

Find Five Ways To Solve Problems

Consider all possible options before picking one.

As I lamented my fatigue resulting from dealing with business problems, a mentor once asked me why I didn't just apply for a job delivering pizzas.

Responding to my quizzical expression he said: "You always wanted to run a business. Solving problems are a big part of that. If you don't want to deal with problems, find a job delivering pizzas." [Note to reader: Save emails defending pizza delivery people. Of course it's a noble job, but if you feel the need to rise to their defense, you've missed the point of the story.]

Indeed, problems present themselves in any business, and our ability to anticipate and solve them quickly can make the difference between average and world class. With regard to solutions, a tool I have used successfully in the brainstorming phase of kaizen and continuous improvement events can also be an effective method to find solutions.

The tool says that the first suggested solution to a problem is often not the best. Many times when a problem presents itself a team adopts the solution voiced by the first member to suggest one, or by the member with the most forceful

personality. These solutions are often selected over potentially better ideas that may have otherwise been suggested by less aggressive, more pensive members. Perhaps a third suggestion would be to keep several first-shift team members for several hours past their scheduled shift to run the order. This option meets the new lead time, but requires several employees to work a long day on short notice (on overtime wage rates) and is, thus, more expensive and poses a threat to employee morale.

A fourth suggestion would be to run the high stakes, challenging expedite order on third-shift. While this solution enables the day team to go home on time with a clear conscience, it also adds the risk of a less experienced third-shift worker making an error and compounding the problem.

A fifth idea could be to run the order on less efficient equipment that would facilitate meeting the expedite, though at higher cost and perhaps even negative margin.

None of these five suggestions is perfect, though most business leaders would agree that suggestions two through five are preferable to the first. With all five suggestions on the table, the team is in a position to make a much better decision than if it had simply accepted the first suggestion.

As is often the case in kaizen events, perhaps the benefits of several suggestions could be combined into a course of action that is better than any of the five individually. For example, in our scenario above, the best aspects of ideas three and four might be combined into a separate solution, with one volunteer from the first shift agreeing to work with the third-shift team to ensure a more experienced team member is on hand while it is running. This solution reduces the risk of a quality issue occurring on third shift, while still meeting the customer's requirement. Moreover, since only one team member is working extra, the financial overtime impact is reduced and, since the employee volunteered, the solution will not affect morale.

This option would never have been considered had the team stopped at option No. 1.

Problems are a normal part of leading and managing any business. Solving problems quickly and effectively can make all the difference between an average and high performing organization. The next time a problem comes the way of your team, Find Five Ways to solve it and pick the best solution.

And once the problem is resolved ... don't forget to throw a pizza party to celebrate. **PF 80**



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problem. With this method, the leader disciplines himself and the team to take a deep breath and, before selecting a course of action, ponder five separate ways that the problem could be solved.

Take, for example, an order for a challenging part that is expedited late in the day by a major customer who insists that the order must be available by noon the following day.

As the team weighs its options, the first recommendation might be that meeting the request is impossible, and that the customer should be contacted and the expedite request denied. The potential downside of this suggestion is fairly obvious—likely disappointing or even angering a valuable customer.

A second suggestion could be to break into an order currently running to process the expedite and meet the customer's request. This has the clear benefit of satisfying the customer whose order has been expedited, but the risk of missing the due date of the customer whose product is currently running, with the added setup and changeover costs associated with breaking into the current order.

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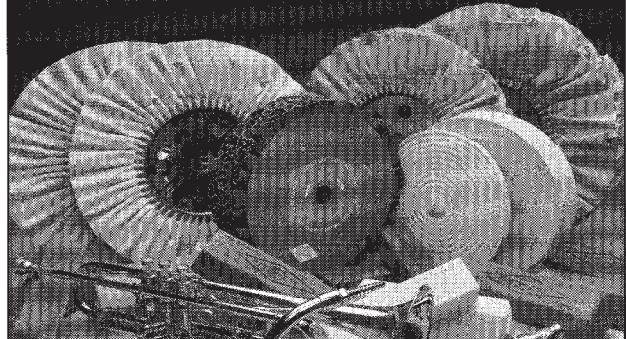
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