

Business Bullet ~
Are You Solving Problems or Juggling Symptoms, Part 2
Contributed by Rich Shefren

Do you ever struggle trying to solve problems that plague your business? Do you analyze and plan, only to have the same problems keep cropping up over and over? There's an important reason that happens. Too often, entrepreneurs and business managers think they're trying to solve problems when in reality, they're focusing on the wrong things. Then compounding that is the fact that they may not be clear on something even more important...the two things you need to determine if you are going to be able to get to the root of the problem. Any problem.

In this 3 part series, we want to show you how to think your way clear to understanding the root causes of problems. And then, we will share the actions you need to take to overcome them—for good.

This issue, we address: **“How do you drill down to the very core of what’s holding you back—and then eliminate it for good?”**

Imagine you wake up one morning with a terrible pain in your lower back. You call the doctor and make an appointment. He gives you a shot and a prescription for some pain pills and sends you on your way. For a while you're feeling great. But, all he's done is treat the symptoms. He hasn't effectively diagnosed and addressed the cause of your problem. It won't be long before you're back in pain again.

We don't want you to make that mistake pursuing your goals. You see, when you drill down and find the real problem that is holding you back, you'll discover something else. That it's likely been a major cause of other symptoms as well. And when you root it out, suddenly big things start to happen!

You'll not only sail past the original 'symptoms', but you'll get added 'surprise' benefits from other symptoms that may affect you but may not have fully surfaced yet.

So, let's talk about how to get to the real cause of your problems...about how to diagnose and cure the things that keep recurring in your business to hold you back.

Last time in Part 1, we talked about two essential things you must know to solve any problem. First, you must have a clear definition of your goal. Second, you have to determine the 'critical success factors' to achieving that goal. These questions will lead you to understanding why you're missing the necessary elements to achieve your success.

For example, let's say your goal is to communicate with your target market three times a month. But you find you're only getting it done once, or at most, twice a month. So, you know your goal. To 'talk' to your target market three times a month.

Then ask, what are the critical success factors I need to get that done? Maybe you need eight hours of uninterrupted time every month. Or maybe you need 2 or 3 more hours per week to research subject matter for that communication. This will surface a 'why' you don't have those success factors. Typically you might say “I'm just too busy.”

Here's the problem. The average problem solver stops here. You go about looking for ways to juggle your schedule. Or you start investing even more of your time learning and implementing a new time management technique. You look for a way to 'solve' the time issue.

But, that's the wrong thing to do. Because at this point, time isn't the issue. You've only uncovered the symptoms that are causing you to miss your goals. You have to dig deeper.

Three Questions to Get to The Root of The Problem

To do this, you have to start by asking, “What's the REAL problem here?” That's the first question you should ask. Because the more clearly you drill down and define the problem, the easier it will be to solve.

So, in the case of our little example, you might ask, “What is taking up so much of my time?” Maybe you're trying to implement too many sales strategies at the same time. Or maybe your customer acquisition process is just too inefficient. It could be anything. But what is critical is that you drill down and find out what “it” is.

The next question you need to ask is, “What is the ideal solution to this problem? What would that look like? And what would absolutely be necessary to have that ideal solution?”

(Continued on Page 2)

So maybe you'd say, "If I only had one sales strategy that performed well enough, I could scrap the rest and save ten hours a month."

When you ask and answer these two questions, you're creating a gap between what is the real problem is right now and what the perfect solution would look like for you to achieve it. In this case, you may come up with running too many sales programs vs having the one that will allow you to dump the rest and focus on your other goals.

Now, from those two points you have a gap, the next question to ask yourself is "What do I believe is the fastest way to get from Point A to B?" What's the easiest, most certain way I can get from Point A to B? That's the hard part. Think this through thoroughly. Don't just do it haphazardly or rush through it to get it done. Actually spend some time digging for the answers.

We believe that most people totally compromise their results because they don't spend enough time thinking. Once you develop the skill of thinking, you will find that your success in every area of life improves.

What you'll find as you take a hard look at your business to identify what truly is necessary may be a lot less what you previously might have thought. You may find that you really only need to know one marketing process that is very effective; you really only need to know one way to acquire customers; you really only need to know one way to track down products or create products or what have you.

When you realize that, you realize it becomes much simpler to succeed in business than you might have thought. And where that realization ultimately leads you is to finding the best ways for you to do all of these things.

In any area of your business or your personal life right now, where you're suffering from either frustration, confusion or problems, the first thing you need to do is dig to uncover the real problem. Then fixate on what the ideal solution would be, what is absolutely necessary to have in order to have that ideal situation or resolution. And what are the best ways to get from point A to point B using different criteria—fastest, easiest, most certain, cheapest, etc.

And as you play with the different answers to your problems, you will start to exercise your thinking muscles. The way a lot of like to do it is by writing-thinking on paper. Consistently trying to get clear about what's the best solution, what's the real problem, what's the best way to get it resolved?

In Part 2, we will expand on your thinking skills with "Five Simple Steps to Becoming a More Strategic Thinker."

Adapted from "**One Step Ahead**", by Rich Schefren, www.strategicprofits.com

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