



MONDAY MOTIVATOR

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MANAGEMENT CONSULTING GROUP

WILL ROBERTSON / JAY McDOWELL

Will@PS-MCG.com Jay@PS-MCG.com

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562-577-7000

Problem Solving

This edition of Monday Motivator is all about a process every business owner must deal with. Making decisions and solving problems goes with the territory of a small to medium business owner / operator. It starts with an understanding that the best problem solvers and idea developers, know that most questions have more than one CORRECT answer. And for business owners we must consider what the meaning of the question is. That question is any question looking for an answer to any issue related to running your business.

For example, if your question is; HOW CAN I WRITE UPSIDE DOWN, USING A PEN AND A PAD?', there are several correct answers.

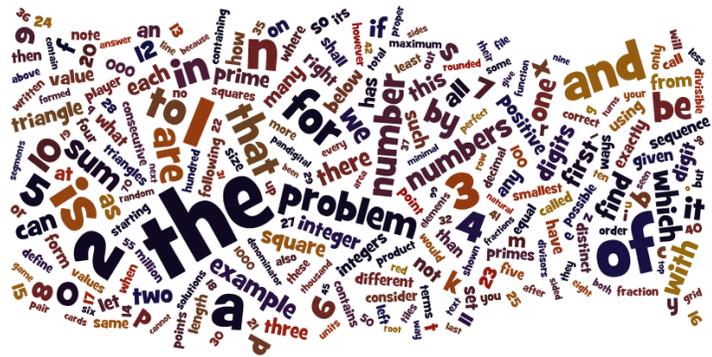
These include:

- You could spend weeks, months or maybe years, learning how to reeducate yourself, so that you can write upside down.
- You could simply turn your writing pad upside down and write normally. Then, as soon as the pad is turned the correct way, your writing will appear upside down.
- You could grab a pen and write the words 'UPSIDE DOWN' on your writing pad. This is a play on words, but it's still a possible answer.

All those answers are correct, depending on what you want to achieve.

If the reason for asking that question, was to learn a new skill, then the first answer is what you are looking for.

If the reason for asking that question, was to find the fastest way to solve the problem of writing words that appear upside down, then the second answer works. If the objective was to create a party trick, the third answer is what you need.



Creative and traditional problem solving

Creative problem solvers search for as many answers as they can find. They then determine which answer is the most valuable to them. Business owners can learn much from this sentence. You can start by creating a list of issues you want answers to. Group them as follows:

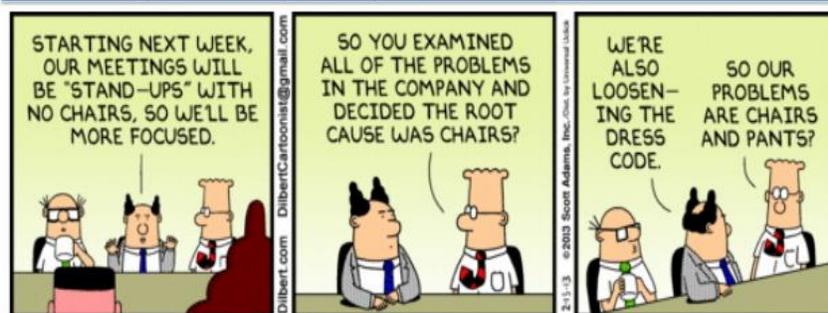
Department	Issue	Possible Answers
Sales / CRM / SFA	Make Your List	List Your Team's Answers
Marketing / PR		
Customer Service		
Production / Manufacturing		
HR		
Finance		
Logistics		
Information Technology		
Exit Strategy		

In corporate America, typical problem solvers look for THE correct answer, as if there were only one. When they find it, (OR THINK THEY DO) they stop looking. The challenge with this approach, is that the first “correct answer” we find is not always the best answer. It’s just an answer.

Problem solving tips

- Once you have clearly defined your question, keep looking for answers. Aim for at least 5 possible answers. 10 is even better. Then, evaluate the answers and determine the one you believe to be most valuable. Turn to a team for answers. Our work as business and executive coaches has revealed a few

Solving the right problem ...



Finding out the most important problems and their causes is the key.

