

TO HELP YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS

A basic step in solving any problem - whether concerning a sporting event, a family dispute or a question of public interest - is to check on yourself.

The Lord expects you--and will assist you--to face up to problems of all types. Moreover, unless you get beyond personal problems, you may never come to grips with some of the insistent and long-standing problems that trouble our uneasy planet.

How not to solve a problem:

Many people assume that all problems are caused by forces outside themselves. One insurance company has collected some bizzare explanations from drivers seeking to justify themselves in accidents in which they have been involved:

Here are a few:

- a. "A pedestrian hit me and went under my car."
- b. "Coming home, I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I haven't got."
- c. "I collided with a stationary bus going the other way."
- d. "I consider that neither of us was to blame, but if either was to blame it was the other one."

To enable you to meet problems of various types--and solve as many as possible--we submit a few elementary tips.

Our treatment of this subject--on which many books have been written--is necessarily limited. But these recommendations may at least serve in helping you to be a problem-solver rather than a problem-maker.

1. CONFRONT PROBLEMS--DON'T EVADE THEM

It is difficult for most of us to say: "This is my problem." But we gain in many ways if we view them as part of living. One man gave these words of admonition to persons tempted to side-step difficult situations:

"Don't push your worries behind your back where they can heckle you...bring them out in front of you, line them up and look them over...decide which ones you can do something about and which ones you'll have to live with."

Problems confronted are problems partly solved. Those we close our eyes to--whether personal, family, business, community, or national--may be the very ones that come back to plague us in the long run.

2. KEEP IN MIND BASIC PROCEDURES

At the heart of effective problem-solving are certain fundamental steps like these:

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- a. Get a clear idea of the problem.
- b. Search out the roots of the problem; don't confuse symptoms with causes.
- c. Keep on the lookout for every possibility and potential solution.
- d. Examine each possibility until you hit on the most suitable.
- e. Decide on the first to be taken

Recall from time to time these fundamentals and you will more rapidly "get back on the track" when you become befuddled or bewildered by the complexity of the problem.

3. CLARIFY THE PROBLEM BY WRITING IT OUT

If you can define a problem, you have a fighting chance to solve it. When it is not crystal-clear just what the difficulty is, many persons find it helpful to write out the problem.

With the aid of pencil and paper, you can rid yourself of unnecessary clutter and direct your attention to the core of the matter.

Correct action depends on clear thinking. Take time to think. Divide the problem into its basic elements. Be sure to be specific, not fuzzy or ambiguous.

List both positive and negative elements involved in any possible decision. Then you should be able to consider the total problem in a new light.

"I so run not without purpose; I fight as not beating the air." (1 Corinthians 9:26)

4. GET ALL THE FACTS

"What are you doing here?" demanded a man who found workmen tearing down a wall in his office. "We got orders," they told him. Looking quickly at the written response, the man responded: "The orders are correct. The room is okay...but you're in the wrong building."

Gather all the pertinent facts about a situation before you try to cope with it. Rushing headlong into action without sufficient investigation may be worse than decision. Too often other persons are needlessly hurt--and all because we neglected to take ordinary precautions.

5. OVERCOME YOUR PREJUDICE

A judge's novel approach changed one prisoner's attitude toward the police and courts. The man, 24, had been found guilty of taunting an officer in Indianapolis and saying, "the police department is full of crooks." In place of a

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fine or jail sentence, the judge ordered the defendant to sit beside him in municipal court for ten days. Surprised by the careful weighing of the evidence, the man frankly admitted his error concerning the honesty of the police and the integrity of the courts.

Sweeping generalizations are both risky and harmful. They only block solutions to problems.

The more we break out of prejudiced attitudes toward any social, economic, racial, or religious groups (to say nothing of political, labor-management, or educational areas) the better our chances are of finding solutions that benefit everybody. "With the judgment you judge, you will be judged."

6. USE COMMON SENSE

If you had a cow and it fell into a well, how would you get it out? This challenge confronted a farmer in Auburn, New York, when his 900-pound cow fell into a big open well. His first thought was to raise the animal with a derrick. But this could have resulted in an injury to the cow if an accident took place. So instead, with the help of volunteer firemen, he pumped the well full of water and let the cow float to safety unharmed.

A common sense approach to problems, big and small, often come up with simple solutions that might otherwise be overlooked.

7. TACKLE PROBLEMS IN AN ORDERLY WAY

A typewriter company was disturbed by complaints it was getting about the carrying case of a portable machine and various features of the machine itself.

So an official immediately put two different teams to work on the separate problems. Some weeks later, a completely new and larger machine was designed by one group, but it didn't fit the new carrying case designed by the other group.

