

## Are you kicking the can down the road?

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When you come face-to-face with a problem, how do you react? Do you ignore it and hope it will go away? Do you feel powerless to solve it? Have you had such bad experiences trying to solve problems in the past that you’ve just given up? Or do you simply just kick the can down the road? If you’re not making some kind of effort to tackle problems in your life, they will tackle you.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve revealed the same problems in people and organizations year after year. Even when ample advice was given on how to solve the problem, the problem persisted on and on. In many cases, leaders were fired. In other cases, businesses tanked for not solving the problem. Bad things typically happen when problems aren’t solved.

Some people are great at solving problems and others couldn’t solve a problem if the solution was spelled out right in front of them. If you’re not a good problem solver, you’re not doomed. The ability to solve problems is something that can be improved with experience. Every time you face

and overcome an obstacle, you gain experience as a problem solver. And each time you solve another problem, you get a little better at the process. But if you never try, fail, and try again, you’ll never be good at it.

To improve your problem solving, do the following:

*Look for trouble.* If you’ve been avoiding problems, go out looking for them. You’ll only get better when you gain experience dealing with problems. Find situations that need fixing, come up with several viable solutions, and then take them to a leader with good problem-solving experience. Observe how they think and react to problems and you’ll gain some perspective on how to handle difficulties.

*Develop a method.* Some people have a hard time solving problems because they don’t know how to tackle them. Years ago, I learned and applied the following TEACH process from leadership expert John Maxwell when I attempted to solve problems:

1) *Time* -- spend time to discover the real issue. (This will require asking “why” over and over until the heart of the matter causing the problem is

revealed).

2) *Exposure* -- find out what others have done.

3) *Assistance* -- have some reliable associates study all angles.

4) *Creativity* -- brainstorm multiple solutions.

5) *Hit it* -- implement a solution (hopefully the best solution).

*Surround yourself with problem solvers.* If you aren’t a good problem solver, bring others onto your team who are. They will immediately complement your weaknesses, and you will also learn from them.

Lastly, be sure to learn every time you solve a problem. Sometimes you’ll get it right and sometimes you miss completely. But one thing is for certain, you’re in trouble if the same problem continually resurfaces. John Foster Dulles, Former Secretary of State, said: “The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year.” Don’t have the same problems you had last year. Solve them and then seek out new problems to solve.

~ The End ~