

# **How to Sharpen Your Managerial Skills**

## **Good Management and Leadership Skills for Aspiring Managers**

By BizMove Management Training Institute

**Other free books by BizMove that may interest you:**

[Free starting a business books](#)

[Free management skills books](#)

[Free marketing management books](#)

[Free financial management books](#)

[Free Personnel management books](#)

[Free miscellaneous business management books](#)

[Free household management books](#)

Copyright © by BizMove. All rights reserved.

### **Table of Contents**

[Introduction](#)

[1. How to Lead and Manage People](#)

[2. How Get Organized](#)

[3. How to Improve Your Planning Skills](#)

[4. How To Delegate Work and Responsibilities](#)

[5. Self Development Tips](#)

[6. How To Set and Achieve Goals](#)

[7. How To Better Manage Yourself](#)

[8. How to Conduct Successful Meetings](#)

[9. How to Handle Stress the Easy way](#)

[10. How to Solve Problems](#)

[11. How to Make the Right Decisions](#)

### **Introduction**

This book feature hundreds of tips, strategies and clever techniques to help you improve your personal management skills. It points out that you must be a leader that people follow, keep informed, make timely decisions and take effective action. In effect you must control the activities of your organization rather than being controlled by them.

### **Here's what's in the book:**

- How to lead and manage people; powerful tips and strategies to motivate and inspire your people to bring out the best in them. Be the boss people want to give 200 percent for.
- How to improve your personal effectiveness; save hours of time with these practical tips and techniques for organizing your time and workload.
- Tips to improve your planning abilities; think ahead to get ahead.
- How to develop yourself; simple to follow self development tips and strategies.
- How to set and achieve goals.
- How to better manage yourself; tips and tactics to unleash your hidden potential.
- How to make the right decisions; an effective 7-step decision making formula that will help you make decisions with unshakable confidence even when you're still not sure. It's easy and really works!
- How to handle stress the easy way; eleven sure-fire ways to make the stress in your life work for you instead of against you.
- How to solve problems; as a manager you deal with problems and crisis situations on an almost daily basis. As a matter of fact the way you handle such situations can make or break you. Here's an effective, easy to implement 9 step strategy that will help you solve problems like magic.
- How to conduct successful meetings the easy way.
- All these and much much more.

My name is Meir Liraz and I'm the author of this book. According to Dun & Bradstreet, 90% of all business failures analyzed can be traced to poor management. This is backed up by my own experience. In my 31 years as a business coach and consultant to managers, I've seen practically dozens of managers fail and lose their job -- not because they weren't talented or smart enough -- but because they were trying to re-invent the wheel rather than rely on proven, tested methods that work. And that is where this book can help, it will teach you how to avoid the common traps and mistakes and do everything right the first time.

[Go to Top](#)

## 1. How to Lead and Manage People

In organizations we must work with and for others. To be able to mutually achieve our goals we must be able to relate to others effectively. These Effective Leadership Skills Training tips will help you do just that.

- Catch people doing things right and then let them know that they are doing things right.
- Use feedback to stay informed about what other people are doing in your area of responsibility and authority.
- Have regular, focused meetings regarding the projects that you are responsible for.
- Provide adequate instructions. Time is lost if things are not done correctly.
- Train others to do jobs. You cannot do them all, nor can others do them if they have not been trained.
- Expect others to succeed. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when you believe others are loyal, dedicated and doing a good job.
- Help others see how they will benefit from doing a job. This is when they truly become motivated.
- Do not avoid talking to a poor performer. It hurts them, the organization and yourself if the situation is not dealt with.
- Do not over control others. It is frustrating for them and time consuming for you.
- Focus on results, not on activities or personalities.
- Reward people for the results that they produce.
- Manage by walking around. See what people are doing and listen to what they have to say.
- Make quality an obsession, especially on smaller items.

Send thank you notes and memos.

- Provide workers with open, direct, and immediate feedback on their actual performance as compared to expected performance and they tend to correct their own deficiencies.
- Practice naive listening. Don't talk, just let people explain why they are doing the types of things that they are doing. You will learn many things. Manage by exception. When things are going well, leave them alone. When a problem occurs, then help.
- Never seek to place blame. Always focus on the problem.

- Never ignore a concern of one of your people. While it may seem trivial to you, to the other person it is a problem that will continue to destroy their train of thought.
- Make it a personal rule and a challenge to respond to someone within 24 hours of hearing their request.
- Keep memos on bulletin boards to a minimum. People will spend less time standing there reading.
- Give employees an opportunity to speak their opinions and suggestions without fear of ridicule or reprisal.
- When you are going to make a change that affects others, get them involved before making the actual change. This increases commitment to make the change work after it is implemented.
- Put key ideas on small posters to hang around the office.
- When the environment and your sincerity permit, give the person a hug or a touch.
- Employees are the only organization resource that can, with training, appreciate in value. All other resources depreciate.
- People want to be involved in something important. Give them a whole project or a significant piece of the project to work on.
- Have salary tied into performance appraisal and accomplishing of objectives.
- Consider sharing distasteful tasks to reduce resentment and hard feelings.
- Ask, "Will you please do this for me" instead of telling someone just to do it.
- Eliminate private secretaries in favor of shared secretaries in order to make it easier to even out the work load.
- If you give employees a basic employee handbook, you will not be interrupted with their questions.
- Pay attention to small details, the big ones are obvious and get taken care of.
- Stay open in your thinking. Be open to all new ideas. Do this and you will not be setting up barriers that do not exist.
- Avoid asking others to do trivial personal items for you.
- Say thank you to those with whom you associate.
- A warm smile and strong handshake break barriers.
- Smile. It helps you feel better and is contagious. The whole organization shudders when the boss is frowning. Likewise it smiles when the boss does.
- Keep things "light" and have fun rather than being too serious. Seriousness blocks productivity.

- In order to fly with the eagles you must "think lightly."
- Work with each person to create standard operating procedures for their specific job. It will eliminate repetitious questions.
- Let people know why they are doing something. It then becomes more meaningful when they recognize their part in a greater vision.
- Provide soft, lively background music not slow and not rock.
- To get a disorganized coffee drinking crew started off more efficiently, begin each day with a 5 to 10 minute meeting just at starting time. They will be focused, set in the right direction and can get right to work.
- Practice the golden rule in business: Do unto others the way you would have them do unto you. Fairness will then be in your business.
- Practice the platinum rule in interpersonal relationships. It is "Do unto others, the way they want to be done unto." They will be more apt to stay comfortable when interacting with us when we are able to do things their preferred way.
- Get others to commit to deadlines by asking, "When can you have that for me?"
- Nail down commitment by asking, "Do I have your word that you will have that for me then?"
- Set the stage for cooperation from others by: 1) Introducing the idea; 2) Continual stimulation by talking about it; and 3) get others to make an investment by having them participate in the planning.
- If you are unable to reach agreement or get a commitment from another person in a meeting, agree to disagree, but summarize your understanding in a confirming memo.
- Giving people recognition generates energy within them. They will then direct that energy toward increased productivity.
- Tap the potential of those working for you by giving them opportunities to think things through for themselves instead of just telling them how to do something.
- Always give people the benefit of the doubt. They may not be the cause of a problem. The cause may be beyond their control.
- Admit it when you do not know the answer to a question posed by a staff member. Then challenge the staff person to research and decide what the best answer is. It will help this person grow.
- Be persistent and follow up.
- When you were away and some of your people did an exceptional job, call them at home in the evening when you find out and personally thank them for what they did instead of waiting until the next time you see them.

- If you know that a person will respond angrily to a particular comment, avoid bringing it up. It is nonproductive and bad for the relationship. In other words, "never kick a skunk."
- When you appreciate what someone has done, let them know and put it in writing. This can then be added to their personnel file.
- Have an opinion survey done to determine how people view the organization. That way you can catch any problems while they are still small.
- Encourage periods of uninterrupted activity such as a daily quiet hour in your department or work group.
- When asking someone to do something, let them know what is in it for them and the organization. Do not focus just on what is in it for the organization and yourself.
- The boss is the strongest model the employees have. Be a positive model as people are watching to see how you behave. They will reflect this in their own behavior. Lead by example.
- Be a member of the 4 F club with others. Be seen as Fair, Firm, Friendly and having Foresight.
- Do not help others unless they need and ask for help.
- Encourage your people to come up with new ideas and ways to do things. Give them credit and recognition for the idea.
- If a new idea won't work, at least praise the effort of the person so they will come up with future ideas.
- Once a month meet with each staff member to catch any problems or concerns the person may have as soon as possible before they become a crisis.
- Be the kind of a person that others want to help out and work for.
- Be flexible and do whatever it takes to get the job done. Remember it is results that count, not activities.
- Generally speaking, getting something done perfectly is usually not as important as getting it done. Perfection has a high cost and it may not be worth it.
- When giving or receiving information, don't hurry. Take the time needed to truly understand. It prevents future problems and misunderstandings.
- Whenever you are having an important discussion with a person, before parting, set a specific follow-up date and time and write it in your calendar.
- Never criticize an employee in front of others. Have all discussions of a corrective nature in private.

