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Creative Problem Solving

Many people are tempted to solve problems based on what they know has worked before. This approach is easy, as it can be implemented rather quickly. However, this linear approach cuts out the possibility of finding more creative and effective solutions that may yield bigger returns in the long-term. Follow these tips by yourself, or in a team setting, to implement new and effective solutions within your organization:

1. Recognize the value of finding new ways to solve problems: Taking the time to look at a problem from different perspectives creates not only an the opportunity to solve it directly but also to find the "once-and-for-all" solution. Finding elegant and creative solutions may help you move beyond the perpetual demands on your time, reduce the pressure you are under and increase productivity.

2. Change your thinking patterns: By being alert to the possibility that there may be other ways of looking at problems, you will force your brain to think of other solutions instead of automatically defaulting to what has been done before.

3. Involve a diverse group: If possible, involve a diverse group of people in the thinking process. Diversity stimulates new and innovative ways of looking at problems.

4. See the problem from a logical point of view: Focus on the available information and try to determine where the gaps are. Look at the patterns and trends inherent to the situation and try to build a future picture from the analysis.

5. Use your intuition: Introduce feelings and instincts into the thinking process and arrive to a possible decision(s). At this step, it is useful to consider how others might react to your decision.

6. Use the *opposition* technique: Simulate a critical examination of the decisions and seek out errors in the thinking. This reveals weak points in a plan and enables the development of contingencies.

7. Use positive feedback: Encourage a more optimistic viewpoint that focuses on the benefits and possibilities that stem from the aforementioned decisions.

8. Use creativity: Allow for innovative ideas and alternative solutions. Try to be non-judgmental and encourage out-of-the-box thinking.

IPS Recommends...

- To think about the problem in context. Ask yourself if there is anything else that is affected by the problem or anything else that could possibly affect the problem?
- To try and bring in someone who has had no prior experience with the problem at hand in order to get their thoughts and any possible unbiased solutions.
- To be educated on any current tools and techniques. Research and use other thinking techniques such as the *Reframing Matrix* by Michael Morgan, *The Random Input* and *The Provocation* techniques.
- Try not to assume that your solutions will be well accepted by people around you because they may not have the same values, attitudes and beliefs as yourself.

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Using Mentorship to Develop Employees' Potential

Mentoring is a relationship in which one person, usually someone more experienced and often more senior in an organization, helps another discover more about his or her personal qualities, capabilities and potential. The following checklist will show you how to effectively leverage mentoring within your organization:

1. Make sure the mentor has the right skills: The mentor must have good listening skills, sophistication in using different forms of questions (opened, closed, probing etc), the maturity to suspend personal judgment and experience in giving constructive feedback.

2. Clarify the mentoring relationship: Make sure that both the learner and the mentor are clear on what the relationship is, and is not about. If appropriate, consider drafting a mentoring contract specifying the participants' specific roles, responsibilities and commitments, planned number and frequency of meetings and the participants' obligation to confidentiality.

3. Open the relationship: Recognize that in the early stages of the relationship, the mentor needs to take a lead later. As the learner's confidence and understanding grows, the balance shifts. Set objectives for what the mentoring process is to achieve. Make the objectives relevant, specific, achievable and time-specific.

4. At the start of each mentoring session, and each time learners reach a milestone, review not just their circumvent performance and success, but also lesson they learned about themselves through the process. Ask questions such as what happened? Why? What did they learn from the experience?

5. At the end of each mentoring session, articulate achievements so far and specify what needs to happen before the next session, especially if the mentor is to arrange something on the learner's behalf. Over the course of the mentoring, control of the learner's development should pass increasingly from the mentor to the learner. The goal is for the learner to be able to stand alone when the mentoring process ends.

6. End the relationship: Mentoring relationships between people outside work may flourish for years. Inside the workplace however, mentoring ends when the objectives are achieved. Having reached this point, celebrate the success of the relationship with a final review of the learner's progress.

IPS Recommends...

• Taking the learner's view into account and selecting a well-matched mentor. Someone the learner respects, can be open to and can trust.

• Remembering that a key part of the mentor's role is to open doors for other people to experience and gain learning opportunities.

• Allowing the mentor to take a flexible approach in order to focus on the learner's learning style.

• Making sure that each session starts with a review and ends with a clear action plan.

• Not revealing the information learned during mentoring to people outside the relationship.

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