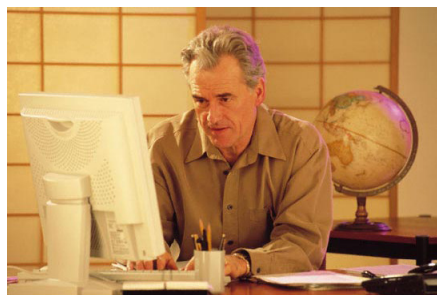


Handling Challenges Productively

Problems arise in all areas of life. Some can be prevented and some cannot. You cannot prevent a natural disaster, turn around the national or world economy, or wipe out crime, poverty, and disease. But through wise observation and planning, you can deal with global problems and minimize their effects on your business and personal well-being.

Be Constructive When Handling Problems

No matter how much attention you give to prevention, some communication challenges will arise. When they do, view them with the attitude that they are opportunities for making needed adjustments and improvements. How you approach the solution of problems is best decided before they arise. When you anticipate the possible obstacles that could arise and plan solutions for them in advance, you are never paralyzed by surprise; you know exactly what to do.



Follow these general guidelines for handling difficulties, challenges, or problems:

- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Your positive attitude about people and their worth, about your ability to communicate, and about the relationships you establish with people does much to prevent problems. But when misunderstanding does occur, plan to keep your positive attitude and approach problem solving with expectations that any misunderstanding is unintended by anyone involved, and that it can be cleared up with investment of a little time and effort. When you approach problems with a positive attitude, other people find it easier to be open, to communicate, to trust you, to control emotions, and to join you in seeking a solution.

- **Use productive communication skills.** Use skills at each point in the problem-solving process that help you and others move toward mutual understanding. At any one time, you may be using a combination of several communication skills. Knowing what communication skills to use is essential for overall communication effectiveness:

Working through difficult situations always requires constructive communication.

- **Deal with causes, not symptoms.** Knowing the cause of a problem makes it possible to deal realistically and effectively with the real issue involved – to cure the problem instead of covering it with a band-aid. It is human nature to want to avoid un-pleasant situations or confrontations. While it is wise to avoid “making a mountain out of a mole hill,” it is never wise to deny the existence of a problem in hopes it will go away. Whatever the size of the problem or in whatever stage of development it is, use all of your communication skills to determine the cause so you can deal with it, not the symptoms. Ask probing questions like these: What symptom indicates the existence of a problem? Who is involved in this problem? What effect is this problem creating? What is my responsibility in this situation? How is the best way to reach our shared goal?

- **Avoid arguments.** Arguing wastes time and energy, fogs the real issues, creates resentment, interferes with sound reasoning, and destroys goodwill. So avoid arguments at all costs! If you wish to persuade people to your way of thinking, you must first convince them you are their friend. To convince them you are their friend, you must be willing to listen to them and be open to their suggestions. Maintain an attitude that problem solving is a search for understanding and a win/win resolution, not a battle to be won. Be calm, reasonable, and willing to consider the point of view of others. Remain flexible and avoid overreacting.

- **Accept responsibility.** Be willing to accept personal responsibility for your part in solving any problem. If you find it necessary to change the way you communicate, make the changes that facilitate reaching your goal. Also encourage others to accept responsibility for contributing to the solution – by furnishing needed information or by taking whatever action is necessary to go right through the problem, around it, or over it – to reach your shared goals.

- **Focus on behavior or results.** When you communicate with people about some problem that exists, focus on behavior or results – attack the problem, not someone’s personality. Trying to change people discourages them and frequently leads to additional problems. Instead, focus on the problem and encourage people to change what they do. Sticking to the issue and what the person can do about the problem removes pressure. When you insist on focusing on what needs to be done instead of who is to blame, everyone can remain objective and creative in seeking solutions.

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