

Problem Solving

A step-by-step worksheet for getting unstuck

When a problem keeps showing up, the pull is to jump straight to a fix. This worksheet slows that down just enough to make sure you are solving the **right** problem, toward a clear goal, with more than one idea on the table. Grab a pen (or a whiteboard) and work through each step in order.

First, a reminder: you have options. Any problem can be met by...

Tolerating it

Distress tolerance skills

**Changing how you
feel about it**

Emotion regulation skills

Staying miserable

or making it worse

Solving it

You are here

1

Describe the problem

Write it out plainly. What, specifically, is creating the distress or the roadblock?

Who is involved?

Where / when does it happen?

What is happening?

Tip: If what you wrote is really two or three problems bundled together, split them up and pick one to start with. Ask yourself which one matters most right now.

2

Check the facts

Strip out interpretations, assumptions, and loaded words. Are you solving the right problem?

What am I assuming or interpreting?

e.g. "They don't care," "This always happens," "They should know better."

What do I actually know? (facts only)

If another person is involved, what could I ask them?

Curious, not judgmental: "Help me understand... Are you blocked somewhere?"

A clue you may have the wrong problem:

- ☐ I have already tried several solutions and nothing is working
- ☐ I keep ending up back in the same spot

Is there a different problem underneath the problem? Restate it here.

3

Identify your goal

Keep it simple. You can't get anywhere without a destination in the GPS.

What am I trying to accomplish? What do I need?

How will I know this problem is resolved? What would that look like?

4

Brainstorm solutions

Aim for at least five. Don't judge or evaluate yet. Wild ideas count.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____

Stuck? Who could I ask for more ideas?

A coach, a colleague, a friend, a therapist: "Here's the problem, here's what I keep trying. What else could I do?"

5

Choose a solution

Pick the idea that best serves your goal and is likely to work. Weigh your top options.

Idea	Pros	Cons

The one I'm going with, and why it fits my goal:

6

Put it into action

Make it concrete. Then go do it and see what happens.

My very first step:

When will I do it?

What or who do I need?

“I don’t have time for this.” Try: “I haven’t *prioritized* the time for this.” Then ask which costs more: slowing down now, or the same problem showing up again and again?

7

Evaluate the results

The step most people skip, and where the learning happens.

What happened? What actually moved the needle?

If it didn’t work: what did I miss? (Revisit Step 2 or your pros and cons.)

Next move:

- ☐ Keep going; it’s working
- ☐ Try another idea from Step 4
- ☐ Go back and redefine the problem

“Why isn’t this getting done on time?”

On the episode, Faith shared a pattern she sees with the startup leaders she coaches: a team member misses deadlines, and the leader ends up taking the work back. Here’s how the seven steps played out. Answers are in orange.

1 Describe the problem

What is happening?

A team member isn’t turning work in on time, and when it does come in, it isn’t at the quality I need. I keep taking the work back and doing it myself.

Split it: that’s two problems (timing and quality). Start with timing.

2 Check the facts

What was I assuming?

They’re not motivated. Maybe I need more incentives or reinforcement.

What did I learn when I asked?

Everyone is in a high-demand, early-stage environment with a million plates spinning. The team isn’t regularly aligning on priorities, and nobody has visibility into what others are working on.

The problem underneath the problem:

We’re not in sync on priorities.

3 Identify your goal

What do I need, and how will I know it’s resolved?

I need to rely on my people: work delivered by the agreed time, or a quick heads-up if they’re blocked. Resolved looks like deadlines met or flagged early.

4 Brainstorm solutions

1. Daily 10-minute stand-up (in-person team)
2. Async written check-in for a hybrid, cross-time-zone team
3. Weekly priorities meeting to set the top three for the week
4. A shared board so everyone can see who is working on what
5. Agree that “I’m blocked” is always a welcome, early message
6. Name urgency and deadline explicitly whenever work is handed off
7. Check for skill or context gaps and train where needed

5 Choose a solution

Idea	Pros	Cons
Daily stand-up	Quick; easy since the team sits together; blockers surface right away	One more meeting; costs time up front
Async check-in	Works across time zones; leaves a written record	Easier to skim or skip; slower back-and-forth

Going with:

The in-person team chose the daily stand-up; the hybrid team is trying an async check-in. Slow down to go fast.

6 Put it into action

My very first step:

Starting Monday: 10 minutes every morning. Each person shares today’s priorities and anything they’re blocked on.

7 Evaluate the results

My plan to evaluate:

Check back in two weeks. Are deadlines being met or flagged early? If not, return to Step 4 and try another idea, or re-check the facts: is it a skills gap or missing context?

When you’re tempted to take the work back: picture your hands tied behind your back. The fastest route is to lean in with curiosity: “We talked about this. Help me understand why it isn’t getting done.”