- Hire people with specific skills and interests that match what the organization needs to have accomplished. The better the match, the better the productivity and the more motivated the person.
- Treat people as people-not things.
- Flaring in anger will drive others away. If not physically at least mentally,
- Keep a "warm fuzzy" file for each person a place to keep track of the things you have already complimented them for, and want to compliment them for.
- Have regular performance review and goal setting sessions with each of your employees at least every three months.
- Have regular "development discussions" with each of your people in which you discuss only how the individual may grow personally and how you and the organization may be able to support them in doing this.
- Low morale in workers may be an indication of the boss only talking about negative things or what's wrong. Be sure to balance negative comments with more frequent positive comments.
- Let your people know you are there to help them not to harass them.
- Telling people what you plan to do, and when, can be a catalyst for getting objections and input which you might not otherwise receive.
- Form an action team to address people's problems right away rather than letting things drag out and perhaps get worse.
- Instead of saying to another, "What can I do for you?" ask them "What can you do for me on this project?"
- Do not hold back from discussing the need to improve performance with one of your people.
- Encourage others to develop their plan of action and give you a detailed explanation.
- Encourage individuals to compete against themselves to achieve more. Let it be a personal challenge to become better as an individual-not competing with others but self.
- Check the ratio of positive comments to negative comments that you make to your people. Purposely make more positive comments.
- Demand accountability.
- Do things for others. They will be more willing to do things for you.
- Consider using time off as a reward for getting things done ahead of time.
- Set up an orientation training program for all new employees. It will help them learn their way around as well as teach them where things are kept and why.

- Stay informed of subordinates' needs and interests. Projects can be more effectively designed and rotated when you are well informed.
- If individuals need some encouragement in taking action, ask them, "What if..." questions to help them see what choices of action are available.
- Let people know that you know they can do it.
- Ask questions creatively so the action to be taken is suggested by the person who is to take it.
- Set up incentives that reward desired performance.
- Ask others for their estimate of how long it will take to do a project. When possible, agree and hold them accountable for that goal.
- Take on someone else's routine so they can do what you need done without interruption.
- Just as with family members, break large chores up into small, fun activities and enjoy doing them with team members.
- Before an employee leaves on vacation agree on a "must do" list of activities to be completed.
- Do not be quick to judge others. Learn to listen carefully before coming to conclusions.
- Consider sharing ideas and responsibility with others rather than just getting someone to do it for you or just doing it yourself.
- Inspire others to new levels of achievement by using positive encouraging feedback and ideas.
- Don't just ask someone who is busy to get things done for you; look for the busy person who is getting results. This is a doer, not simply a busy wheel spinner.
- Believe in the good of people.
- Do not be a "baby sitter" of others, constantly taking care of them and telling them what to do. Challenge them and help them learn to think and do things for themselves.
- Consider an incentive plan to reward productivity gains.
- Don't do what you can get someone else to do by simply asking.
- Clearly communicate who you want to do what, by when and at what cost. Then identify who needs to know about it and when they are to be informed.
- For people you relate to regularly, keep a list of things you need to talk to the person about. Then when you meet with or call them, you can review all the items that have accumulated on your list.

- Recognize you are not the only one who can do a job right. Trust others to do things for you.
- Organize, deputize, supervise.
- Meditate for one minute before starting a new subject or project.
- Don't worry about who gets the credit for completing a project. Focus on the task To be accomplished and do it.
- When credit is given to you for completion of a project, be sure to give it to all who were involved. This will nurture the relationships and provide motivation to support you in the future.
- Be sincerely interested in the people working for and with you.
- Help others recognize their own importance.
- Keep a list of birthdays, marriage and work anniversaries and other special dates. Provide recognition to your people on each of these dates. Mark your calendar prior to the actual date so you have time to prepare for it.

[Go to Top](#)

## **2. How Get Organized**

Achieving goals in an efficient way is possible when you know how to get organized. Here are some ideas and tips that will teach you how to get organized.

- Use a personal pocket calendar that you carry with you at all times to help keep yourself organized.
- Use check lists and check sheets regularly for those things which must be done in a correct way.
- Have different-colored checklists for easy identification.
- When people come back to you asking the same question they have asked several times before, ask them to set up a standard operating procedure by simply writing down the statement that you are to make about how the situation is to be handled. They can then keep that at their desk, and will not have to ask you about it in the future.
- Create a visible time line for key projects.
- Make a daily "to-do" list of activities that you must do and set priorities on it every day. Then do the activities in priority order.
- Use an App or a tickler or follow-up file allowing you to file items until the day that you can act on them.
- Set up a system to handle repetitive tasks.

- Avoid over organizing to the point where your perfectionism interferes with your achieving results.
- Identify and post reorder quantities on office supplies to prevent running out completely.
- Carry a notes App or 3x5 cards or a notebook or note paper or your pocket calendar to make notes of things that you would like to remember.
- When doing work on a computer, have a regular routine of backing up your work at least twice a day to ensure it does not get lost.
- Dictate your notes or thoughts for projects on a cassette, then either have it transcribed by your secretary or personally pay a student to do it for you.
- Work on only one item at a time.
- Keep only one project on your desk at a time to avoid distractions. Time is lost sorting through other items while you're working on one.
- If you are working on several projects, keep each one in a clearly labeled file by itself so you do not have to look through a mixed project file to find things.
- Do not schedule every minute of the day; keep flexible for the unexpected items that will come up,
- When you sense things are out of control-STOP. Sit quietly, relax, re-establish priorities in writing, decide what action to take, then go again.
- Sit down and do all trivia in one sitting to get it over with.
- Build flexibility into your schedule by purposely overestimating the amount of time needed on each activity.
- Use a people page-a page that has an individual's name at the top on which you write down the routine things you want to ask this individual. Then call this person once a day, or at most, twice to ask all the questions that have accumulated on the page.
- If you are responsible for several key projects, use project pages in your calendar or planner. Keep one page on each project. Whenever you think of something that is relevant to that project, jot it down on the appropriate page. This way you will be organizing your thoughts as you have them.
- Schedule a meeting with yourself every day. Then during this meeting work uninterrupted on your top priority project.
- Carry a project with you so when kept waiting in a doctor's office, airport or on a bus, you can be productive.
- Before leaving the office at night, put the most important project for tomorrow on your desk. It will be there ready and waiting for you in the morning.

- Establish an efficient working routine that matches you and your job. Do a certain activity at the same time each day or on the same day every week.
- Organize items you reference frequently in a ring binder in protective plastic. It will enhance its usability and present ability to customers or to yourself.
- Keep a log of requests made. Be sure to note the day and hour they are to be completed.
- Each day make a Call-See-Do list. Who you should call. Who you should see, and what you should do.
- Consolidate support staff where possible. For example, typing staff could be reorganized into a pool to equalize their work loads.
- Create specific useful forms such as time sheets and other record keeping sheets that are helpful to a specific job, but do not bog down the people with redundant paperwork.
- Keep only one calendar and keep it with you at all times.
- Combine all personal and work related items into your one personal calendar.
- Gather all needed materials and supplies for a project. Then when you sit and do the project, you won't have to run for this item or that item.
- Capture a few minutes from every activity you do. They accumulate to be extra time for your high priority projects.
- Use the computer where practical for reports and processing of information gathered.
- Instead of using a standard form it may pay off to make a customized form for a special customer. Assess the situation carefully.
- Trade days. Work on Saturday when it is quiet and take another day or two half days off.
- Implement flex time to help employee motivation.
- Once you are sure you are doing the most important thing, then ask yourself: "How can I do this more efficiently?"
- Use short, simple, written directions for routine procedures.
- Move your in-basket off the desk so it will not be a temptation or distraction.
- As things you must do come to mind, write them down in your pocket planner or calendar immediately so they do not get lost.
- Look for ways of automating office procedures.
- Work four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days. It gives you an extra day at home and better concentration at work.

- Use a steno pad to list thoughts, duties, interruptions or questions. Use a highlighter to cross them off as you deal with them.
- Keep a notebook with pages headed "Thanks giving," "Christmas," "Office party," or the name of other special projects. Then when you think of something that must be done or bought, etc., you can jot it down on the appropriate page.
- Make up daily/weekly/monthly/quarterly lists of routine duties with blank spaces to fill in responsibilities and special duties.
- Group like tasks together to prevent job jumping and wasting time.
- Provide adequate private work space as well as central areas and conference space to maximize effectiveness.
- Buy ahead so you have supplies on hand.
- Ask people who are not closely involved with a problem or process how they think it could be done. You will get fresh ideas.
- Use the proper tools for the job even if you have to go out and purchase them.
- Develop personal systems that work for you, then follow them. Be sure to update them periodically.
- At night put classified material in a secure place. Do not leave it out where it might walk off.
- Clean your desk the last five minutes of the day and prepare it for getting started first thing in the morning.
- Keep papers you are not working on in the filing cabinet, not on your desk.
- Keep supplies and materials in a storage cabinet, not on your desk.
- Establish an organized filing system that anyone can use and see that things get into it immediately.
- Save simplistic, repetitious, routine, manual jobs, (folding papers, stuffing envelopes) for times when you choose to simply relax and chat with others, or listen to cassette tapes.
- List key activities on 3x5 cards, one to a card. Review them in priority sequence several times each day.
- Stick "Post-It-Notes" on projects to show status or progress of a project.
- Role model as an organized person. You will soon convince yourself.
- Devise a problem resolution log which keeps track of progress on solving problems within a department.
- Schedule a block of time to be dedicated to major projects.

- When you think other people might forget something important, use multiple reminders to jog their memory. Use such things as notes, lists, tickler reports, status reports, briefings, phone calls, special bulletins, and so forth.
- Look for two or more complementary activities that can be dovetailed and done at one time.
- When you receive a person's business card, write notes about your encounter on the back of the card.

[Go to Top](#)

### **3. How to Improve Your Planning Skills**

Planning skills is written about and talked about more than it is done. Here are some ideas that will help you improve your planning skills and planning ability.

