

What's the Problem?



...a better way to manage

the
happy
manager

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What's the Problem?

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How to be a Better Manager...

What's the Problem? is one of a series of practical, thought-provoking guides, designed to help you deal with a wide range of management ideas, activities and situations. Whether you are a new manager, or one who wants to hone or develop existing skills, we're sure you'll find something valuable in any of these guides.

This series of e-guides is published by Apex Leadership Ltd. The guides have been developed by a team of professional managers, consultants and educators. The full range of titles is available from [Apex Leadership Ltd](#), or from [the Happy Manager.com](#). Use these guides to benefit from our wealth of management expertise. Let us help you find: **a better way to manage...**"

Phil Higson & Anthony Sturgess
Directors, Apex Leadership Ltd

Using the guides

Each guide contains information, insight and inspiration on essential management topics. The best way to use the guides is to read through each section in turn, ensuring you pause for reflection wherever you see the "Consider..." points. Be sure to answer any questions posed, wherever they appear - they are there for a reason!

Consider ...

Tools ...

After you've worked through the guide, work through the tools. These have been designed to help you use and develop the advice given in the guide. Click on the tool buttons where they appear for an in-text hyperlink to the actual tool. At the end of each tool you can simply click on the "return" link to get back to your place in the guide.

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What's the problem?

Most problem solving guides and processes begin with defining the problem. Of course this is important and you'll find that and much more in this guide. But first we argue there is a crucial stage before this - one that is too often missed. Before defining problem solving, we stress two crucial principles:

- Firstly, make sure you start by thinking about the nature of the problems you're trying to solve. Ask: "is it the right problem to solve?"
- Secondly, try not to see every problem as a problem. Think positive. Ask: "what opportunities are created by this problem?"

Both of these principles are understated ideas at the heart of effective problem solving. But they're often missed in our rush towards finding solutions!

You don't often hear of problem solving processes that start with finding the right problems to solve. Many would argue that they have enough problems to solve already without looking for more!

Yet identifying problems that are critical to your business success is certainly something worth being proactive about. Finding the real cause of problems, and finding them early, is time well spent. And in doing so, keep looking for opportunity.

For example, finding and solving problems that affect your customers can transform a business. Poor service can be a problem but attention to service recovery is also an opportunity. Impress them with your responsiveness, promptness and attention to their needs, and there is an opportunity to turn dissatisfied customers into loyal ambassadors.

What are the problems with problem solving? This guide is designed to help you find the right problems then take steps to address them.

It will help you to:

- Think about what you do when you don't know what to do!
- Define problem solving.
- Solve the right problems.
- Apply a 7 step problem solving process.
- Be creative in generating possible solutions.
- Get to the root causes of problems.
- Solve problems with groups and teams.
- Find the best problem solving tool ever – a good question!

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What is Problem Solving - an Alternative View

Problem solving then, is what you should do when you don't know what to do. However, we may all be more susceptible to panic, procrastination, pretending or ploughing on than we might care to admit. To avoid these responses think through your own approach to problem solving.

You can start by using the questions tool 1 to help you with some common problem solving problems.

[Tool 1](#)

