5 TIPS

FOR EFFECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING AT WORK

This year you have likely been tackling a number of additional and unexpected challenges. With time and energy becoming an increasingly valuable resource, **identifying the root cause of the problem and overcoming it as quickly as possible is particularly important right now.**

So, to help you resolve problems at your business efficiently and effectively, we've pulled together our top 5 tips...

RUN THE
5 WHY'S PROCESS

The 5 why's process is designed to help you to identify the root cause of your business' challenges. By revealing the underlying causes, you can minimise the likelihood that they reoccur, saving you time and resources in the long run.[1]

To run the exercise, arrange a meeting when an issue arises, and **ask your team why** it occurred. The answer might be a 'missed deadline'. Once you've determined the cause, ask 'why' again. For instance, if a 'missed deadline' was the reason for the conflict, you should ask 'why was the deadline missed?' Perhaps the employees were overworked, or they didn't have the right tools to talk to each other. To complete this process, ask 'why' a total of 5 times so you can get to the core of the issue and resolve it.[2]

ENCOURAGE
ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a great tool in problem solving sessions, as it can encourage employees to feel more comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification, **leading to fewer misunderstandings and costly 'do-over' work.**[3]

To encourage your workforce to learn this skill, ask them to remain neutral and non-judgmental when other people voice their opinions. Active listening also involves allowing periods of silence, asking questions, reflecting back on what's said, asking for clarification where necessary and displaying verbal and non-verbal feedback – including smiling, eye contact and offering words of encouragement.[4] When working remotely, ensure that all cameras are turned on and that all distractions are kept to a minimum by closing all other applications on your device.

TAKE ADVANTAGE

OF DIGITAL TOOLS

Digital tools can be really useful when mapping out your ideas, getting employee buy-in and tracking progress in problem solving sessions. By using online mapping tools, you can easily share and update your mind maps to allow for team collaboration and brain storming, while ensuring flexibility.

For example, you could use a whiteboard or online mind mapping tool to develop solutions to the issues you've identified. For larger meetings, try using an employee feedback apps like Vevox, which allows you to send out surveys to your team, and host Q&As or polls in real-time to make sure everyone's voice gets heard. When you've decided on your solution, there's lots of great apps to track your progress as you implement them – like Trello, Blink or Slack.

SCAMPER

The SCAMPER method offers a great way to assess the quality of the solutions you come up with in your problem-solving sessions. **By evaluating each solution, you'll be able to determine the most viable and effective solution for your business.**

SUBSTITUTE

What would happen if we outsourced the problem?

COMBINE

Could we ask two teams to work together to solve this issue?

ADAPT

How could we adapt this solution to make it better?

MODIFY

How could we modify this solution to add more value?

ELIMINATE

What could we remove from this solution to make it simpler?

REVERSE

How might we reorganise this solution to make it more effective?

PUT TO ANOTHER USE

What other uses might this solution have?[5]

CREATE CONTINGENCY PLANS

Contingency plans are a vital step in any problem-solving session, as they minimise the likelihood that unforeseen circumstances will impact the effectiveness of your solution. By having a backup option when things go wrong or when the unexpected happens, you can ensure that your business will continue to move forward, regardless of circumstance.[6]

To create an effective plan, list potential challenges or hurdles you may need to overcome whilst implementing your solution. Next to each problem, determine how you will move forward if it occurs. For example, if you're forced to work remotely in the future, which tools will you need to use to ensure your solution will still be effective?

Finally, make sure each contingency plan has an owner, who will be responsible for actioning the plan if these issues do arise.

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[1] 5 Whys: Getting to the Root of a Problem Quickly, Mind Tools
[2] The 5 whys process we use to understand the root of any problem, Buffer, September 2018
[3] How Your Listening Skills Can Make Your Employees Better Problem Solvers, The Uncommon League, October 2018
[4] How to practice active listening, verywell mind, October 2018
[5] 20 Brainstorming techniques that work, miro, June 2020
[6] Contingency Planning: Developing a Good "Plan B", Mind Tools