- Force yourself to plan.
- If you fail to plan, you are by default planning to fail.
- Schedule uninterrupted time every day to do your planning.
- Anticipate possible problems you could encounter in your project because of people, material, or mechanical failures. Purposely provide preventive actions and contingency plans in important high risk situations.
- When planning a project, plan in thinking time.
- Plan for tomorrow, tonight. Your subconscious will help organize while you sleep.
- Each day anticipate the sequence of activities that you will do to attain the objectives you are after.
- Think about your entire week. How will important projects be sequenced?
- Do your planning on paper to capture all of your ideas and to be sure none of them get lost. We can only work mentally with about seven pieces of information without losing some- thing. Write your thoughts down and you will be able to utilize everything you think of during your planning process.
- When developing a specific plan, list the activity steps individually on small pieces of paper and then sequence the pieces of paper. Then write the whole plan out in sequential order.
- If you must, leave your office and get away to do your planning in a quiet place where you can think.
- Don't hurry the process. Something will get overlooked.
- When things go wrong, it can generally be traced back to a poor job of planing or failing to follow an existing plan.

- List key words that relate to a project. They will fit into and help you in planning. Keep records of how long it takes to do an activity. You can use this information for future scheduling.
- Take the first 10% of any time block and dedicate it to planning that block.
- Whether you call it planning time, thinking time, quiet time or meditation, the payoff in increased productivity is the same.
- Schedule one weekend away each quarter and make it a top priority. Mini-vacations are refreshing.
- Encourage your staff to create their own plan and then to explain it in detail to you.
- Sit quietly and mentally rehearse the steps in your plan. Use your imagination to visualize the steps being taken. You will sense where additional steps need to be added and will anticipate problems to prevent.
- Consider settling for 90% completion of 90% of the projects. The final 10% may not be worth the cost to attain them.
- Use the first 10 minutes of each day to plan or review your plan for the day.
- When starting a new project or activity, take a moment to quietly review, mentally, the steps you will follow.
- Set your own due dates for projects earlier than the actual deadline.
- Put schedules in writing. Publish them and then follow up with them.
- If you cannot identify the objectives and steps to take to get to a goal, it is "unrealistic."
- Mentally organize before proceeding.
- Create and use Gantt charts.
- Create and use PERT charts.
- Stick Post-It-Notes on paperwork to indicate or highlight scheduling and due dates.
- Remember the 6 P's of planning: Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.
- Schedule formal planning meetings with your staff regularly.

[Go to Top](#)

#### **4. How To Delegate Work and Responsibilities**

Derived from Latin, delegate means "to send from." When delegating you are sending the work "from" you "to" someone else. Effective delegation Skills will not only give you more time to work on your important opportunities, but you will also help others on your

team learn new skills. Here are some tips that will help you improve your delegation skills - delegation of work .

-- Delegation helps people grow underneath you in an organization and thus pushes you even higher in management. It provides you with more time, and you will be able to take on higher priority projects.

-- Delegate whole pieces or entire job pieces rather than simply tasks and activities.

-- Clearly define what outcome is needed, then let individuals use some creative thinking of their own as to how to get to that outcome.

-- Clearly define limits of authority that go with the delegated job. Can the person hire other people to work with them? Are there spending constraints?

-- Clear standards of performance will help the person know when he or she is doing exactly what is expected.

-- When on the receiving end of delegation, work to make your boss' job easier and to get the boss promoted. This will enhance your promotability also.

-- Assess routine activities in which you are involved. Can any of them be eliminated or delegated?

-- Never underestimate a person's potential. Delegate slightly more than you think the person is capable of handling. Expect them to succeed, and you will be pleasantly surprised more frequently than not.

-- Expect completed staff work from the individuals reporting to you. That is, they will come to you giving you alternatives and suggestions when a problem exists rather than just saying "Boss, what should we do?"

-- Do not avoid delegating something because you cannot give someone the entire project. Let the person start with a bite size piece, then after learning and doing that, they can accept larger pieces and larger areas of responsibility.

-- Agree on a monitoring or measurement procedure that will keep you informed as to progress on this project because you are ultimately still responsible for it and need to know that it is progressing as it should. In other words-If you can't measure it don't delegate it.

-- Keep your mind open to new ideas and ways of doing things. There just might be a better way than the way something has previously been done.

-- Delegation is not giving an assignment. You are asking the person to accept responsibility for a project. They have the right to say no.

-- Encourage your people to ask for parts of your job.

-- Never take back a delegated item because you can do it better or faster. Help the other person learn to do it better.

- Agree on the frequency of feedback meetings or reports between yourself and the person to whom you are delegating. Good communication will assure ongoing success.
- Delegation strengthens your position. It shows you are doing your job as a manager-getting results with others. This makes you more promotable.
- Delegation is taking a risk that the other person might make a mistake, but people learn from mistakes and will be able to do it right the next time. Think back to a time a project was delegated to you and you messed it up. You also learned a valuable lesson.
- Find out what the talents and interests of your people are and you will be able to delegate more intelligently and effectively.
- A person will be more excited about doing a project when they came up with the idea of how to do it, than if the boss tells them how to do it.
- Be sensitive to upward delegation by your staff. When they ask you for a decision on their project, ask them to think about some alternatives which you will then discuss with them. This way responsibility for action stays with the staff member.
- Don't do an activity that someone else would be willing to do for you if you would just ask them.
- "Push" responsibility down in a caring helpful way.
- Remember, you are not the only one that can accomplish an end result. Trust others to be capable of achieving it.
- Break large jobs into manageable pieces and delegate pieces to those who can do them more readily.
- Keep following up and following through until the entire project is done.
- Resist the urge to solve someone else's problem. They need to learn for themselves. Give them suggestions and perhaps limits but let them take their own action.

[Go to Top](#)

## **5. Self Development Tips**

As long as you are still alive, you are capable of changing and growing. You can do anything you want to do, be anything you want to be. Listen to some positive thoughts on how to continue yourself development and then apply them in your own life.

- Accept personal responsibility for your own growth; no one can do it for you. What you do today will determine your readiness for tomorrow.
- Take time every day to do something for yourself.
- Take classes to stay current in your field of expertise. The world is changing rapidly and you must learn to manage change to avoid obsolescence. The way Will Rogers put

this was that "Even if you are on the right track, if you just sit there you will get run over."

- Listen to cassette tapes on personal and professional growth topics.
- Never look back to the past-you only can control your actions in this instant, so what should you be doing right now?
- Learn from "other people's experience" rather than having to try everything for yourself. It shortens the time needed to learn.
- Dealing with a problem helps you learn patience and strengthens your management skills; it is good mental exercise.
- Analyze, in a non-judgmental way, mistakes in which you were involved. It will help you to prevent these in the future.
- Reward yourself when you catch yourself working on the most important priorities.
- Never say something can't or won't be done. Keep looking for ways to do it.
- After attending a seminar, report to your boss or other people in your organization, what the most important things are that you learned from the program.
- For all learning experiences, whether it is reading, seeing, thinking or attending, apply the R squared, A squared formula: Recognize, Relate, Assimilate, and Apply. These actions will help you grow in the direction of your goals.
- Eliminate one time waster a week from your life.
- Read a minimum of one chapter of a book a day.
- Read a minimum of one book a month.
- Be hungry for what life has to offer and go for it.
- Decide what you really desire to do-then do it.
- When you have the option of reading a book or listening to the cassette tape version of the program, listen to the tape. It will be more to the point and can be done while you are driving, jogging/walking, or getting other routine things done.
- Develop a "master mind" group of four or five people with whom you can openly discuss ideas in a nonjudgmental way.
- Develop yourself as a resource for others by networking. Find out who does what, when, and for whom. You may find excellent contacts for your future needs and for the needs of others you meet.
- Work for balance in your life goals: family, financial, professional, social, spiritual, recreational.
- Always keep your goals in mind as you start a new activity.

- If you do a lot of work with the calculator, run the machine with the hand you don't use for writing.
- Do not be afraid of failing at something. You can learn and change as a result of it.
- The most difficult projects are opportunities for your biggest successes just as the most difficult people could become your strongest allies.
- Put up pictures of your dreams and goals where you will see them frequently. They will remind you and aid you in focusing and visualizing your goal.
- We all have the same 24 hours in a day. Learn from those people who get more done than you do. Perhaps you can find a way to improve what you are doing.
- Find a nonjudgmental mentor who will help you by providing feedback, suggestions, challenges and support.
- Identify some "models" and observe their style and actions. Do not copy them but learn from their experiences.
- Learn from the errors you see others make as well as from their successes.
- Fill your mind with positive ideas, thoughts and inspirations and you will have no room left for the negative.
- Trade jobs with someone so you gain additional experience.
- Ask for and accept lateral moves in the organization so you learn more about the entire operation.
- Do more than your "self doubts" say you can.
- Have confidence that you can get through and learn from anything and everything you experience.
- Reward yourself with a treat when you have completed a learning objective.
- Keep a daily journal, recording your thoughts, ideas, feelings and personal growth progress.
- Ask questions, listen, then ask more questions. You will learn as well as help others learn.
- Ask yourself, "How can I manipulate my fate?"
- Do things with someone you respect. They will be supportive of you and you will learn from interacting with them.
- Seek new information on projects for which you have responsibility. Look for new "ah ha" ideas all the time.
- Challenge yourself to learn something new every day.
- Remain flexible and constantly adaptable.

- Be open to others and sincerely interested in them. You can learn from everyone you meet.
- Mentally rehearse a new skill. Your subconscious does not know the difference between actual practice and mental rehearsal.
- Keep a record of what you accomplished the previous day(s)/week. If you did not accomplish as much as you wanted, it gives you extra incentive to do better in the next time period.
- Make notes of the questions you want answered. Then as the answers come to you, jot them down next to the question.
- Work on overcoming personal, nonproductive habits; for example: overeating, smoking, gossip.
- Keep an "Idea File" ring binder or notebook in which you record all new ideas. At least once a week in a standing appointment with yourself, review your ideas.