Defining problem solving

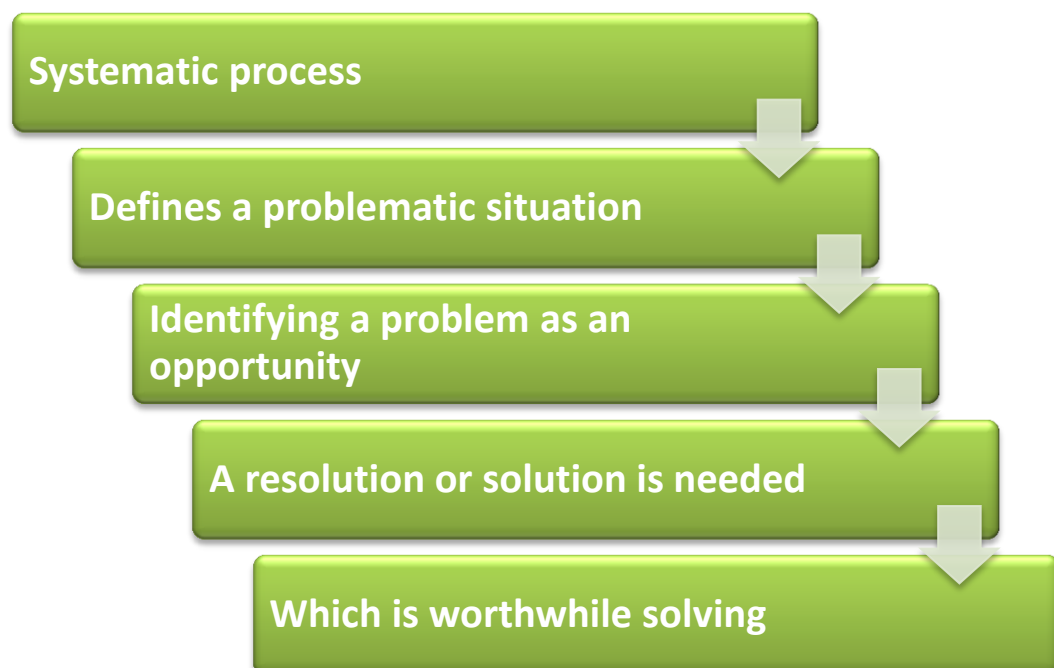
A working definition of problem solving can help clarify what constitutes a problem. Perhaps an obvious place to start is to recognise that a problem must be "problematic". If a solution is clear then you don't have a problem to solve, you have a decision to make!

It's useful to think of five factors which help to build a definition of problem solving. Problem solving is:

A **systematic process** which **defines a problematic situation** (where there is a gap between actual and expected, or the situation is vague, or there is something unsatisfactory).

It **identifies the problem as an opportunity** for which a **resolution or solution is needed**, to be implemented by an individual or group.

Finally (and crucially) it should be **worthwhile solving**.



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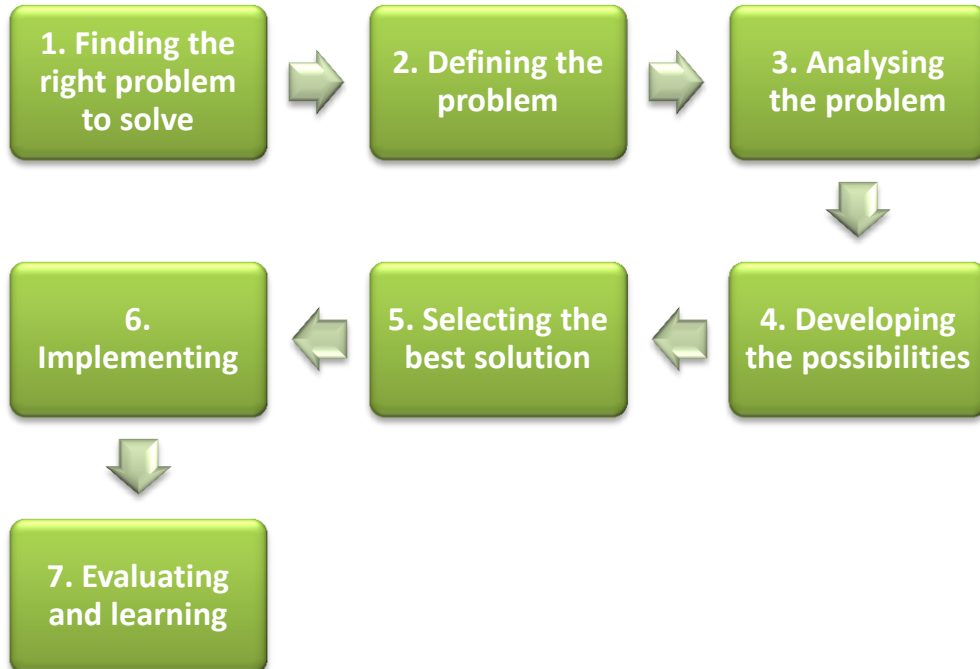
7 step problem solving process

Our seven-step problem solving process provides a structured basis to help you solve problems. Finding the right problems to solve is the first step but if that is an underused first step, it's all too often followed by a rush to action. The impulse to do something, before it's really clear what the problem is, can make things even worse.

