

## More than One Way to Skin a Cat: Adventures in Creative Thinking

By Moira Russell (Author) dated: 27/6/09

How many times have you caught yourself saying that there could be no other solution to a problem – and that that problem leads to a dead end? How many times have you felt stumped knowing that the problem lying before you is one you cannot solve. No leads. No options. No solutions.

Did it feel like you had exhausted all possible options and yet are still before the mountain – large, unconquerable, and impregnable? When encountering such enormous problems, you may feel like you're hammering against a steel mountain. The pressure of having to solve such a problem may be overwhelming.

But rejoice! There might be some hope yet!

With some creative problem-solving techniques you may be able to look at your problem in a different light. And that light might just be the end of the tunnel that leads to possible solutions.

First of all, in the light of creative problem-solving, you must be open-minded to the fact that there may be more than just one solution to the problem. And, you must be open to the fact that there may be solutions to problems you thought were unsolvable.

Now, with this optimistic mindset, we can try to be a little bit more creative in solving our problems.

1. Maybe the reason we cannot solve our problems is that you have not really taken a hard look at what the problem is. Here, trying to understand the problem and having a concrete understanding of its workings is integral solving the problem. If you know how it works, what the problem is, then you have a better foundation towards solving the problem.

Now make the simple statement of what problem is. Identify the participating entities and what their relationships with one another are. Take note of the things you stand to gain any stand to lose from the current problem. Now you have a simple statement of what the problem is.

2. Take note of all of the constraints and assumptions you have regarding the problem. Sometimes it is these assumptions that obstruct your view of possible solutions. You have to identify which assumptions are valid, and which assumptions need to be addressed.

3. Solve the problem by parts. Solve it going from general view towards the more detailed parts of the problem - the top-down approach. Write down the question, and then come up with a one-sentence solution. The solution should be a general statement of what will solve the problem. From here you can develop the solution further, and increase its complexity little by little.

4. Although it helps to have critical thinking aboard as you solve a problem, you must also keep a creative, analytical voice at the back of your head. When someone comes up with a prospective solution, try to think how you could make that solution work. Be creative. At the same time, look for chinks in the armour of that solution.

5. It pays to remember that there may be more than just one solution being developed at one time. Keep track of all the solutions and their developments. Remember, there may be more than just one solution to the problem.

6. Remember that old adage, "two heads are better than one." That one is truer than it sounds. Always be open to new ideas. You can only benefit from listening to all the ideas each person has. This is especially true when the person you're talking to has had experience solving problems similar to yours.

You don't have to be a gung-ho, solo hero to solve the problem. If you can organise collective thoughts on the subject, it can help.

7. Be patient. As long as you persevere, there is always a chance that a solution will present itself. Remember that no one was able to create an invention the first time around.

Creative thinking exercises can also help you in your quest to be a more creative problems solver.

Here is one example.

Take a piece of paper and write any word that comes to mind in the centre of the page. Now look at that word then write the first two words that come to your mind. This can go on until you can build a tree of related words. This helps you build analogical skills, and fortify your creative processes.

So, next time you see a problem you think you can't solve, think again. The solution might just be staring you right in the face. All it takes is just a little creative thinking, some planning, and a whole lot of work.

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