[Go to Top](#)

## **6. How To Set and Achieve Goals**

Life is a journey. Not just any journey, but the most fantastic journey in the universe. Life is a journey from where you are to where you want to be. You can choose your own destination. Not only that, you can choose how you are going to get there. Goal setting will help you end up where you want to be.

-- When it comes to setting goals, start off with what's important to you in life. Take out a sheet of paper. Sit quietly, and on that sheet of paper, brainstorm what you want to accomplish between now and the end of your life.

-- Second step-use another sheet of paper, and this time consider yourself and your personal goals for the next 12 month period. Some key areas in which you might set personal goals include: family, personal growth, financial, health, social, career, hobbies, spiritual, and recreation. Write down the things that you plan to accomplish or achieve or attain during this one-year period?

-- Now, as a third step, go back and compare the two goal lists you have made. Make sure that the items on your short-term list will, as you attain them, be helping you attain your long-term or lifetime goals. It is important that what you are doing short term is taking you in the right direction toward your lifetime goals. Please rewrite your short term goals now if you need to.

-- As a next step, looking at the goals that are on your list at this time, if there are any that you are not willing to pay the price for, go ahead and cross them out, leaving only those items you are willing to cause to happen in your life. This does not necessarily mean you have the money or the other resources for attaining the goal right now. However, when you do have it, would you spend it on or trade it for the goals you have on your list?

-- Now, on still another sheet of paper, create the job goals that are important to you during this upcoming 12-month period. Identify what outcomes you wish to attain or achieve during this one-year period in your specific area of responsibility and authority.

-- Some key areas in which you might consider writing job goals, if you did not already, include: quality, quantity, cost control, cost improvement, equipment, procedures, training, sales, financial, and personnel.

-- As a next step, look for the blending between your job or work goals and your personal goals. Anywhere you notice that you are attaining a goal on the job while at the same time you are attaining a personal goal, note this relationship: it is in these areas you will be most highly motivated.

-- For each of the three lists that you have just created, take an additional sheet of paper and list the activities that you must do to attain the most important goal that you have on each of your lists.

-- Now on another piece of paper titled "Things To-Do List" identify from the activities you just listed, the ones that you must do tomorrow to move you toward your most important goal.

-- Rewrite your goals in these categories at least every three months.

-- The only thing in life that is constant is the fact that everything is changing. It makes sense that our goals will change as we change.

-- Recognize how focusing on what you do want, what you do intend to accomplish, also defines what you choose not to do in your life.

Daily rewrite your list of "Things To-Do" after first reviewing your desired goals.

-- Success is defined as "the progressive realization of a worthwhile goal." If you are doing the things that are moving you toward the attainment of your goal, then you are "successful" even if you are not there yet.

-- Every step along the way to achieving a goal is just as important as the last step.

-- It is not the achieving of a goal that is so important, it is what you become in the process.

-- Set goals with your family also. Help children learn this process early in life.

-- Decide what you should be accomplishing and then stick to your knitting. Do not attempt to be or do all things for all people.

-- Dreams and wishes are not goals until they are written as specific end results on paper.

-- Written specific goals provide direction and focus to your activities. They become a road map to follow.

-- Being busy with activities does not pay, only results do. As in baseball you only get points for getting to the goal of home plate. Just making it to the bases does not count.

- It has been said that the amount of information available to us is now doubling in less than 30 months. We must learn to focus on only what is truly important to our self and our job.
- Be sure the goals and activities that you are working for are yours and that you really want and desire to achieve them. The commitment is vital to your success in achieving them.
- When you have a goal that is exciting to you, the life energy flows through you. You are excited about accomplishing it because it is personally meaningful.
- Create a time line or matrix chart on which you display your goals visually and the dates when you will have them accomplished.
- Continually look for ways to integrate or blend personal and professional goals.
- Setting a goal, that you believe is unattainable will result in frustration. To be challenging and motivating, goals must be perceived as realistic and attainable.
- Those people with dreams are the ones most likely to experience them.
- Set goals carefully for you will attain them. This also means if you set none, you will attain that.
- Goals, when thoughtfully set, can provide strong motivational direction.
- Clear cut, understandable and realistic objectives leading to the goal help to maintain the sense of realism and the hope of attainment of the goal.
- Establish measurement criteria to monitor progressive movement toward your goal. Then you will experience progress.
- Set goals that you will be proud to have achieved, then sense your having completed them.
- Have a vision that you know is unquestionably right and you will be internally driven to achieve that vision.
- A goal is "reasonable" when you can see the entire process needed to get to its attainment.
- Good planning assists in sensing reasonableness of challenging goals.
- Use picture goals.
- Develop an emotional reason why you should attain your goal.

[Go to Top](#)

## **7. How To Better Manage Yourself**

You are responsible for everything that happens in your life. Learn to accept total responsibility for yourself. If you do not manage yourself, then you are letting others have control of your life. These self management tips will help "you" manage "you."

- Look at every new opportunity as an exciting and new-life experience.
- If you catch yourself worrying about an upcoming task, go ahead and do it now so it no longer is a distraction.
- Get into the habit of finishing what you start.
- Give up "waiting time" forever. Have something with you at all times to work on. For example: plan your day, work on a report, or read a page from your book.
- Be a professional who exhibits self-confidence and self-assurance in your potential to complete any task.
- Avoid worry. The majority of the things you worry about never occur.
- Agree with yourself in advance that you will have a good attitude toward the upcoming task.
- Hire specialists to do those things you are not expert in.
- Take a chance-calculated risks pay off in entrepreneurial progress.
- Frequently ask, "Is what I am doing right now moving me toward my goals?"
- Plan the future, but live in the present.
- Make a list of your accomplishments as you go through the day-they are greater than you think.
- Keep a time log at least once every six months to determine exactly where your time is going.
- Do it right the first time and you will not have to take time later to fix it.
- Practice concentrating on your work, doing only one thing at a time.
- Accept responsibility for your job successes and failures. Do not look for a scapegoat.
- Do not view things you do as a "job." View all activities as a challenge.
- Use your subconscious mind by telling it to do what you do want. Instead of telling yourself, "I can't do that very well," say, "I can do this very well."
- Schedule several short vacations or long weekends-this creates positive deadlines by when you must have projects done.
- Develop a faster operating tempo or pace. Do things with a sense of urgency. Get over thinking you must do everything yourself.
- Take time to be quiet and reflective for a few minutes each day.

- Live effectiveness in everything you do rather than just sporadically applying time management techniques.
- Live in the Now. The current instant is the only time in which you have control-not the past, not the future, just now, in this instant.
- Recognize you control only 50% of a relationship and that is your half. If you are dissatisfied with what is going on, change what you are doing and saying.
- Give yourself points for completing tasks on your "to-do" list in priority order. When you reach 10 points, reward yourself.
- Carry a card with your goals written on it and review your goals at least three times a day.
- Act with enthusiasm in all that you do.
- Take time out to thank yourself for a good job.
- Practice your personal beliefs. It may be helpful each morning to take 15 minutes to gather your thoughts and say a prayer.
- Operate knowing that there is good in everything. Every cloud has a silver lining-look for it.
- Whenever you have an important thought that is not directly related to what you are working on, write it down. Then you will not forget it and you also will no longer be distracted by it.
- Make a commitment to show someone a specific accomplishment on a certain date. The added urgency will help you feel motivated to have it done.
- Reward yourself when you have successfully completed a high priority project.
- Instead of thinking about what you didn't get done, recognize all you did get accomplished and reward yourself for having done the most important things.
- Keep a list of accomplishments as well as a list of "things to-do. You will learn just how much you do get done.
- Practice self determination, wanting to do it for yourself.
- Nothing takes the place of persistence. Practice "stick-to-it-iveness."
- Get into the habit of writing down a person's name-it will help you to remember it.
- Believe that you can be what you want to be.
- Operate on the philosophy that what we give out is what comes back to us.
- Occasionally, sit quietly and do a self-assessment of your skills and strengths.
- Praise yourself for your progress.

- Recognize not all days will go as you desire. Be kind to yourself on days when your self esteem is wavering. Remind yourself that you are good and can stand up to any obstacle.
- Never criticize yourself as having a weakness. There is no such thing. You are only talking about a present undeveloped skill or part of yourself that if you so chose, you can change. You do not have any weakness, only untapped potential.
- Check to be sure you do not fall into the activity trap of simply doing tasks without knowing to what greater good the task is designed to contribute.
- Be pleasant all the time-no matter what the situation.
- Life is what you perceive it to be. Do you see it as a bore or as an adventure?
- Recall what you were hired to do and make sure it happens.
- To get ahead in anything, operate in the "and then some" manner. Always do what is expected "and then some," so what you give is always more than is expected by the other person.
- When working on a project that you can't stand, do it for a few minutes at a time until you can't stand it anymore. Then do something else and come back later for a few more minutes. Keep taking these bite size pieces until it is completely done.
- Look at what you do as an adventure. You can discover new things from this new perspective.
- Challenge yourself to do things differently than you have in the past. It provides new ideas and keeps you interested.
- Finish that last task you are working on before you go home; do not just leave it.
- Plan your day as you shower and dress in the morning. Keep a pad and pencil nearby to jot down ideas.
- Talk to yourself. Self talk using positive affirmations is something that is common among all great achievers. They convince themselves that they can accomplish their goals.
- Practice being punctual. Others will sense your professionalism.
- Plan, at least to a minimum, everything you undertake.
- Think it through, then do it.
- Think of your time as money. Are you getting a good return on the way you invest/spend it?
- Take some time, no matter how short, every day to do something you enjoy.
- Remember, if you think you can or you think you cannot, you are right.
- Use the self-fulfilling prophesy on yourself. Expect yourself to succeed.

