

DHS Leader Development Program

Problem Solving – Purpose-Driven Problem Solving: Leadership Tools & Techniques



Homeland Security

As a Matter of Fact:

The World Economic Forum's [Future of Jobs Report 2020](#) identified the top 10 skills of 2025, which included *analytical thinking and innovation, and complex problem-solving*.

A [Harvard Business Review](#) study measured which competencies have the greatest impact on a leader's success and found that *problem-solving* ranked #3 out of 16 competencies.

Too often, we approach problem-solving in a vacuum with short-sighted perspectives; and end up creating more problems. Leaders are those who have a vision for the future, see strategically, and are goal and purpose-oriented. By identifying the goal and working to the purpose, leaders may see new ways or hidden opportunities to truly achieve a goal – not just “solve” what appear at first glance to be problems. But in a fast-paced environment, where stakeholders demand progress NOW, how can leaders ensure that they are adept at thoughtfully identifying ways to overcome obstacles and move forward? By shifting their approach from being a “problem-solver” to becoming a “solutions architect.” By first articulating the overall goal and purpose, and then aligning inquiry and brainstorming with team members who bring differing resources and perspectives to that purpose, leaders find that there are alternate ways to get through to an objective – and sometimes even find that the things that were originally identified as “problems” – weren't the problems that needed to be solved at all, or might be addressed in simple, new or unusual ways that foster forward movement more easily than anticipated. Purpose-driven leaders find purposeful paths to success!

Ready to enhance your leadership skills? Check out these resources!

Helpful tip: If the Skillsoft links below do not work for you, just copy the title into your Component's learning management system to access these resources

“We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” — Albert Einstein.

Watch and Learn – Want to know more? Get wiser in just 4 minutes!

Hear from Industry Experts



[Four Steps to Solving a Problem](#)

Follow these four steps to frame your problems in a way that makes solutions possible. *4-minute video*



[The Power of Team Problem Solving](#)

Leaders don't always have to have all the answers. Lauri Curtis shares why some of the best solutions to problems come from letting employees address the issues. *3-minute video*

Engage and Explore – Have more time to invest in your success? Micro-learning segments in these courses can be helpful!

Courses

[Getting to the Root of a Problem](#)

In this course, you'll learn about identifying stakeholders, gaining their input and trust, and using analysis techniques to get to the root cause of a problem. *27-minute course*

[Leading through Problem Solving and Decision Making](#)

The hallmark of leadership is being able to work through problems and make tough decisions using the skills and experience of your team. In this course, you'll learn how to use a three-stage approach to engage your team in this effort. *48-minute course*

Read or Listen – Interested in digging deeper? Delve into these books, available in multiple formats!

Books

[Problem Solving and Decision Making](#)

In this collection of articles from MIT Sloan Management Review, you'll learn the difference between a decisive leader and an impulsive one, as well as the best way to confront problems within a team. *51-page book*

[Decision Making & Problem-Solving Strategies](#)

Decision Making & Problem-Solving Strategies presents a simple framework for leveraging creativity to tackle difficult decisions and tasks. *8-page book summary*

Apply and Grow – Ready to practice? Try these steps to increase your leadership success!

Focus on Purpose, Not Problems: Have you ever noticed that what you dwell upon expands? For instance, someone mentions a new song that you've never heard – and suddenly you hear it everywhere! Or, you think of someone you haven't heard about in a while, and next thing you know, you get an email referencing that person. Awareness expands your focus – so, rather than spending all your energy on examining “what's wrong,” adopt an approach called “*appreciative inquiry*,” which focuses on what's “right”. When faced with an obstacle, first articulate what success looks like for the end goal. Then, identify what would need to “go right” to get to that state. Now, frame critical steps in the affirmative, and benchmark similar situations that work successfully, and identify innovative or new approaches that you had not considered. Additionally, you may find you can “re-cast” your focus – that is you find that the apparent “problem” is not the real obstacle, and by focusing on purpose rather than problems, you see a new way, aspect or approach to focus on that provides forward movement. Remember, you don't know all the possible factors and information out there that may “solve your problem” – tap into the power of purpose to help you expand your horizons, perspectives, and process. When you work to the purpose, the *how, when, where, and what* will flow and fall into place naturally!

Put Me in Coach, I'm Ready to Play the Solutions Game: Often, we get in our own way when it comes to solving problems. We see limited causes, limiting factors, and limited options because we focus on what is and what we know rather than on what could be and what we want to achieve. One of the best ways for leaders to get out of their own way to solve problems is to engage a leadership coach. Coaches do not solve problems; they pose questions that encourage leaders to consider more information and options that will provide solutions to their problems. Leaders at all levels employ coaches, from C-suite to the frontlines, to ensure that problems and opportunities are considered thoroughly, proactively, and creatively rather than reactively. You can even use coaching questions to “coach” yourself! Challenge yourself to write down answers to questions like “What fears does this raise?” “What do you think is at stake?” “What's the worst that can happen, and what happened the last time you faced a similar situation?” and “What would you like to see happen?” to get started on your journey to become thoughtful about obstacles and opportunities!

Invest and Inquire – Want more? Check out these DHS Leader Development tools and resources!

- To learn about strategies for day-to-day leadership success, join an upcoming [LDP Learning Café](#) or check out podcasts of previous ones!
- [The Coaching Talent Bank](#) is a one stop shop for those seeking a coach – invest in your leadership success and contact a coach directly.
- Interested in increasing your leadership potential? Learn more about [Leadership Bridges](#) for resources and opportunities.
- Find out more about requirements and options for [Supervisors, Managers and Executives](#) and targeted development for [Team Members and Team Leads](#)
- The [DHS Leader Development Speakers Talent Bank](#) provides organizations great options for learning facilitators, and invites talented presenters to join!
- Visit the [DHS Leadership Library](#) for more books and articles to help you lead.
- Catch someone in the act of being a leader! Send a “[Caught You Leading! Keep It Up!](#)” [Leader Gram](#) today!
- For more information and resources visit [DHS Leader Development Program](#) or contact your Component [Leader Development Action Officer](#)