Effective Problem-Solving

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In life there will always be problems and obstacles. Sometimes we are faced with an issue so big that we do not know how we can overcome it. Our self-esteem and confidence may wobble.

Two things that can really help are having a step-by-step approach to tackling problems, and re-framing our problems as challenges or opportunities.

Take for example the case of Johnny. He had put on a lot of weight since he split up with his girlfriend as he had stopped going to the gym and instead stayed at home, mindlessly eating junk food. His self-esteem had already suffered from the break-up and this wasn't helping.

Maria was having difficulty revising for an important presentation for her employer. She felt overwhelmed and unable to concentrate. The more she panicked, the less she could do, which led to her panicking even more.

Change the Point of View

To reframe the problem, Johnny could use the break-up as a reason to get to know himself better, and to learn more about health and fitness, something which he had been passionate about. Maria could look at her difficulty revising as a challenge: can she identify the ways in which she prepares and presents best, and prove to herself that she is indeed capable?

How to Find the Solutions

Trying to find solutions to problems can be intimidating. We may not want to admit that there is a problem, for fear of looking "less than." However, mastering problem-solving is a skill that will be useful for life.

The first step is to recognize and admit that there is a problem, then to name it and own it. The next step is to brainstorm all possible solutions, no matter how far out they may seem. Don't edit yourself at this stage, because the next stage is to evaluate the solutions and see which could be most effectively applied to your situation.

Once you've evaluated each potential solution, pick the best one or two. Start using it. Give yourself some time to really try implementing your chosen solution. Then, review and ask yourselft some questions:

- Is the problem solved?

- How do you feel?

- What can be changed?

By breaking the mountain into rocks, so to speak, you'll find it a lot easier to overcome problems.

Face Your Problem

Use the table below to tackle a problem you are currently facing.

Task	Example One	Example Two	Your Issue
1. Spot the problem	Over-eating in front of TV	Unable to focus on revision	

2. Name the problem	Mindless eating in front of TV while I'm trying to relax	Poor concentration	
3. Brainstorm solutions	- Call a friend - Choose another activity instead of TV, such as taking a walk, surfing the web. - Keep snack food out of the house - Ensure I've eaten enough at dinner to avoid temptation of snacking - Clean apartment	- Identify learning style - Ask teacher for help - Start a study circle with friends - Start relaxation techniques - Eliminate caffeine from diet	
4. Evaluate solutions	- Calling a friend could work, but who to call? - There are plenty of activities I've been meaning to take up, to try to be more social - Keeping snack food out of the house is difficult because my family want to eat those foods. - I already eat enough at dinner – it's not really about satiety - Cleaning apartment is not enough of a distraction	- I think I'm a auditory learner, so I need to find ways of recording revision material - My teacher is there to help – he wants us to pass! - It could improve relations with my friends, and hearing them say the material will help. - Maybe I could do some yoga; I'd have to learn other relaxation techniques - Switching to decaf shouldn't be too hard	
5. Choose best solution	- Calling a friend or relative might benefit them as well as me - I will try to take up volunteering at least once in the week	I definitely can talk to my teacher and start recording revision materal.	

6. Use solution	Volunteering will help me do something positive and get out of the house	I now feel more support and encouragement from my teacher.	
7.Review problem-solving	How am I doing?	How am I doing?	

Key Points

- Facing problems is a part of life.

- Once we recognize and own a problem, we're on our way to solving it.

- It's helpful to re-frame problems as challenges that can help us grow.

- Breaking down problems step-by-step is a useful approach to solving them.