- Doing gives you the power to do.
- Whenever you agree to get back to someone or complete a project, commit to a specific date by when you will have it done. and write this in your calendar immediately.
- Think in terms of long-term results.
- Create your own "motivation board" by putting up notes of things you need to do on a bulletin board or special wall space. It is an easily visible way to see what you need to work on. When an item is done, remove the note. Also keep your goals listed and pictured on your board.
- "Ninety percent of success in showing up."
- Be open and ready to make adjustments as things change.
- Focus 100% of your attention on a project.
- Since your boss will be asking you for progress reports, from time to time, stay informed by asking your people for progress reports each day while you meet them in their office or work area.
- Hire an assistant to run small errands and cleanup paperwork, etc. Even if you pay them from your own pocket, it is a good investment because it increases your productivity.
- Enjoy your life and blessings. You could be worse off.
- Recognize that even though you say you are doing something for someone else, in reality you are doing it for yourself. Since you are doing it for yourself, you can also enjoy it more.
- Start each day with a smile.
- Your job reflects you. Can you take pride in it being well done, error free and on time?
- Do it right or do it wrong just do it!
- Compete with yourself to become a little better each time you do something. Achieve your potential.
- Streamline your daily routine to do the same thing at the same time in the same order. Periodically review for continued effectiveness and efficiency.
- When responsible for a project, become intensively involved with it.
- Tell someone else what you are doing to keep on schedule. It keeps you committed.
- Make each day the best day of the week.
- Network with others in the organization to stay informed of who is doing what, when, where, and for whom.
- Use even small "pockets of time" to make lists, write notes and consider ideas.

- Consciously decide what are some things you are NOT going to do.
- Be willing to ask that a staff meeting be called to clarify a specific issue.
- Purposely schedule something you enjoy between routine projects. It will help rejuvenate you.
- Schedule a block of time periodically to take a big bite out of a major project.
- Realize "energy begets energy." Act and energy will flow.
- Time your routine activities such as telephone calls. Determine how you can "capture" some of the time and use it on other top priority activities.
- Be a "doer" not a "sitter."
- Sense the pride you will feel when you have completed a project.
- "He who kills time buries opportunities."
- Meditate according to your personal beliefs at the beginning of each day.
- Create the right "mind set" for success by adjusting your attitude for the upcoming project.
- Stay interested in what you are doing. Keep looking for what is interesting in your work. Change your perspective and look at it as someone outside your job would, Do not get hung-up on trivial details or tangents. Stay focused and moving.
- Always carry a pen or pencil and paper on which you can make notes.
- Do not accept calls for the first 15 minutes of the day while you prepare your daily strategy.
- Contemplating, meditating on, thinking about, or praying about the activities and success of the workday focuses energy toward that end result.
- Nest activities to available waiting time. Take a bite out of your elephant-sized project.
- Establish personal incentives and rewards to help maintain your own high enthusiasm and performance level.

[Go to Top](#)

## **8. How to Conduct Successful Meetings**

Was your last meeting successful? Were you an effective chairman or an active participant? Were those who had a contribution to make invited? Did the meeting accomplish the stated purpose? These questions and many more need to be asked and answered affirmatively if organizational meetings are to be successful. The chairman - the one who plans, hosts, and leads a meeting - must establish a proper environment.

The environment, and the feeling conveyed to the participants by the chairman, will have a great impact on the outcome of the meeting. The chairman must stimulate, guide, clarify, control, summarize, and evaluate the discussion, keeping in mind his responsibility to accomplish the meeting objectives. If he fails to perform his role effectively, the meeting may turn into meaningless discussions of irrelevant subjects, a series of pointless power plays, and even boring monologues.

Meetings are essential and can serve as an effective method of communication within an organization. They have been rightfully categorized by some managers as time-consuming, high-priced, and un-productive, but this need not be the case. Sometimes we expect too much from a meeting. When it fails to meet our expectations, we may be too quick to criticize. William E. Utterback, author of *Group Thinking and Conference Leadership*, said, "It must not be supposed that the conference table possesses the magic property of generating wisdom when rubbed simultaneously by a dozen pairs of elbows." Meetings are helpful means of achieving coordination. When there is a gathering of people with a mutual interest, the results may be as follows:

Encourage participation in the subject of concern;

Integrate interests;

Broaden perspectives and change attitudes;

Improve decision-making; and

Motivate and commit participants to courses of action.

The fundamental decision concerning meetings is not whether to hold them, but how to make them effective. Recent studies show that members of middle management spend 30 percent of their time in meetings. Unproductive meetings can result in substantial loss to an organization.

On the other hand, a productive meeting becomes a tool for effective management communication, and serves as a vehicle for development of specific plans or the organization of specific tasks. In any case, successful meetings don't just happen; they occur as a result of careful planning, good leadership, and close attention to details before, during, and after the session.

### **The Planning Process**

The key steps to be taken by the chairman in planning a meeting are as follows:

Establish the meeting objectives;

Prepare the meeting agenda;

Determine timing and physical arrangements;

Identify and invite participants; and

Consider matters of protocol.

Let's review each of these steps in detail.

### **Meeting Objectives**

Why is the meeting being held? What will it accomplish? Meetings are usually held for one or more of the following reasons:

To disseminate new information or provide feedback;

To receive a report;

To coordinate efforts of a specific nature and obtain group support;

To win acceptance for a new idea, plan, or system;

To reconcile a conflict;

To negotiate an agreement;

To motivate members of a group;

To initiate creative thinking within a group; and

To solve a current problem within a group.

The meeting plan should not be too broad or the meeting may be doomed from the beginning.

Therefore, a wise chairman identifies realistic objectives for the meeting and is prepared to meet them.

### **Meeting Agenda**

Is an agenda necessary? How long will it require to carry out the agenda? Would the meeting run smoothly and be just as successful without it?

The agenda should crystallize the intended meeting objective(s) and establish the time available to accomplish them. Whether the agenda is in writing or stated verbally by the chairman, it provides the framework to keep the meeting on target. Furthermore, it permits the chairman to devote his attention to managing the interplay of the participants.

The meeting should focus on the objective(s) and also on reaching the objective(s) in a pre-established, finite time schedule. Meetings that exceed established time limits usually are not constructive because opinions begin to replace facts. Such meetings are apt to go astray and may even disintegrate into personal contests or power plays between participants. There are several other points to consider during preparation of the agenda. Notable among them are:

**Focus the agenda on items relating to the same general topic, if possible.** Begin with a discussion of topics of major concern to participants; then, if necessary, discuss related topics of lesser importance. A meeting of this type requires fewer attendees and generates better participation in the discussion.

**-Schedule fewer agenda items when the topics cannot be related.** It is difficult for most participants to come to a meeting completely prepared on a wide variety of topics. The more concise the agenda, the better.

**Attach background data for each topic to be discussed, when the agenda is distributed.** This will ensure that each participant has some familiarity with the items before arriving at the meeting.

**Establish a time limit and priority for each agenda item.** Consider whether the topic to be discussed is familiar, new, controversial, or complex.

**Don't have the meeting run too long.** One hour is usually the norm for busy middle- to upper-level managers. When the meeting is scheduled on a quarterly, semiannual, or annual basis, it may run longer to accomplish the objectives. Schedule a "break" when the meeting is expected to take over 2 hours.

**Submit the agenda to the participants, with the background data, as early as possible.** This will give each participant more time to prepare for the meeting.

The chairman should be sure the meeting is needed. If the need disappears, he should cancel the meeting.

### **Time/Physical Arrangements**

When should the meeting be held? Where should it be held? There are several necessary considerations regarding time and physical arrangements for the meeting. Among the more important are:

The convenience of the place.

The size of the room. It should not be too large or too small. If the right-size room is not available, it is better to select a small room, rather than too large a room. A small room presents a friendlier atmosphere than a large, sparsely filled one.

The seating arrangement and the availability of extra seats if needed.

The lighting, heating, and ventilation.

Any visual aids required and their proper use.

Availability of extra paper and pencils.

The need for name plates or name tags.

The handling of messages.

It is the chairman's responsibility to begin and end the meeting on time. It is the responsibility of attendees to arrive on time. Two techniques proved effective in curing cases of chronic tardiness are (1) to ignore latecomers; and (2) to make no attempt to bring late-comers up to date.

### **Meeting Size**

How many persons should be invited to the meeting? What is the purpose of inviting each person? The attendees should be viewed as management resources - each able to contribute to the meeting through knowledge or experience or both. It is wise to include some of the persons in the organization to whom action items may be given after the meeting. This tends to encourage better support for the topics to be discussed. Attendance by disinterested persons tends to increase non-relevant discussion and impede the meeting. Thus, the chairman should invite as many people as necessary, but no more.

The size of the meeting tends to affect the way it functions. For example, if attendance exceeds seven, there is a tendency for communication to become more centralized, and

participants have less opportunity to communicate directly with one another. As the number of people invited increases, the ability of the chairman to predict the interaction that will take place becomes more difficult.

It is important to have all relevant points of view on a particular subject under consideration represented at the meeting, even if this makes it a large meeting. A large meeting requires increased formality and extra time for each topic to ensure adequate communication between participants.

Proponents of the "small group" theory consider seven to be the maximum number of participants for a productive meeting. However, if a problem-solving type of meeting is to be held, some authorities claim that up to 12 participants can be accommodated effectively. If the number of participants exceeds 18, the chairman may find it almost impossible to accomplish the meeting objectives.

On the other hand, in a meeting involving only three participants, there may be a tendency for two of them to form a combination against the third participant. This could be disastrous so managers should guard against organizing too small a meeting.

### **Matters Of Protocol**

Why should the chairman be concerned about protocol? How can this affect the success of a meeting? One of the initial steps to ensure a successful meeting is to give adequate consideration to protocol. Protocol might be defined as the application of common-sense courtesy.

Some steps the chairman might take to avoid protocol problems are:

Notify participants well in advance of the meeting date, and provide them with an agenda and background data.

