

Get Me a Solution - Quick!
By Jo DeMars

What's your problem today...

Employee

Supplier or contractor?

Customer?

As managers, we try to troubleshoot by being proactive. We carefully plan and write tight contracts. Companies devote hours to spelling out expectations and requirements in policy handbooks. We deliberate over specifications and we work on our delivery systems to ensure great customer service. The advance work is a good investment and it pays dividends every day. But even the most organized company will never completely eliminate problems and the seasoned manager keeps an arsenal of solutions to handle unexpected challenges.

SOLUTIONS

The easy ones:

1. Catch the problem early before it can morph into disaster.
2. Contain the problem quickly before it spreads.
3. Own the problem immediately, accept your responsibility and hold others responsible for their part.

Generally speaking, people appreciate open, honest communication that offers a straightforward approach in working together to resolve issues. By acknowledging your responsibility and offering to make things right you set the stage for cooperative win-win solutions to develop.

The hard ones:

1. Evaluate your position, your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Evaluate the other's position, their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Sit on the other side of the table: look at your position from the other point of view - are there changes you need to make?
4. Invite the parties to a neutral setting with the common understanding that you both intend to work out solutions that benefit both of you.

The really hard ones:

Sometimes the best of intentions, good communication and a common need to work things out still aren't enough to get to resolution. Now it's time to consider getting outside help.

1. Mediation: The parties sit down with a trained, independent mediator who helps them find solution.
2. Arbitration: The parties turn the problem over to a trained, independent decision-maker who designs a solution.
3. Programs: Recurring problems or ones that affect a large number of people may need an organized program to control costs and ensure fairness.

Learning not avoid conflict, to approach problems quickly and honestly can keep your problems low profile, increase your productivity and reduce the cost to your company.

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