

Six simple steps for business problem solving

TAMMY TANSLEY - OCTOBER 27, 2015

4 MIN READ



When the going gets tough in your business – and it will – how do you find the energy for creative business problem solving? I have a six step process that is both easy and free.

I'm sure I'm not alone in worrying about money coming in, and money going out, not to mention difficult suppliers and clients, and the myriad of other things that can keep a soloist up at night. Sometimes it is tempting to wonder if it is all too hard, and whether we'd be better off chucking it all in.

And of course, the reality is that there are probably times when things truly aren't working or the issue is really so insurmountable that chucking it all in *is* the only option left. But in the vast majority of cases it is more about that panic comes when you can't see a way forward (or in some cases out of) a particular situation or situations.

There is comfort in knowing that whilst having a plan doesn't immediately fix the issues that might be keeping you up at night, it will at the very least provide some movement forward as opposed to just going round the constant loop in your head.

Which is why I like this very simple approach to business problem solving so you can come up with a plan for those times when you're really up to your eyeballs in it and can't see a way out..

STEP ONE: Set aside some time

It doesn't need to be a lot of time, just enough to give you the clarity that just doesn't come when you're juggling a hundred things at once.

STEP TWO: Get some help if you can

It needs to be someone who is willing to help you walk through the process (rather than providing their own 'helpful' advice and suggestions). If such a person is not available, no worries, just make sure you have quiet space with no interruptions (including phone, email etc).

STEP THREE: Question time

If you've got someone with you – get them to simply ask you this question. If you're by yourself, ask yourself the question (out loud!).

“What is the specific issue that you want to solve?”

Remember, the answer to this needs to be specific. “I want to earn more money” doesn't give you enough clarity to find a plan. “I want to find a way to pay my tax bill of x dollars by the end of this month” is much better. No doubt, you've heard of the **SMART acronym** (specific, measurable, attractive, realistic and timeframe). This can be a handy tool in defining what the actual problem or issue is. There might be multiple issues, but deal with them one by one and detail them one by one. Just detailing them can bring a clarity in itself.

STEP FOUR: Brainstorming

Now you know the specific issue to be solved, spend 10-15 minutes answering these questions (and recording the answers):

- What **systems/infrastructure** do you have around that supports you?
- What inner qualities do you have?
- What behaviours/knowledge and skills do you have?
- Who supports you (use specific names not just generic terms like family and friends)?

STEP FIVE: Come at it every which way

Get your partner to ask you:

- How will your (insert inner quality) help you assist with this issue?
- What would (insert name) say about the issue that might be of use in resolving the issue? What questions might (insert name) ask you about the issue?
- How can your (insert knowledge/skills/behaviours) assist you with resolving the issue?
- How can you use (insert infrastructure) to support you with this issue?

Your partner (or you if you're asking yourself these questions) should just keep asking the questions until you've exhausted everything on the list (not provide any input/advice/views!).

This technique can be so very powerful because it provides a different way of looking at the issue. After all, you've already (presumably) given some thought to the issue without any clear way forward so looking at the issue with a different lens can be helpful.

A few other questions that can sometimes spark some different ideas:

- If I could give you a dose of courage, what steps would you take?
- What needs to happen before you will do something about the situation?
- What do know that you could/should do but are avoiding it because you are **scared**/worried or you are worried that it will be uncomfortable or unpleasant?
- What else?

Chip and Dan Heath (authors of *Decisive* and *Switch*, amongst other books) suggest some other questions that can help with this:

- Imagine that the option you're currently leaning toward simply vanished as a feasible alternative. What else could you do?
- How can you dip a toe in the decision without diving in headfirst?
- What would you tell your best friend to do, if he/she was in the same situation?
- If you were replaced tomorrow, what would your successor do about your dilemma?

STEP 6: Action items

Once you've got some ideas what you can do, start to formulate them into specific actions (back to SMART again). What can you do right now? What can you do tomorrow etc? Remember, simple is often best. And almost always, the answer or answers are staring you in the face.

A friend of mine spent months lying awake at night agonising over a tax bill that was well overdue. We went through this process and she came up with the answers to solve it within half an hour. Her first action was to proactively call the tax office and be honest about the problem and ask for their help and advice, rather than avoid their calls. Some months on, she's paid off her bill and is sleeping well at night again!

Remember that the plan is important, but even more critical is acting on the plan! So, if you've got a partner helping you with this process, ask that they help keep you accountable for doing what you say you're going to do.

The good news is that this business problem solving process is quick, easy and free. Give it a go and see if it can get you sleeping at night again!

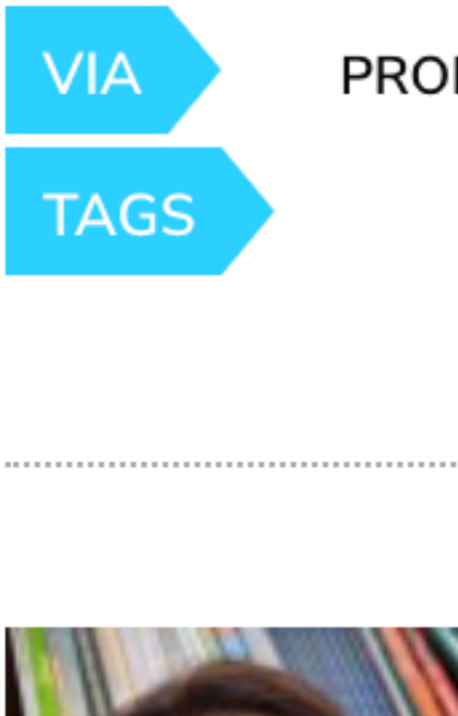
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Tammy Tansley

This can mean anything from getting the **people basics right**, to the **solving of a systemic or difficult people or team problem**, to the **introduction of complex organisational and cultural changes**. Why do I do this? Because I know that the bit that makes work unpleasant usually is when people interactions start to go wrong. I love working with clients to help them resolve issues or put in place approaches so that the issues don't arise in the first place, rather than for them to spend hours lying awake at night trying to work out how to move an issue (or person) forward.

There are lots of consultants out there; so how will you know if I am the right person to work with you and your business? Clients have described me as part confidante, part strategist, part tactician. Clients say that they have a sense of relief that things are not just with, and that they are no longer alone in trying to deal with an issue (particularly complex or long standing issues). They say that it is not just the quality of the advice but the depth of the advice. That they feel that they have someone on their side. In answer to the question - what do you do?

I work with either individual clients (usually via a coaching relationship) or organisations either at the team or organisational level. Sometimes I am working with a CEO on people strategy, a team on high performance and coaching individual employees, all in the same organisation. I can work in organisations for a discrete period of time or a specific project. Other times, it is an ongoing and varied relationship that evolves as the organisation evolves. I work as a **human resources, culture & change** and **industrial relations consultancy** for businesses in **finance, manufacturing, resources, oil and gas, government, retail, services and not for profit sectors** - both in Western Australia and nationally.

These include both smaller 100-500 employee organisations and large global businesses. I am also the author of *Do What You Say You'll Do* (a book for new leaders and those reinventing their leadership styles). Check out the website here: www.dowhatyousay.com.au and Enterprise Agreements : Made Easy (a book on how to easily negotiate an enterprise agreement that meets the needs of all parties). Check out the website here: www.easmadeeasy.com.au

To find out more about the person behind the business, take a look at my [Flying Solo Spotlight profile](#).