Notify department heads when subordinates with expertise are needed.

Make sure that arrangements with resource persons outside the organization are completed before the meeting.

Introduce resource persons and newcomers at the start of the meeting. Also, make their affiliations and expertise known to the other attendees.

List participants in alphabetical order in the meeting announcement and minutes, unless someone present far outranks the others. In that case, list this person first.

Express gratitude to those from outside the group as well as to those within the group for significant contributions to the success of the meeting.

Advise those invited to attend the meeting of postponement or cancellation as far in advance as possible.

### **Running the Meeting**

The chairman should make the meeting as relaxed and informal as possible. He should resort to Robert's Rules of Order only when attendance is large or debate becomes heated. The chairman should "manage" the meeting, speak when appropriate, encourage discussion, seek a consensus, and summarize. Under no circumstances

should the chairman be unprepared, "hog" the discussion, play the comic, chastise a participant, or let the meeting run by itself.

The meeting will not get off the ground unless the participants know where they are going. Therefore, it is important that the chairman make a concerted effort to ensure that:

Every participant has a clear understanding of the meeting objectives at the start of the meeting.

Each agenda item has a time allocation. The time limit for the meeting should be announced when the agenda is published, or at the beginning of the meeting.

The objective(s) remain valid throughout the meeting. If not, they should be revised.

Meeting objective(s) can be communicated more readily if the chairman does not try to force them on the participants. A consensus about the objectives at the beginning will vastly improve chances for success of the meeting.

Do you play your role well at a meeting? For a meeting to succeed, the chairman must display strong leadership and he and the participants must be willing and determined to:

Become acquainted with each of the participants and carry on a light conversation with them during the "warm-up" session at the beginning of the meeting.

Give the other participants an opportunity to present their ideas, opinions, and recommendations without interrupting or degrading their comments.

Listen wisely and well to the other participants.

Accept new or fresh thoughts and ideas expressed by other participants, provided these thoughts and ideas support the objective(s) of the meeting.

Assist in the process of arriving at a consensus by combining ideas with those of others, reconciling them through compromise, or coordinating them with other ideas.

Do away with non-relevant issues, perceptions, or personal conjectures as soon as they arise and before they can become disruptive.

Always be patient and flexible (but with caution).

### **Major Problems in Running a Meeting**

One of the major problems a group often faces at the beginning of a meeting is reaching agreement on both top-level and sub-level objectives. The objectives must be agreed upon before the meeting proceeds, if it is to be successful.

A second major problem concerns the personalities of participants. For example, the chairman may be dominant/submissive, have a desire to be liked, or want to impress his superiors. On the other hand, the invited participants may be self-centered, talkative/shy, aggressive/defensive, argumentative/unresponsive. The participants may have trouble communicating because of differences in age, rank, expertise, and prestige. The ideas of some participants may be ignored and others ridiculed. The mood of the group may be one of elation, depression, or regression.

There is no way to avoid these personality problems; therefore, the challenge facing the chairman is how to deal with them effectively. The answer is based upon creating an environment for effective communication. The problems can usually be resolved if the participants can communicate with one another. The problems will not be resolved if they remain hidden.

A firmly established, finite time limit for the meeting is the single most effective means of eliminating non-contributory discussion. It gives the group a common purpose and helps the chairman police inappropriate comments.

Another major problem that groups sometimes face is having participants become lost in the problems they are attempting to solve. When this happens the chairman must take positive action to bring the meeting back on target. He can do this by taking one of the following two courses of action:

Halting the discussion and redirecting the meeting.

Halting the discussion and trying to find out where it is heading. If it is heading in a direction the participants feel is proper, he can allow the discussion to continue where it left off. If the meeting is heading in the wrong direction, he can change the direction.

The latter is preferable. Failure to do anything almost guarantees failure of the meeting. Halting the discussion and redirecting the meeting without providing an opportunity for participants to comment tends to create a debilitating emotional reaction. This might lead to withdrawal of some participants from further discussion, or precipitate aggression. When the participants pause to consider where the discussion is heading, there will be few adverse effects and the progress of the meeting may be enhanced.

A fourth major problem a group might face is how to make a decision at the proper time. If the chairman feels a consensus has been reached, he should cut off further discussion. A decision reached by consensus is the one most likely to be carried into action effectively. Decisions imposed on a minority by the majority of participants, or on the participants by the chairman, are not likely to be lasting or effective.

Groups often fall short in trying to reach decisions. Outside pressures or deadlines tend to foster majority-type or chairman-type decisions. Therefore, it is imperative that the chairman attempt to create an environment to make a consensus easier to obtain. Such an environment develops when each participant is given an opportunity to be heard or to voice an objection. In any case, before the meeting time limit expires the chairman should try to get the participants to agree that a decision is necessary, even if it falls short of unanimity.

### **Coping with Weakness**

In order to make meetings more effective, one must be acquainted with the major weaknesses and ways to cope with them. The most common weaknesses of meetings are that they are slow, expensive, tend to produce a leveling effect, or lead to dilution or division of responsibility. Let's take a closer look at each of these weaknesses.

**Meetings tend to be a slow way to get things done.** They do not lend themselves to quick, decisive actions. One observer of committee meetings stated, "They keep minutes and waste hours." Delays are not always bad. Delays provide time for objective

reviews or ideas and development and/or consideration of alternatives. Thus, delays can lead to better decisions. For a meeting to be effective, those with expertise and/or the need for action, should attend. Inviting experts and providing sufficient time to consider alternative solutions to problems increases the cost of a meeting. However, the cost to an organization if the meeting is not held may be far greater.

**There is a tendency at meetings to bring the individual thinking of the participants in line with the average quality of the group's thinking.** This leveling effect takes place when a participant begins to think less as an individual and adapts the ideas of other participants. The normal tendency is to accept ideas of the most dominant individual at the meeting although his ideas may not be the best. Leveling is not always undesirable; it tempers unreasonable ideas and curbs autocrats. The chairman should try to curb the leveling tendency. One way to keep a dominating participant in check is to seat him directly to the chairman's right.

**The tendency for a decision made at a meeting to dilute or divide responsibility is a serious one.** When this happens, weak managers are prone to blame their failures on that decision. Such comments as "I didn't support this approach at the meeting" are used to explain their failure to perform effectively. The chairman must be attuned to decisions that tend to dilute or divide responsibility and find a way to avoid them. All of the participants should be given an opportunity to express their viewpoints before the decision is made.

### **Wrap-up and Follow-up**

The most important part of the meeting is its ending. After all information has been presented, all decisions made, all problem solutions found or all conclusions reached, the chairman must summarize and solidify the results. He must review decisions and then perceive any conflicts that might result. He must give those who made a major contribution to the meeting the credit they deserve. If no major decisions were reached, he must emphasize progress made and nail down assignments that will lead to a future decision-type meeting. The chairman must always follow through on his promises to the group; otherwise the participants will have no enthusiasm for participating in a future meeting if called upon to do so. If a meeting is a prologue to action, the epilogue must produce results. When no action follows a meeting, the meeting can be considered a failure. The chairman must never allow himself to think "activity" is the same as "accomplishment."

To translate decisions reached in a meeting into actions, the chairman must conduct the necessary follow-up action. A strategy used by successful chairmen is to:

Plan the follow-up procedure before the meeting;

Adjust the procedure during the meeting; and

Consolidate the procedure after the meeting.

When the chairman follows up on meeting decisions, he demonstrates that meetings can accomplish something. This encourages future participation.

### **Summary**

Meetings are an essential management tool. Meetings can improve communications, promote coordination, develop people, and help to get a job done. Poor meetings waste time and resources and discourage people. In preparing for a meeting, the chairman should ensure that the agenda focuses on accomplishment of specific objectives.

From time to time throughout the meeting, the chairman should take a census to determine whether the objectives are still valid. If not, they should be revised.

For a meeting to be successful, it must be supported within the organization and provide a needed decision or produce worthwhile actions. This will not occur unless several weaknesses related to meetings are overcome: their slowness, expense, tendency to create leveling, and tendency to dilute or divide responsibility.

Also, for a meeting to be successful, consideration must be given to the timing, meeting place, seating arrangements, size of room, and visual aids.

The leader of a meeting must have the right attitude; a well-conceived plan; and the ability to direct (focus), control, motivate, interpret, and moderate the meeting. He must recognize that reaching initial or revised objectives of the meeting, and follow-up after the meeting, are essential to its success.

The value of an effective meeting may be summed up as follows: It serves as the cornerstone for successful team-building and progress within an organization.

[Go to Top](#)

## **9. How to Handle Stress**

You need stress in your life! Does that surprise you? Perhaps so, but it is quite true. Without stress, life would be dull and unexciting. Stress adds flavor, challenge, and opportunity to life. Too much stress, however, can seriously affect your physical and mental well-being. A major challenge in this stress-filled world of today is to make the stress in your life work for you instead of against you.

Stress is with us all the time. It comes from mental or emotional activity and physical activity. It is unique and personal to each of us. So personal, in fact, that what may be relaxing to one person may be stressful to another. For example, if you're a busy executive who likes to keep busy all the time, "taking it easy" at the beach on a beautiful day may feel extremely frustrating, nonproductive, and upsetting. You may be emotionally distressed from "doing nothing."

Too much emotional stress can cause physical illness such as high blood pressure, ulcers, or even heart disease; physical stress from work or exercise is not likely to cause such ailments. The truth is that physical exercise can help you to relax and to handle your mental or emotional stress.

Hans Selye, M.D., a recognized expert in the field, has defined stress as a "non-specific response of the body to a demand." The important issue is learning how our bodies respond to these demands. When stress becomes prolonged or particularly frustrating, it can become harmful-causing distress or "bad stress." Recognizing the early signs of

distress and then doing something about them can make an important difference in the quality of your life, and may actually influence your survival.

