know these steps, you can then get creative with the approach you take to find the solutions you need.

### 1. Define the Problem

You must define the problem before you start, whether you're solving it independently or as a group. If you don't have a single view of what the problem is, you could be fixing something that doesn't need fixing, or you'll fix the wrong problem.

Spend time elaborating on the problem, write it down, and discuss so you're clear on why the problem is occurring and who it is impacting.

## **2. Ideate**

Once you have clarity on the problem, you then need to start thinking about every possible solution. This is where you go big and broad as you want to come up with as many potential solutions as possible.

Don't just take the first idea; build out as many as you can as the more you create, the more likely you'll find a solution that has the lowest impact on the team.

## **3. Decide on a Solution**

Whichever solution you pick individually or as a team, make sure you think about the impact on others if you implement this solution. Ask questions like:

1. How will they react to this change?
2. Will they need to change anything?
3. Who do we need to inform of this change?

## **4. Implement the Solution**

When you implement the solution, be prepared for feedback, and plan for this. When you roll out the solution, request feedback on the success of the change made.

## **5. Review, Iterate, and Improve**

Making a change shouldn't be a one time action. Spend time reviewing the results of the change to make sure it's made the required impact and met the desired outcomes.

Make changes where needed so you can further improve the solution implemented.

# **4 Techniques to Encourage Problem Solving**

Each individual or team is going to have different needs and may need a different technique to encourage problem solving. Try one of these to stimulate the process.

## **1-2-4 All Approach + Voting**

The 1-2-4-All is a problem solving approach that can work no matter how large the group is. Everyone is involved, and you can generate a vast amount of ideas quickly.

Ideas and solutions are discussed and organized rapidly, and what is great about this approach is the attendees own their ideas, so when it comes to implementing the solutions, you don't have more work to gain buy-in.

As a facilitator, you first need to present the group with a question explaining the problem or situation. For example, 'What actions or ideas would you recommend to solve the company's lack of quiet working areas?'

1

With the question clear for all to see, the group then spends 5 minutes to reflect on the question individually. They can jot down their thoughts and ideas on Post-Its.

2

Now ask the participants to find one other person to discuss their ideas and thoughts with. They can be in threes if the numbers aren't even.

Ask the group to move around to find a partner so they can mix with new people.

Ask the pairs to spend 5 minutes discussing their shared ideas and thoughts.

4

Next, put the group into groups of two or three pairs to make groups of 4-6. Each group shouldn't be larger than six as the chances of everyone being able to speak reduces.

Ask the group to discuss one interesting idea they've heard in previous rounds, and each group member shares one each.

The group then needs to pick their preferred solution to the problem. This doesn't have to be voted on, just one that resonated most with the group.

Then ask for three actions that could be taken to implement this change.

**All**

Bring everyone back together as a group and ask open questions like 'What is the one thing you discussed that stood out for you?' or 'Is there something you now see differently following these discussions?'

By the end of the session, you'll have multiple approaches to solve the problem, and the whole group will have contributed to the future solutions and improvements.

### **The Lightning Decision Jam**

The Lightning Decision Jam is a great way to solve problems collaboratively and agree on one solution or experiment you want to try straight away. It encourages team decision making, but at the same time, the individual can get their ideas and feedback across.<sup>[1]</sup>

If, as a team, you have a particular area you want to improve upon, like the office environment, for example, this approach is perfect.

The approach follows a simple loop.

## **Make a Note – Stick It on The Wall – Vote – Prioritize**

Using sticky notes, the technique identifies major problems, encourages solutions, and opens the group up for discussion. It allows each team member to play an active role in identifying both problems and ways to solve them.

## **Mind Mapping**

Mind mapping is a fantastic visual thinking tool that allows you to bring problems to life by building out the connections and visualizing the relationships that make up the problem.

You can use a mind map to quickly expand upon the problem and give yourself the full picture of the causes of the problem, as well as solutions.

The goal of a mind map is to simplify the problem and link the causes and solutions to the problem.

To create a mind map, you must first create the central topic (level 1). In this case, that's the problem.

Next, create the linked topics (level 2) that you place around and connect to the main central topic with a simple line.

If the central topic is 'The client is always changing their mind at the last minute,' then you could have linked topics like:

1. How often does this happen?
2. Why are they doing this?
3. What are they asking for?
4. How do they ask for it?
5. What impact does this have?

Adding these linking topics allows you to start building out the main causes of the problem as you can begin to see the full picture of what you need to fix.

Once you're happy that you've covered the breadth of the problem and its issues, you can start to ideate on how you're going to fix it.

Now start adding subtopics (level 3) linking to each of the level 2 topics.

This is where you can start to go big on solutions and ideas to help fix the problem.

For each of the linked topics (level 2), start to think about how you can prevent them, mitigate them, or improve them. As this is just ideas on paper, write down anything that comes to mind, even if you think the client will never agree to it!

The more you write down, the more ideas you'll have until you find one or two that could solve the main problem.

Once you run out of ideas, take a step back and highlight your favourite solutions to take forward and implement.

## The 5 Why's

The five why's can sound a little controversial, and you shouldn't try this without prepping the team beforehand.

Asking why is a great way to go deep into the root of the problem to make the individual or team really think about the cause. When a problem arises, we often have preconceived ideas about why this problem has occurred, which is usually based on our experiences or beliefs.

Start with describing the problem, and then the facilitator can ask 'Why?' five times or more until you get to the root of the problem.

It's tough at first to keep being asked why, but it's also satisfying when you get to the root of the problem.

As a facilitator, although the basic approach is to ask why, you need to be careful not to guide the participant down a single route.

To help with this, you can use a mind map with the problem at the center. Then ask a why question that will result in multiple secondary topics around the central problem. Having this visual representation of the problem helps you build out more useful why questions around it.

Once you get to the root of the problem, don't forget you must be clear in the actions to put a fix in place to resolve it.

## The Bottom Line

To fix a problem, you must first be in a position where you fully understand it. There are many ways to misinterpret a problem, and the best way to understand them is through conversation with the team or individuals who are experiencing it.

Once you're aligned, you can then begin to work on the solutions that will have the greatest impact.

For the more significant or more difficult problems to solve, it's often advisable to break the solution up into smaller actions or improvements.

Trial these improvements in short iterations, and then continue the conversations to review and improve the solution. Implementing all of these steps will help you root out the problems and find useful solutions.

## More Tips on Problem Solving

1. The Simplest Ways to Improve Your Problem Solving Skills
2. How to Use the 5 Whys to Get to the Root Cause of Any Problem
3. Creative Problem Solving: Create Meaning from Contradictory Ideas

## Reference

You finished reading the article "**5 Steps (And 4 Techniques) for Effective Problem Solving**" edited by the [TipsMake](#) team. We hope this article has provided you with many useful tech tips and tricks. You can search for

similar articles on tips and guides. Thank you for reading and for following us regularly.

---