# A Guide to Solving Workplace Problems

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Problem solving is a skill leaders need to develop to feel confident dealing with the variety of challenges and decisions they face on a daily basis.

We solve problems every day—the challenge comes when the problem is new, complex, or reoccurring. A formal problem-solving process can be useful to ensure you are considering all aspects of the problem and prescribing the right solution for it.

Adapted from Gordon Lawrence's Zig-Zag model, the process uses a four-step approach to help you consider multiple perspectives when working through a problem.

**Step 1:** Gather Facts

**Step 2:** Brainstorm

**Step 3:** Apply Logic

**Step 4:** Impact on People

Some of these steps come more naturally for us than others. Using this step-by step approach helps us maximize our strengths and minimize our blind spots. Let's take a closer look at what's involved with each of the step.

**Gather Facts:** Simply put, what are the facts? What is it that you already know about the problem or situation? What is the history of the situation? What resources

are available? What time-frames do you need to consider? What additional data do you need? Resist the urge to stop here—the data alone will not solve the problem!
**Brainstorm:** Now that you know the facts, you can consider the possibilities for solving the problem. What are new ways of approaching the issue? What does the data tell us? What does our imagination tell us?

**Apply Logic:** Next, analyze the logical consequences of the possibilities. What are the pros and cons of what you've considered so far? If you step outside the situation, what do you see objectively or critically about the situation?

**Impact on People:** Finally, consider the effects of the possibilities or decision on people. How will you and others feel about the possible outcomes? What is consistent with your values, and the values of others? What do you and others really care about? What impact will the decision have on yourself and others?

## Why It Matters:

> *Rarely do problems "fix" themselves. More often, they become bigger and more difficult to manage. Not addressing problems when they first arise can also lead to continual crisis management, where leaders are constantly putting out fires. This can negatively impact your team. Leaders should move promptly and thoughtfully to solve problems.*

- Once you have worked through each step you can make a more informed decision. Omitting any of the steps could have significant consequences.

- By not gathering facts, you may be short on data and solve the wrong problem.

- By omitting the brainstorming step, you may limit yourself to what has been tried previously.

- If you do not apply logic to the possibilities considered, you may neglect to assess the logical consequences of each alternative.

- Not considering the impact on people may cause you to arrive at solutions that are logical but impossible to achieve.

A formal problem-solving process will allow you to feel more confident when faced with a challenging situation. It will also help you build a reputation as a leader that approaches problems with ease and identifies the best possible solutions for the organization, something everyone benefits from.

## References:

Lawrence, Gordon D. 1979. People Types and Tiger Stripes. Gainesville, FL: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, INC