

Albert Einstein

The Success Series: Creative Problem Solving

By Stefan Swanepoel

Introduction

The word Einstein has become a synonym for "brainy" and "intellectual". Originating of course from Albert Einstein (1879-1955), most likely the most famous scientists of this century and widely regarded as one of the best problem solvers that ever lived. When you have a simple problem you usually know exactly what to do. However, more often than not a multitude of complexities cloud our options, confuse our mind and the obvious or correct solution becomes blurred.

Basic problem solving is a linear, hierarchical process that can be complex and confusing. The following simple, systematic, step-by-step procedure taken from The Success Series (www.iSucceed.com) will navigate you through the problem-solving process and help bring to the surface those issues that need to be addressed before a solution can be uncovered.

1. Identifying the problem: Step one is to clearly identify the obstacle, the challenge or the problem. What is the problem? Is it your problem? Can you solve it? Is it worth solving? These are basic, but critically important questions, so be willing to invest time in defining and understanding the full extent of the problem, both in general and specific terms.

2. Gathering information: Step two is to gather all the data you can regarding the problem. Find out what the boundaries or constraints are. This includes a lack of funds or other resources. If a solution itself is surrounded by too many constraints, then the constraints themselves become the problem. Ask questions such as: Why this is important? Who is involved? What solutions have already been tried? What are the stumbling blocks?

3. Developing alternatives. Step three encompasses the developing and evaluating of options. Look at the problem in different ways. Search for a new perspective that you haven't thought of before. Brainstorming is an excellent discovery process. Stay flexible and be open to other possibilities. One note of caution during this phase: Be sure to defer judgment and do not criticize or disregard another's suggestions. At this stage, the goal is not to evaluate ideas, but to create them.

4. Selecting solutions. Once you have listed all the possible alternatives, step four asks that you evaluate the alternatives without prejudice, no matter how absurd, strange or off the chart they may be. Use either the "Positives & Negatives" technique, by listing a minimum of three good and three bad things about that idea, or the "Suitability, Feasibility and Flexibility" matrix to rate every option accordingly. Compare and prioritize the solutions without expecting a "perfect solution." Re-evaluate your best solution to see if there is anything you missed and be prepared to consider a compromise or hybrid solution before you make the final decision.

5. Implementing decisions. Implementation means solving the problem and without this step you will have failed. Don't falter, don't hesitate and don't change mid-stream. This is not the ponder stage, you've done your homework and now you must focus on implementation. Decide what tasks this involves, who will perform them, what the deadlines are and who is ultimately responsible. A very large portion of solutions fail not because of poor decision making but poor execution. Monitor the steps, the timeline, the progress, the impact and the results. Communicate to stakeholders and those affected by the decision.

In Closing

Einstein once said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is at all comprehensible." Problem solving is fundamentally thinking and thinking is a mental process which allows us to deal with and manipulate information according to goals, plans and desires. At any point any number of choices can be made giving rise to different solutions. Like traveling from one place to another, different routes will lead us to different places. Each step is a result of the previous step and therefore your plan will evolve as you solve the problem.

Acknowledgement

This article is part of "*The Success Series*" by Stefan Swanepoel author of 11 books and whitepapers, and a celebrated speaker to more than 250,000 people on five continents. Stefan is CEO of The RealtyU® Group, the largest real estate education, training and career development company (www.RealtyU.com) in the US.