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surprises when it comes to how some business owners solve problems. We have lead company owners to create teams of people who will be most affected by the answers they

accept as the solution to the problem they are trying to solve. Such a team brings a much better overall vision to the solutions being suggested. Examples of this abound in American corporate history. By adding up the suggested answers then weighing the merit of each one, the company leadership was in a far better position to adopt a course of action that everyone on the team had some input and agreement to. Thus, the leadership team moved answers into actions that addressed the issues in question, and did it quickly. Team together, team apart.

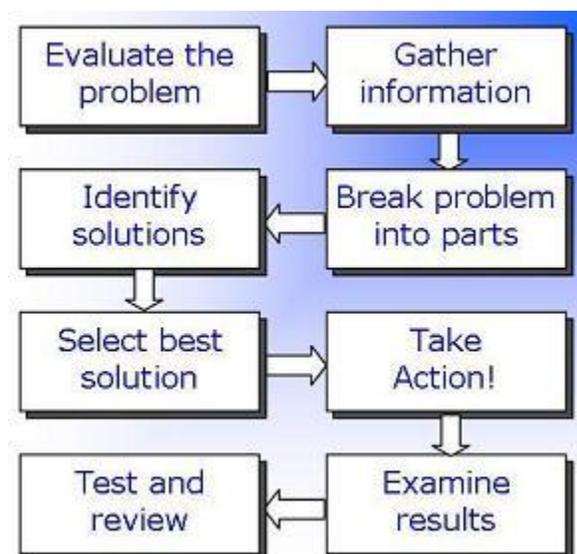
2. Be sure you have refined the key questions you are seeking answers to. A lot of business owners are not confident about asking the right questions related to the issues they are trying to address. In the absence of clarity, conversations have little direction and thus, tend to wander from one speculative concept to the next, with little progress towards dealing with the issue that started the conversation. The fix to this is to write out the problem, the issues that problem is creating and the benefits of solving the problem. With this data, you can start a meeting of thinkers and make progress much faster than hoping the team at the table will accidentally find the ideal solution to the problem.
3. Feedback. We have heard this word for decades. Hollywood has a ball with this word and its meaning. In the movie “What About Bob” Dr. Leo Marvin, played by Richard Dreyfuss, Leo is trying to decide what fireplace backdrop will complement him best for an upcoming TV interview at his summer home. He asks his wife Faye what she thinks – the pipes and duck or the shotgun on the wall. When she says either one will do he responds with “Faye..... you *KNOW* I need *FEEDBACK*! Your team needs feedback. Once a solution has been adopted by your team, keep them in the loop about how the solution is impacting the problem it was chosen to solve.
4. Know when you have solved the problem. Once you have decided about the issue, it’s time to delegate responsibility, get out of the way and move on to other issues. Let your team be fully engaged in the solution process. It supports teamwork and improves morale.

To treat this topic with a solution of its own here are some of the more important considerations of solving problems:

There are several stages to solving a problem:

1) Evaluating the problem

- Clarifying the nature of a problem
- Formulating questions
- Gathering information systematically
- Collating and organizing data
- Condensing and summarizing information
- Defining the desired objective



2) Managing the problem

- Using the information gathered effectively
- Break down a problem into smaller, more manageable, parts
- Using techniques such as brainstorming and lateral thinking to consider options
- Analyzing these options in greater depth
- Identifying steps that can be taken to achieve the objective

3) Decision-making

- Deciding between the possible options for what action to take
- Deciding on further information to be gathered before taking action
- Deciding on resources (time, funding, staff etc.) to be allocated to this problem

4) Resolving the problem

- Implementing action
- Providing information to other stakeholders; delegating tasks
- Reviewing progress

5) Examining the results

- Monitoring the outcome of the actions taken
- Reviewing the problem and problem-solving process to avoid similar situations in future

In summary, problems introduce “process” as a necessity and are part of the challenge of owning and running a small business. Input and agreement from your team is also the best approach to solving problems. Having a business coach on your team shortens the time required for results.

Will Robertson, Founder / CEO and Jay McDowell, President / MBA are doing business as Performance Strategies, Inc. Our offices are located at 1231 E. Dyer Road, Suite 215, Santa Ana, CA 92705. You can reach us 562-577-7000. Our web site is www.PS-MCG.com Our E Mail addresses: Will@PS-MCG.com and Jay@PS-MCG.com



Will Robertson, Founder / CEO



Jay McDowell, President / MBA

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