Have you ever heard people say (or perhaps said yourself) things like:

- "I wished we hadn't jumped to that solution so quickly."
- "I think we may have solved the wrong problem."
- "It was only at the end that I realised we had acted too quickly, with too little information."
- "The solution we went ahead with turned out to be impractical and too expensive."

Rather than leaping into ill-informed action, a structured process can help ensure you take logical steps to solve a problem. The seven step problem solving process covers:



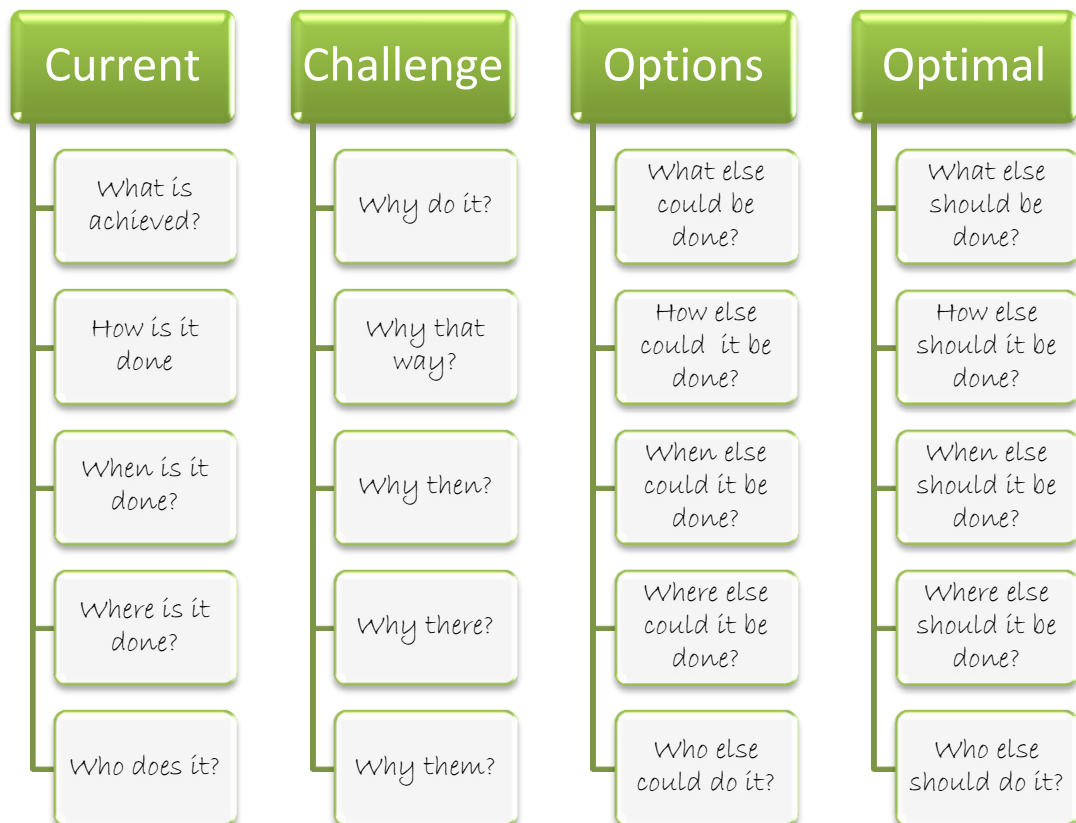
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Tool 5: Problem analysis in 4 steps

Use the 4 step problem analysis to progress from analysis to options and possible solutions. This tool uses the 6 questions from tool 4 and is adapted from the "critical examination technique".



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HOW TO BE A BETTER MANAGER

Updates

For more information on the content of this e-guide, and other related topics, visit: www.the-happy-manager.com

Join the community: subscribe to the Happy Manager Newsletter for regular updates and advice on better ways to manage.

Join the conversation: bookmark the Happy Manager blog.

(www.the-happy-manager/blog) Leave any comments, suggestions or examples of your own experiences for the benefit of other readers.

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Have a Good Workday
How to Build a Happy Workplace
Workstyle, Lifestyle

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Team Building Exercises
Team Health Check
The Problems with Teams
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Extreme Thinking: Unlocking Creativity
SMART Goals, SHARP Goals
Making Better Decisions
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