

# Six Ways To Be A Better Problem Solver

No matter what company you work for or position you hold, problem solving is inevitably a part of your work life.

Those [problems may be small](#), like un-jamming the printer, or complex, like declining sales revenue. But no matter the size or scope, finding solutions requires the ability to examine all the options, think creatively, make reasoned choices and [communicate](#) well.

In fact problem solving is at the core of what good leadership requires. Being known as someone who can deal with problems—especially those that seem overwhelming to others— can be a boon to you professionally. Here are six ways to become a better problem solver and increase your value within your organization:

1. **Define the problem.** Einstein reportedly said if he had one hour to save the world he would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and five minutes finding the solution. That's because you can't look for solutions until you step back and understand the problem. A good way to do that is to look at the smaller problems that make up the bigger one. Breaking the problem down into smaller components will make it easier to tackle.
2. **Change the description.** Art Markman, a psychologist and author of "Smart Thinking," advocates changing the way you describe the problem, as a way to find [creative solutions](#). Changing the way you describe it, he says, tells your mind you're in a different situation and that can unlock memories and information that will help you find a solution. Another strategy is to rewrite the problem from a different perspective. For example, how would your competition define it? Your boss? Your mother?
3. **Look at other countries, communities.** There's a good chance the problem you're facing has also been faced by other companies in your industry, or in a different industry. The problem may not look the same on its surface but fundamentally, it could be. Do some research to find information about other companies facing similar or parallel problems and how they solved them. Their exact solutions might not work for your problem, but they may provide the kernel of [inspiration](#) you need to find what does.
4. **Get input from others.** It takes more than one person's input to solve a problem, so good leaders facilitate an open dialogue with their team and make it safe for everyone to share their ideas as honestly as possible. Map out suggestions on a white board and see where they overlap. Encourage your team to be [entrepreneurial](#) and connect dots in whatever way seems right to them—you never know where you'll find your answers.



5. **Get some distance.** At some point you will need mental distance from the problem you are working to solve. Walk away from it for a while and do something completely different, giving your brain a chance to push the creativity reset button.
6. **Widen your options.** Consider two or three alternative solutions at the same time, something known as multi-tracking. Chip Heath, co-author of the book “Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work,” has said that by considering a few options at once, you’re less likely to make a commitment to the wrong one. You may also see, more clearly, the dimensions in which they differ from each other.

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