



THE LEADER'S GUIDE TO PROBLEM SOLVING

FROM FIREFIGHTING TO A REPEATABLE SYSTEM



A problem is a gap between the outcome you want and the outcome you have, with uncertainty about the best way to close it.

CLEAR PROBLEMS

are measurable, time-bound, and owned.

AMBIGUOUS PROBLEMS

are fuzzy, ownerless, and unfixable.

THE 4 SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

FRAMING

define what the problem is and is not

REASONING

choose analysis that fits the data & risk

EXPERIMENTATION

run small, reversible tests

COMMUNICATION

share evidence + decisions clearly

THE 6-STEP PROBLEM SOLVING SYSTEM

NAME THE PROBLEM IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Write a short, clear paragraph that states the present state, target state, date, stakeholders, one recognizable example, and a few non-goals to prevent scope creep. If it's confusing or hard to repeat, rewrite it until a front-line teammate can say it back in their own words.

FIND THE CONSTRAINT AND THE CAUSES YOU CAN INFLUENCE

Every system has a bottleneck—identify whether it's structural, behavioral, or informational using simple tools like a cause map or fishbone diagram. Look for the smallest change with the biggest impact; if you can't find it, you're not ready to redesign the system.

CHOOSE THE LEVEL OF METHOD THAT FITS THE RISK

Match the method to the problem: quick experiments for low-impact, reversible issues and deeper analysis for high-impact, irreversible ones. Use a simple rubric—impact, reversibility, time to learn, and blast radius—to choose the right approach.

DESIGN A FALSIFIABLE TEST

A good test can prove you wrong—define the hypothesis, expected effect, time window, and the smallest sample that would change your mind. Decide in advance what counts as success, no effect, or harm, then review the results together and name the test's limits openly.

IMPLEMENT WITH GUARDRAILS

Roll out the change at the smallest scale that gives real signal, and protect stakeholders and colleagues with guardrails. As you move faster, cut costs, or speed deployment, watch the corresponding risks so you don't "win the number" while losing the point.

CLOSE THE LOOP AND KEEP THE LEARNING

Write what you tried, what happened, and what you decided, then share it. If it worked, make it the new standard; if not, explain why and what's next—keeping a simple log so others can follow the story and closing the loop with stakeholders and partners.

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