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Creative Ways to Enhance Your Problem Solving Skills at Work



Problem solving is a process that we use to bridge a gap between a present situation and a desired goal. We go through this process almost everyday at work to make decisions and get our job done. Furthermore, we are often encouraged to “think outside of the box” when searching solutions for a problem. Therefore, it is important to adapt a creative approach to solve problems at work. It is always better to have more than one options to problem resolution.

Creative ideas do not suddenly just appear in people’s minds. Instead, they are usually results of trying to solve a specific problem or to achieve a certain goal. We have to make a conscientious decision about being creative, and it requires focus and practice to succeed in creative problem solving.

STEPS TO CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

- ↳ **Identify and understand the problem.** Sometimes, we are faced with various changes in the workplace or need to do things more efficiently but are not sure how to tackle the issue. In the creative problem solving process, it is essential to start by identifying the real problem and/or goal at hand. If it seems unclear, ask for clarification until you fully understand the problem. If the situation seems overwhelming and the problem seems compounded, break it down to multiple simple questions and tackle them one at the time.
- ↳ **Gather information.** After identifying the problem/goal, the next step is to collect information that will help you formulate creative ideas. Talk to your supervisor and/or colleagues in other departments or campuses about their experiences in dealing with similar issues. Find out from your supervisor what resources are available to you in addressing the problem. Utilize the internet for online resources and research for best practices.
- ↳ **Allow yourself time to think.** Creative solutions to a problem does not emerge in a snap of the fingers; it takes time. Except when dealing with a crisis situation, you want to allow yourself sufficient time to be thoughtful about your ideas. Get up from your desk and take a break when you feel like you are not going

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anywhere. Sometimes it helps the creative thinking process when you are physically away from the problem because you may be able to see things from a different viewpoint.

- 🔗 **Brainstorm and generate ideas.** Creative problem solving method in the workplace generally involves a team approach. Brainstorming session with the co-workers and/or other stakeholders is an effective way to generate ideas. Employees bring different perspectives from their diverse experiences and backgrounds, and it allows the group brainstorming session to be more creative and valuable. Be sure to write down every idea offered or discussed, no matter how small or irrelevant it may seem at the moment. They may still add value in finding the solution when combined with other ideas, or they may spark other new thoughts.
- 🔗 **Evaluate potential solutions for feasibility and effectiveness.** After generating and writing down all the ideas, now it's time to combine and evaluate them. In evaluating the potential options, consider the resources available, possible constraints, the District's culture and norms, and other criteria that might impact your evaluation and decision. It is beneficial to determine a list of evaluating criteria ahead of time and consult your supervisor and/or team members as necessary. This evaluation process is designed to help you find the idea(s) that are most realistic and suitable to solve your problem and allow you to achieve your goal.
- 🔗 **Take action.** Now you have found your creative, feasible solutions, the next step is creating an action plan to implement the ideas. Establish realistic timeline to take actions and stick to it.

As you go through this creative problem solving process, be mindful that your best or favorite ideas may not be the most realistic and feasible solutions for the problem at hand. It is important to keep an open mind and embrace other possibilities and ideas that emerge along the way. This approach is a way to turn a problem to an opportunity to develop new ideas and improve team success.

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