



WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO LEARN THIS SKILL?

At school, in private life and in the workplace, problems arise regularly – it's just a part of life. Learning some methods to help you tackle what comes up helps reduce your stress levels when it happens, giving you more mental space to think clearly and sort things out.

WHAT?

A consistent approach that helps you to solve problems, including challenges that may feel confronting or that are new to you.

IT'S OKAY TO...

- > not know what you want to do
- > get knocked into the pit
- > move faster or go slower
- > fail (as long as you tried)

WHAT YOU NEED

- > Paper and a pen

WHAT TO DO

01

Identify and define the problem. If you can step back, take a deep breath and try to define the problem, you're on the way to solving it. Grab a piece of paper and answer these three questions:

- > What am I trying to sort out?
- > Why is it a problem?
- > What does it affect?

For example: 'I need to get a permit for my festival/shop/market stall. This was unexpected and it might cost money, and I'm not sure how long it will take. It is not the end of my plans, but it is an extra thing to do and might delay my launch.'

02

Break it down into tasks and prioritise them. The key is to break down the problem into smaller pieces. Then make a list of all the things you could do to tackle just one part of the problem. Sometimes just by breaking it down, making a list and sorting it, the solution to the problem becomes clear.

For example: 'I need a permit. To find out fees and how long it will take I will check the Council website first, then phone them or ask the festival facilities manager / market manager, if I need a 'real life' estimate of how long it will take. Then I'll get the forms, fill them in and pay the fee. Then I'll rejig my plans for the event in case I have to delay the launch.'

WHAT TO DO CONT:

03

Explore many options. There's more than one way to solve each problem, and in real life you are not being graded for your approach. The results are what counts! Try coming up with different options, then look at them and choose the most suitable.

Lots of great advice about how to do this can be found on this project management blog:

www.wrike.com/blog/problem-solving-techniques

04

Do your research including asking for advice. Research the problem and potential solutions, but don't be afraid to ask for advice – there is no shame in not knowing how to do something new. Review your task list with someone who you trust. It's okay if you don't know them all that well if you approach them in such a way that asks for their advice about how they overcame similar problems.

Do not ask them to solve your problem for you – this is a sure way to get them off-side! Instead, tell them the problem, ask them if they had solved a similar one, and tell them the highlights of your task list.

05

Build in options. Think about potential road blocks and ways you could go over or around them. Developing the flexibility to go over hurdles is important to learning how to solve problems. Go back over your task list and make sure you haven't built in dead-ends for yourself.

06

Give it a rest and go outside. If you have time, take a break, especially outside. Even a 20-minute walk often poses new ideas to a problem. Go for a run, swim or play with your dog for a set period of time. If the problem feels insurmountable, sleep on it and come back to your task list in the morning. Don't procrastinate too long, but do give your subconscious mind time to work it through.

07

Decide on your approach and make a timeline. Look at the list of tasks you have chosen as the way forward. Work out which ones need the most time. For example, if you have to wait for someone to get back to you, take that into consideration. There may be multiple steps that need scheduling in the right order. If it works for you, use a tool such as a Gantt chart or Trello to help you organise the tasks that make up your solution and keep track of them.

08

Learn from your mistakes. We all make mistakes, and sometimes things just don't work out. Sit back, remove personal emotions from the equation as much as you can, and think about what you could do differently next time you encounter this kind of problem. Reflection journals and sketchnoting can help you to think openly and proactively without overly criticising yourself.

You CAN do this, you are just learning **how** to do it!

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GOT IT?

➤ When problems arise, which they will, you can calmly step back and work out what to do. Your capacity to solve problems gradually gets better like a muscle – strong and flexible!



TRY THIS

If you feel like you've nailed it but you want to level up, try this:

- Look for a mentor who could provide advice on business or career problems.
- Look into project management tools and calendars.
- Find a reflection technique that works for you. You will get better at this and keeping a journal or notebook may show you how you are improving.

SO WHAT?

- Problems are a natural part of life, and they don't have to be hot-wired to your emotions. Learn to step back and break them down.
- Having a basic structure for how to approach a problem will benefit you in your studies and future work. It can also lead to improved confidence in your own capability. The more problems you solve, the better you get at it.

WHAT ACTION WILL YOU TAKE?

- Step back, identify and define the problem. Write this down.
- Break it into chunks or tasks.
- Prioritise the tasks and create a timeline.
- Don't forget to think of ways to go over anticipated hurdles!



IF YOU LIKED THIS ONE YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY...

- How to Find a Mentor
- How to Use Sketchnoting
- How to Write a Basic Budget
- How to Organise a Group Project
- How to Consider Ethics in Decision-Making