### **Reacting to Stress**

To use stress in a positive way and prevent it from becoming distress, you should become aware of your own reactions to stressful events. The body responds to stress by going through three stages: (1) alarm, (2) resistance, and (3) exhaustion.

Let's take the example of a typical commuter in rush-hour traffic. If a car suddenly pulls out in front of him, his initial alarm reaction may include fear of an accident, anger at the driver who committed the action, and general frustration. His body may respond in the alarm stage by releasing hormones into the bloodstream which cause his face to flush, perspiration to form, his stomach to have a sinking feeling, and his arms and legs to tighten. The next stage is resistance, in which the body repairs damage caused by the stress. If the stress of driving continues with repeated close calls or traffic jams, however, his body will not have time to make repairs. He may become so conditioned to expect potential problems when he drives that he tightens up at the beginning of each commuting day. Eventually, he may even develop one of the diseases of stress, such as migraine headaches, high blood pressure, backaches, or insomnia. While it is impossible to live completely free of stress and distress, it is possible to prevent some distress as well as to minimize its impact when it can't be avoided.

### **Helping Yourself**

When stress does occur, it is important to recognize and deal with it. Here are some suggestions for ways to handle stress. As you begin to understand more about how stress affects you as an individual, you will come up with your own ideas of helping to ease the tensions.

**Try physical activity.** When you are nervous, angry, or upset, release the pressure through exercise or physical activity. Running, walking, playing tennis, or working in your garden are just some of the activities you might try. Physical exercise will relieve that "up tight" feeling, relax you, and turn the frowns into smiles. Remember, your body and your mind work together.

**Share your stress.** It helps to talk to someone about your concerns and worries. Perhaps a friend, family member, teacher, or counselor can help you see your problem in a different light. If you feel your problem is serious, you might seek professional help from a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker. Knowing when to ask for help may avoid more serious problems later.

**Know your limits.** If a problem is beyond your control and cannot be changed at the moment, don't fight the situation. Learn to accept what is-for now-until such time when you can change it.

**Take care of yourself.** You are special. Get enough rest and eat well. If you are irritable and tense from lack of sleep or if you are not eating correctly, you will have less ability to deal with stressful situations. If stress repeatedly keeps you from sleeping, you should ask your doctor for help.

**Make time for fun.** Schedule time for both work and recreation. Play can be just as important to your well-being as work; you need a break from your daily routine to just relax and have fun.

**Be a participant.** One way to keep from getting bored, sad, and lonely is to go where it's all happening: Sitting alone can make you feel frustrated. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself, get involved and become a participant. Offer your services in neighborhood or volunteer organizations. Help yourself by helping other people. Get involved in the world and the people around you, and you'll find they will be attracted to you. You're on your way to making new friends and enjoying new activities.

**Check off your tasks.** Trying to take care of everything at once can seem overwhelming, and, as a result, you may not accomplish anything. Instead, make a list of what tasks you have to do, then do one at a time, checking them off as they're completed. Give priority to the most important ones and do those first.

**Must you always be right?** Do other people upset you - particularly when they don't do things your way? Try cooperation instead of confrontation; it's better than fighting and always being "right." A little give and take on both sides will reduce the strain and make you both feel more comfortable.

**It's OK to cry.** A good cry can be a healthy way to bring relief to your anxiety, and it might even prevent a headache or other physical consequence. Take some deep breaths; they also release tension.

**Create a quiet scene.** You can't always run away, but you can "dream the impossible dream." A quiet country scene painted mentally, or on canvas, can take you out of the turmoil of a stressful situation. Change the scene by reading a good book or playing beautiful music to create a sense of peace and tranquility.

**Avoid self-medication.** Although you can use drugs to relieve stress temporarily, drugs do not remove the conditions that caused the stress in the first place. Drugs, in fact, may be habit-forming and create more stress than they take away. They should be taken only on the advice of your doctor.

### **The Art of Relaxation**

The best strategy for avoiding stress is to learn how to relax. Unfortunately, many people try to relax at the same pace that they lead the rest of their lives. For a while, tune out your worries about time, productivity, and "doing right." You will find satisfaction in just being, without striving. Find activities that give you pleasure and that are good for your mental and physical well-being. Forget about always winning. Focus on relaxation, enjoyment, and health. Be good to yourself.

[Go to Top](#)

## **10. How to Solve Problems**

As the owner of your own business you deal with problems on an almost daily basis. How problem solving is approached can dramatically affect the growth of your business. Although you find solutions to your problems, many businessmen and women are not

really skilled in the methods of problem solving, and when solutions fail, they fault themselves for misjudgment. The problem is typically not misjudgment but rather a lack of skill.

This guide instructs you in some techniques of problem solving. Crucial to the success of a business faced with problems is your understanding of just what the problems are, defining them, finding solutions, and selecting the best solutions for the situations. This guide explains the following.

How to identify a problem.

How to respond to it.

The different techniques and methods used in problem-solving.

How to find alternative solutions.

How to select the best solution for the situation.

Designing a Plan of Action.

How to implement the Plan of Action.

How to assess the success of the solution and the Plan of Action.

## **Introduction**

What is a problem. A problem is a situation that presents difficulty or perplexity. Problems come in many shapes and sizes. For example, it can be:

Something did not work as it should and you don't know how or why.

Something you need is unavailable, and something must be found to take its place.

Employees are undermining a new program.

The market is not buying. What do you do to survive?

Customers are complaining. How do you handle their complaints?

Where do problems come from? Problems arise from every facet of human and mechanical functions as well as from nature. Some problems we cause ourselves (e.g., a hasty choice was made and the wrong person was selected for the job); other problems are caused by forces beyond our control (e.g., a warehouse is struck by lightning and burns down).

Problems are a natural, everyday occurrence of life, and in order to suffer less from the tensions and frustrations they cause, we must learn how to deal with them in a rational, logical fashion.

If we accept the fact that problems will arise on a regular basis, for a variety of reasons, and from a variety of sources, we can:

learn to approach problems from an objective point of view; learn how to anticipate some of them; and prevent some of them from becoming larger problems.

To accomplish this, you need to learn the process of problem solving.

here, we will instruct you in the basic methods of problem-solving. It is a step by step guide which you can easily follow and practice. As you follow this guide, you will eventually develop some strategies of your own that work in concert with the problem-solving process described in this guide.

Keep in mind, though, as you read that this is not a comprehensive analysis of the art of problem-solving but rather a practical, systematic, and simplified, yet effective, way to approach problems considering the limited time and information most business owners and managers have. In addition, some problems are so complex that they require the additional help of experts in the field, so be prepared to accept the fact that some problems are beyond one person's ability, skill, and desire to succeed.

## **1. Identifying the Problem**

Before a problem can be solved, you must first recognize that a problem exists. Here is where your approach to problem-solving is crucial. You should not allow the problem to intimidate you. You should approach it rationally and remind yourself that every problem is solvable if it is tackled appropriately.

Fear can block your ability to think clearly, but if you:

1. Follow a workable procedure for finding solutions;
2. Accept the fact that you can't foresee everything;
3. Assume that the solution you select is your best option at the time; and
4. Accept the possibility that things may change and your solution fail;

you will then enter the problem-solving process rationally, You should try to view it as an intellectual exercise. Once you recognize that a problem exists, your next step is to identify the problem. First, you need to discover how the problem occurred. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Did something go wrong?
2. Did something breakdown?
3. Were there unexpected results or outcome?
4. Is something that once worked no longer working?

Second, you need to know the nature of the problem:

1. Is it people, operational, technical, etc.?
2. Is it with a particular department, product or service, etc.?
3. Is it something tangible or intangible?
4. Is it an external or internal problem?

Third, you need to decide how significant the problem is. Based on the level of significance, you may choose to deal with the problem or not to deal with it. Sometimes what you think is a small problem, when analyzed, proves to be a major problem. The reverse is also true. To determine this, you should ask yourself the following types of questions:

1. Is it disrupting operations?
2. Is it hampering sales?
3. Is it causing conflict among people?
4. Is it an everyday occurrence or is it infrequent?
5. Is it affecting personnel and their productivity?
6. Is it common or unusual?
7. Is it affecting goals, and if yes, which ones?
8. Is it affecting customers, vendors, and any other external people?

Fourth, you should narrow down the type of problem:

1. Is it basically a problem which occurred in the past and the main concern is to make certain that it doesn't occur again?
2. Is it a problem which currently exists and the main concern is to clear up the situation?
3. Is it a problem which might occur in the future and the basic concern is planning and taking action before the problem arises?

The answer to all of the above questions will help you focus on the true problem. You cannot effectively research the causes of a problem until you have a clear understanding of what the problem is. Sometimes, people spend many hours on what they perceive as a problem only to find out, after seeking the causes, that something else was really the problem.

In order to appropriately identify the problem and its causes, you must do some research. To do this, simply list all the previous questions in checklist form, and keeping the checklist handy, go about gathering as much information as you possibly can. Keep in mind the relative importance and urgency of the problem, as well as your own time limitations. Then interview the people involved with the problem, asking them the questions on your checklist.

After you've gathered the information and reviewed it, you will have a pretty clear understanding of the problem and what the major causes of the problem are. At this point, you can research the causes further through observation and additional interviewing. Now, you should summarize the problem as briefly as possible, list all the causes you have identified, and list all the areas the problem seems to be affecting.

Before proceeding to finding solutions, there is some additional research that could be done. If possible and if warranted, you might wish to find out:

1. What has previously been done in regards to this problem.
2. What have other companies done.
3. What formal knowledge might you need to acquire.
4. What has been learned from past experience.
5. What do experts say about the problem.

