

# Problem Solving Skills

<http://athealth.com/topics/problem-solving-skills-2/>

One of the most exciting aspects of life is the array of choices that we have on a daily basis. Some of our decisions are simple, like deciding what to eat for dinner or what shirt to wear. However, some choices are challenging and take careful thought and consideration.

When we are confronted with these types of decisions, it can be very difficult to decide on the best option, and we may be plagued by indecision. We may be forced to choose between two equally good options, or perhaps, we may have to pick between two choices that both have drawbacks. We may waver back and forth between different alternatives and may feel paralyzed to make the decision.

This is a very normal reaction to tough choices in our lives, and we all, at times, experience a sense of being unable to decide on some option. However, researchers have developed a technique that many people have found useful when they are trying to make a difficult decision or solve a problem that seems unsolvable. This procedure involves a series of steps that you can go through on your own when you are confronted with a decision or problem that needs to be solved. This approach may not work perfectly for all difficulties, but it may help with many of the problems you are confronted with in your life.

## **Step 1: Problem Orientation**

This step involves recognizing that a problem exists and that solving the difficulty is a worthwhile endeavor. It is important that you approach the decision-making process with a positive attitude and view the situation as an opportunity or challenge. You should try to approach the situation with confidence and with a willingness to devote some time and effort to finding an appropriate solution to your problem. Remember, you are a competent person, and the problem you are facing can likely be solved with a little hard work.

## **Step 2: Problem Definition**

Before you start to tackle the current problem, it is important to clearly understand the difficulty and why you are unhappy with the current situation. This may seem obvious, but it is important that you really think about and gather information about the problem, and make sure that the problem you are trying to solve is the "real" problem. That is, sometimes people find a different problem than the one that is really distressing them, and focus on this one, since it is easier than dealing with the real problem. This step really involves your thinking about the difficulty you are having, understanding the problem, and contemplating why the situation is distressing. Some people think of problems as a discrepancy between what they want and what the current situation is like. It is useful during this stage to think about how the current situation is different from how you would like it to be, and what your goals are for the state of affairs. If you are currently facing many difficult decisions, it may be helpful to prioritize those problems and deal with them one at a time.

### **Step 3: Generation of Alternative Solutions**

During this stage, you should ask yourself, "What have I done in this situation in the past, and how well has that worked?" If you find that what you have done in the past has not been as effective as you would like, it would be useful to generate some other solutions that may work better. Even if your behavior in the past has worked like you wanted it to, you should think of other solutions as well, because you may come up with an even better idea. When you start to think of possible solutions, don't limit yourself; think of as many possible options as you can, even if they seem unrealistic. You can always discard implausible ideas later, and coming up with these may help generate even better solutions. You may want to write a list of possible options, or ask others what some solutions they might have for your problem.

### **Step 4: Decision Making**

Now you are ready to narrow down some of the options that you have generated in the previous step. It is important that you examine each of the options, and think about how realistic each is, how likely you would be to implement that solution, and the potential drawbacks of each. For example, if your solution costs a great deal of money or requires many hours of effort each day, this may be too difficult to implement. You should also consider the likelihood that each option has in terms of your being able to achieve the goals that you want regarding the solution. As you start to narrow down your choices, remember, no problem solution is perfect and all will have drawbacks, but you can always revise the solution if it does not work the way you want it to work.

### **Step 5: Solution Implementation and Verification**

Once you have examined all your options and decided on one that seems to accomplish your goals and minimizes the costs, it is time to test it out. Make sure that when you implement this solution, you do so whole-heartedly and give it your best effort. During this stage, you should continue to examine the chosen solution and the degree to which it is "solving" your problem. If you find that the solution is too hard to implement or it is just not working, revise it or try something else. Trying to solve these problems is never an easy task, and it may take several solutions before something works. But, don't give up hope, because with persistence and your best effort, many difficult decisions and problems can be made better!