

Problem Solving

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Soldiers from the Asymmetric Warfare Group use a tire, steel poles and ropes to move a 300-pound bag down a gravel road during a predeployment exercise on April 25 at Fort A.P. Hill, Va. The week-long training focused on creative thinking, problem solving and adapting to challenges. (U.S. Army photo by Maj. Sonise Lumbaca)

In today's global and highly competitive world, it is vitally important to understand the intellectual principles of problem-solving. Problem-solving deals with understanding simple to complex problems, analyzing them, and then coming up with viable solutions. Intellect deals with the capacity to use knowledge and understanding in order to meet a desired result or purpose. Using that knowledge with acquired skills is the central theme of this paper. This

paper will focus on three primary skills which are essential to the capacity for problem-solving; critical thinking, oral/written communications, and collaboration. These skills by themselves are not the end all, but they are in fact critical and therefore the emphasis for this paper.

Critical thinking is the process used to analyze, interpret, synthesize, comprehend, apply and evaluate problems. Critical thinking focuses on “how” to think versus “what” to think. When used correctly, this skill will work in any facet of one’s life (personally or professionally). Within institutions and schools across America including businesses (large and small), for profit, non-profit, government, non-governmental, and for the purpose of this paper, especially the military, both individuals and organizations use elements of critical thinking to solve day-to-day problems. This skill involves understanding not just your own point of view but also the multiple perspectives within and outside of your organization. Keeping and maintaining an open mind is extremely important in this process and will ultimately help you achieve your desired outcome much more rapidly.

Oral and written communications deal with the organization, structure and crafting of words. This is another skill that is vital in all aspects of life. Oral communication involves the concepts of expressing one’s views clearly, concisely, and in an organized manner. Oral communication skills take patience and hours of practice. This principle centers on the ability to speak in front of audiences, large or small, and gives the speaker the confidence to deliver the message clearly and accurately.

Written communication on the other hand, is the ability to express oneself in writing. Compared to oral communications, written communications are transcribed thoughts on paper. Examples include writing a budget proposal, preparing an operations order or preparing

something as routine as a counseling statement. It is the ability to clearly convey your meaning to the receiver so that they correctly understand your meaning or intent. It takes tremendous effort to master this skill but those who spend the necessary time working on this skill often reap the rewards.

The last skill related to problem-solving is that of collaboration. Collaboration is the process of working together for the greater good (teamwork). It takes recognizing that the value of the whole or the sum total far exceeds that of the individual parts. Individual parts are combined in order to formulate a total picture. This captures the essence of collaboration. The process of collaboration adds to the knowledge of problem-solving and mastering intellect. Champions of any sort understand this concept as everyone strives toward achieving for the same goal. In successful organizations, collaboration is often a hallmark characteristic that is ever-present and understood by all.

In conclusion, problem-solving, specifically analytical abilities, critical thinking and oral/written communications, is the key to success both for today and tomorrow's operating environment. The ability to understand the importance of and continually focus on the improvement of these skills both individually and collectively is paramount to the success of any organization. The point to take away from this paper is that focus on the development of these skills is both absolutely necessary and should be viewed as a lifetime pursuit.

Possessing the ability to analyze problems, establish fresh ideas and communicate effectively are keys to obtaining success and a competitive advantage. Developing these skills eases the burden of daily living and helps with reaching your desired goals. Those who take the time to master these principles gain a much needed advantage and often do not experience the

same degree of challenge when attempting to reach their goals, whereas those who do not possess these skills often find themselves overburdened and less resilient.

If you would like to learn more about these skills it is recommended that you take the time to read the following: “Strategic Leadership, the Multiple Frames and Styles of Leadership” by Richard Morrill, “Critical Thinking, How to Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World” by Richard Paul, “Closing the Gap Between Strategy and Execution” by D.N. Sull and “The Global Achievement Gap” by Tony Wagner.