Much time and duplication of effort can be avoided in settling personal or organizational problems by establishing an order of priorities.

8. DON'T OVERSIMPLIFY

Setting a fire to a local brewery was one wife's way to stop her husband's drinking. The angry woman gave police this straight-forward explanation: "If the brewery burns down and they don't make beer, my husband can't drink."

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Many a person, exasperated by failure in high places or low, jump to the conclusion that abuses can be cured by one sweep of the hand--or a few matches. Such impatience only compounds the trouble. Be alert to weakness in people and situations. But be realistic in trying to win people over or in correcting long-standing abuses.

9. SEE OPPORTUNITIES IN PROBLEMS

Problems are seldom fun. In fact, they can test us almost to the breaking point. But rebelling won't make them go away. A healthy attitude which looks for whatever footholds may be found in the most uncompromising situations, can start us on the road to at least a partial solution.

Moreover, the anguish and trials we endure, especially in activities that promote the betterment of other people, may purify our motives and uncover latent abilities that no amount of "sweetness and light" ever could. "For this slightest momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

10. AVOID PROBLEMS BY PLANNING AHEAD

Hundreds of telephone conversations between London and Europe abruptly ended when a workman dug a hole outside Bert's Cafe in Swanel, England. As the ditch-digger operated his mechanical shovel on a drainsite, he little realized that--because of faulty instructions--he was severing thousands of connections on the continent cable. International telephone links were thrown into confusion.

After a ten-hour delay, phone calls to Europe were resumed. Eurovision's TV was back in action and Early Bird satellite communications between Britain and the continent were again in operation.

"Where I am told to dig, I just dig," the workman later said in defense of himself. "No one told me to look out for a cable."

Persons carrying out instructions have a right to be told in advance of hazards to be avoided. Parents, teachers, and supervisors of all types can forestall innumerable problems by thinking things through before giving orders.

11. BE WILLING TO MAKE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

In seeking solutions for problems, we should be flexible enough to make adjustments without sacrificing principle... you might ask yourself questions like these:

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Do I keep an open mind to all proposals? Or do I block out some because of my own dislikes?

Am I willing to work out a fair compromise? Or do I insist on having things my own way?

Am I genuinely pleased when somebody else comes up with a bright idea or do I regard it as a personal affront?

Have I such a clear picture of the goals that I can distinguish between a sensible compromise and an unworthy surrender?

"Love...does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right."

12. GET BEYOND FAULT-FINDING

Instead of resorting to the overworked complaint, "Why don't they do something about it?" ask yourself, "What can I do?"

If possible, work out a small portion of the problem. Having done this, you may discover fresh insights into the total problem. New confidence comes from the smallest success. Remember the Christopher motto: Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." Frankly acknowledge defects and abuses, but get beyond criticism. Do something by prayer, word, and deed to right what has gone wrong. "Look to yourself, that you may not lose what you have worked for."

13. DON'T HESITATE TO SEEK ADVICE

Goethe, the German philosopher, once said: "To accept advice is but to increase one's own ability. Look for guidance from those competent to give it."

In all problem-solving processes, moreover, we should humbly request divine assistance. Here is one prayer that has been said by countless persons over the years: "God grant me the patience to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what can be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference."

14. BE DECISIVE--MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND

One embarrassed pianist was unable to stand for his final bow after playing Mozart in an Austrian Music Hall. His coattails had become caught in the piano stool. As a packed audience watched on in bewilderment, he wrenched and pulled all to no avail. Finally with a flourish the quick thinking musician slipped out of his coat and took a bow in his starched white shirt front.

The audience applauded both performances.

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Whatever your circumstances may be, you can rely on the Lord's help in arriving at prudent decisions, providing you do your part. "Seek and you will find; knock and it will be open to you."

15. DO WHAT YOU CAN

A valuable lesson can be learned from these words of a ten-year-old boy in Bismark, North Dakota, who was born without arms or legs:

"I know there are some things I cannot do. But I think of all the things I can do and I don't worry so much about the difference."

Many persons are tempted to think that, because they cannot do everything in coping with the problems of life, they are thereby excused from doing anything. No matter how limited your range of action may be, do whatever you can--as promptly as you can.

This applies not only to overcoming personal problems, but in a special way to the vast, complicated, and growing problems of the modern world. The following lines by an anonymous author may serve as a reminder of the importance of you:

"I am only me, but I am one,
I can't do everything, but I can
do something
And what I can do, that I ought to do
And what I ought to do, by the grace
of God, I will do."

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