

# Problem Solving Tips

Author: Kansas State University

Topic: General

## PROBLEM SOLVING TIPS

We all can feel confused by problems and wonder if they can be solved. Well, yes, most of them can! Each problem might be different but there are basic ways to approach any problem that make it easier to unravel and probably even resolve.

1. **RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM.** Sounds so basic, but too often is missed because we tend to overestimate the dilemma. Ask yourself, "Why is this a problem?" Separate issues of choice (you prefer to solve it) from issues of need (you must solve it). Eliminate the panic factor!
2. **EXPLORE IT.** Don't make assumptions-get real information. Don't keep it a secret-talk with others and gain perspective. Keep details relevant to the issue. Guess how you might approach it. Does it break down into smaller and more manageable tasks? How imperfect can the solution be and still be a good solution? Is the problem another person? Or is it you? Maybe your behavior or your attitude? A rule? An expectation? Self-imposed? Might it resolve itself? Allow yourself to consider all possibilities. Is it really YOUR problem? Ask yourself: "If this, then..." Exactly what outcome do you want? What might be unanticipated outcomes?
3. **DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO WORK WITH IT.** Studies indicate the most important part of problem solving is feeling confident you can and will solve the problem. You must be willing to devote your time and energy to the problem and the solution, and you need to be willing to maybe feel uncomfortable while doing so. After all, if it were easy it wouldn't be a problem!
4. **MAKE A PLAN, THEN DO IT.** Set your goal. Prioritize. Be organized. Anticipate some trial and error. Keep assessing your plan: is it working? If not, do something different. Keep integrating new information as you gain it. Remember to keep details relevant to the issue. Get help if you need it.
5. **LOOK BACK AND REVISE FOR NEXT TIME.** Then move on. You may not have the exact same problem again (although you may!), but it's likely you have gained good information and experience through your problem solving journey. Use it!