Creative Problem-Solving
August

Emotional

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary includes several definitions for the word "problem." The definitions that we are most concerned with while learning about the creative problem-solving process are:

- "any question or matter involving doubt, uncertainty, or difficulty," and
- "a question proposed for solution or discussion."

A problem can be defined as a scenario in which the current situation does not match the desired situation, or anytime actual performance does not match expectations. Other labels for a problem include challenges or opportunities, or any situation or circumstance for which there is room for improvement.

Intellectual

The creative problem-solving process requires creativity. However, many people feel that they are not creative. This is the sign of a mental block at work. Everyone can tap into creative resources in their brains. Creativity is not something to be turned on and off when needed. The potential for creativity is always there. We just need to learn how to access it.

Here are a couple of tips:

- Change your perspective. Work on the floor or go to the park for your brainstorming session.
- Write in a journal, in a spare notebook or on plain paper for 15-20 minutes. It does not have to be about the specific problem you need to solve. Dump all of your mental clutter on to these pages that no one will ever see (unless you want them to). Then let the pages and their recorded thoughts go.

Occupational

The Creative Problem-Solving Process uses six major steps to implement solutions to almost any kind of problem. The steps are:

- **Information Gathering**, or understanding more about the problem before proceeding
- **Problem Definition**, or making sure you understand the correct problem before proceeding
- **Generating Possible Solutions** using various tools
- **Analyzing Possible Solutions**, or determining the effectiveness of possible solutions before proceeding
- **Selecting the Best Solution(s)**
- **Planning the Next Course of Action** (Next Steps), or implementing the solution(s)
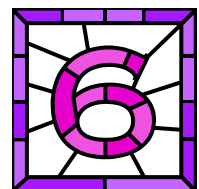
Physical

Here are some tips for creating a creative mental space to encourage productive problem-solving:

- Go outside for a few minutes, especially for a nature walk or bike ride. Exercising and getting sunshine even for just a few minutes are sure ways to redirect your brain to a more creative outlook.
- Breathe deeply. Especially when stressed, we tend to become shallow breathers. Fill your entire lungs with air to get some extra oxygen to your brain. Practice deep breathing for 5 to 15 minutes for not only more creativity, but for a great burst of energy.

Social

Dr. Edward de Bono introduced a concept for thinking more effectively in groups in his book, *Six Thinking Hats*. The premise of this idea is that the brain thinks about things in a number of different ways.

The different categories of thought are assigned to a color-coded "hat," that provides a structured way to think about different aspects of a problem.

1. **White hat – Facts and Information**
2. **Red Hat – Feelings and Emotion**
3. **Black Hat – Critical Judgment**
4. **Yellow Hat – Positive Judgment**
5. **Green Hat – Alternatives and Learning**
6. **Blue Hat – The Big Picture**

The Six Thinking Hats methodology allows a deliberate focusing during problem-solving sessions, with an agreed-upon sequence and time limit to each hat. It ensures that everyone in the group is focused on a particular approach at the same time, rather than having one person reacting emotionally (red hat) while others are being objective (white hat) and still another is wearing the black hat to form critical judgments of ideas.

Spiritual

After the problem has been solved, take the time to celebrate the things that went well in the problem-solving process. Try to recognize each person for their contributions and accomplishments. You can celebrate successes by recognizing the contributions of the team members in the follow-up meeting. Alternatively, you can have a party or other form of celebration. A good activity just needs to help the team celebrate a job well done in coming up with all the solutions, evaluating them, and finally implementing a solution effectively.