## 2. Roadblocks to Problem Solving

Many of us serve as our own roadblocks in solving problems. There are a variety of roadblocks to watch for in order to effectively use the technique of problem solving:

1. Watch out for old habits.
2. Check your perceptions.
3. Overcome your fears.
4. Be careful of assumptions.
5. Don't be tied to a problem; try to look at it with detachment.
6. Don't let yourself procrastinate.
7. Control your inclination for reactive solutions.
8. Control your inclination for rash solutions.
9. Avoid emotional responses and always attempt to be rational.
10. Be aware that the nature of a problem can change.
11. Do not skip steps in the problem solving process.

At this point, you are ready to check your understanding of the problem. You've already identified the problem, broken it all down into all its facets, narrowed it down, done research on it, and you are avoiding typical roadblocks. On a large pad, write down the problem, including all of the factors, the areas it affects, and what the effects are. For a better visual understanding, you may also wish to diagram the problem showing cause and effect.

Study what you have written down and/or diagrammed. Call in your employees and discuss your analysis with them. Based on their feedback, you may decide to revise. Once you think you fully understand the causes and effects of the problem, summarize the problem as succinctly and as simply as possible.

## 3. How to Find Solutions

There are a number of methods for finding solutions. We will describe five thinking methods below, but we recommend that you use a number of them in finding solutions. The first four methods described are unconventional and more innovative. They allow you the possibility of arriving at a novel solution. The fifth method is a more typical and straightforward method.

**1. Association:** There are three types of associative thinking. This type of thinking is basically a linking process either through similarity, difference, or contiguity. For example, contiguity finds solutions from things that are connected through proximity, sequence, and cause and effect. The process works as follows: List as many parts of the problem you can think of. Then giving yourself a short time limit, list as many words or ideas that have either proximity, sequence, or related cause and effect to the ones you have listed. For example, a contiguous association might be "misplaced work - cluttered desk" (proximity); "misplaced work - rushing" (sequence); "misplaced work - irate customer" (cause and effect).

Associative thinking taps the resources of the mind. It brings into focus options you might not have considered if you stuck to ideas only directly related to the problem. As a result of associative thinking, you might find other relationships embedded in the problem that will lead to a better solution.

**2. Analogy:** This thinking method is a way of finding solutions through comparisons. The process is based on comparing the different facets of the problem with other problems that may or may not have similar facets. An analogy might go like this: "Employees have been coming in late to work quite often; how can I get them to be at work on time? This to me is like soldiers being late for a battle. Would soldiers come late to a battle? Why not?" By comparing the situation of workers to the situation of soldiers, you may find a solution for a way to motivate employees to come to work on time.

**3. Brainstorming:** This thinking method is based on a free, non-threatening, anything goes atmosphere. You can brainstorm alone or with a group of people. Most often a group of people from diverse backgrounds is preferable. The process works like this: The problem is explained to the group and each member is encouraged to throw out as many ideas for solutions as he or she can think of no matter how ridiculous or far-fetched they may sound. All the ideas are discussed among the group, revised, tossed out, expanded, etc. based on the group's analysis of them. Based on the group's grasp of the effectiveness of each idea, the best ones are selected for closer review. For example, the group of people might throw out for consideration any thoughts they might have on how to increase sales or improve profits.

**4. Intuition:** This mode of thinking is based on hunches. It is not, as some think, irrational. Intuition or hunches are built on a strong foundation of facts and experiences that are buried somewhere in the subconscious. All the things you know and have experienced can lead you to believe that something might be true although you've never actually experienced that reality. Use your intuition as much as possible but check it against the reality of the situation.

**5. Analytical Thinking:** This thinking method is based on analysis. It is the most conventional and logical of all the methods and follows a step by step pattern.

a. Examine each cause of the problem. Then for each cause, based on your direct knowledge and experience, list the solutions that logically would seem to solve the problem.

b. Check the possible solutions you arrive at with the research you have compiled on how the problem was solved by others.

Using each thinking technique, search for solutions. Keep a running list of all of them, even the ones that seem far out, too simple, or even impossible. The effect of this is to give you a rich pool of ideas that will lead you to the best solution.

#### **4. Sorting Out the Best Solution**

Go through your long list of solutions and cross-out those that obviously won't work. Those ideas are not wasted for they impact on those ideas that remain. In other words, the best ideas you select may be revised based on the ideas that wouldn't work. With the remaining solutions, use what is called the "Force Field Analysis Technique." This is

basically an analysis technique which breaks the solution down into its positive effects and negative effects. To do this, write each solution you are considering on a separate piece of paper. Below the solution, draw a line vertically down the center of the paper. Label one column advantages and one column disadvantages.

Now, some more analytical thinking comes into play. Analyzing each facet of the solution and its effect on the problem, listing each of the advantages and disadvantages you can think of.

One way to help you think of the advantages and disadvantages is to role-play each solution. Call in a few of your employees and play out each solution. Ask them for their reactions. Based on what you observe and on their feedback, you will have a better idea of the advantages and disadvantages of each solution you are considering.

After you complete this process for each solution, select those solutions which have the most advantages. At this point, you should be considering only two or three. In order to select the most appropriate solution, you should check each solution against the following criteria:

Cost effectiveness;

Time constraints;

Availability of manpower, material, etc.;

Your own intuition.

Before you actually implement the solution, you should evaluate it. Ask yourself these questions:

1. Are the objectives of the solution sound and clear and not complex?
2. Will the solution achieve the objectives?
3. What are the possibilities it will fail and in what way?

## **5. The Plan of Action**

Finding the solution does not mean the problem is solved. Now, you need to design a plan of action so that the solution gets carried out properly. Designing and carrying out the plan of action is equally as important as the solution. The best solution can fail because it is not implemented correctly. When designing the plan of action, consider the following:

Who will be involved in the solution;

Who will be affected by the solution;

What course of action will be taken;

How should the course of action be presented to company employees, customers, vendors, etc.;

When will it happen - the time frame;

Where will it happen;

How will it happen;

What is needed to make it happen.

Design a plan of action chart including all the details you need to consider to carry it out and when each phase should happen. Keep in mind, though, that the best plans have setbacks for any number of reasons - from a key person being out for illness to a supplier shipping material late. So remember that your dates are only target dates. Solutions and plans of action must be flexible. Expect some things to be revised.

## **6. Evaluating the Plan of Action**

Before you implement the plan of action, you should analyze it to see if you've considered as many of the variables as possible. Some questions you might ask yourself are:

1. Is there adequate staff to carry it out?
2. Is the plan detailed yet simple enough for those affected to know what to expect and how to carry it out?
3. Will it embarrass anyone - manager, employee, customer, vendor, etc.?
4. Is the time frame realistic and feasible?
5. Are there special conditions which may have been overlooked?
6. Who should be informed?
7. Who should be involved?
8. Who should be responsible for each aspect and/or phase?
9. Is the plan of action cost effective?
10. Does the plan have a public relations component?

## **7. Obstacles You May Encounter**

There are a number of obstacles you may encounter when you implement your plan of action. It is, therefore, advisable that you devise ways to overcome them. Try not to allow obstacles to prevent you from reaching your goals. Some obstacles to watch for are:

1. Not receiving material and/or equipment on time;
2. Other situations which might arise and deflect your attention from this problem;
3. Procrastination;
4. A power struggle among managers and/or employees;
5. Resistance to change - a natural human condition.

Resistance to change and company-wide acceptance is typically the biggest obstacle. The best way to overcome them is to build a public relations component into your plan of action. The key question to ask yourself is, "How will I get my people to support the solution and make it work?" Some effective methods for accomplishing this are:

1. Have as many managers and employees involved in the problem solving process as possible.

2. Advertise the problem and solution to your employees through memos, newsletters, and posters, showing the advantages and disadvantages of the solution but proving it is better than the conditions which currently exist.
3. Establish a schedule of meetings where different groups of employees can be exposed to the solution and ask them for their feedback.
4. If necessary, develop a training program so that managers and employees feel competent in carrying out the solution.
5. Involve key leaders who wield impact and influence others.

The key to a successful PR campaign is involving, as much as possible, the people who are affected by the problem. The benefits of doing so is that they will understand the problem better and why the solution is an effective one. The result will be that they will be more likely to not only support your solution but also make sure that it works. Many times the solutions we select for problems don't work because employees sabotage them, not because they are not inherently good solutions. Employees may resist change, especially if they feel threatened. Involving employees will assuage their fears.

### **8. Simulating the Solution / Plan of Action**

Before you implement the plan of action on a full scale, you should select a small group of managers and employees and role play the solution in the work setting. Observe the group as they carry out the solution and take note of:

1. How they carry out the solution;
2. Their reactions to the solution;
3. Their understanding of the solution;
4. The effectiveness of the tools they are using in carrying out the solution;
5. Their resistance to change and reverting back to the previous behaviors.

Based on what you observe, you may need to revise some of your plans.

### **9. Successful Implementation**

To assure the successful implementation of your solution and plan of action, remember the following:

1. Prepare your staff well in advance;
2. Train your staff well in advance;
3. Order equipment, material, etc., well in advance;
4. If necessary, hire new staff and do so well in advance;
5. Use PR at every meeting and in memos as much as possible;
6. Evaluate the effects of each phase as it is implemented and make the necessary adjustments;
7. Attempt to remain flexible and open-minded.

### **Evaluating the Success of Your Solution**

As each phase of your plan of action is implemented, you should ask yourself whether your goals were achieved, how well they were achieved, and did it work smoothly. To check your own perceptions of the results, get as much feedback as possible from your managers and from your employees. What you may think is working may not be working well in the eyes of your people. Always remember that they are one of your most valuable tools in successfully carrying out your solution.

[Go to Top](#)

## **11. How to Make the Right Decisions**

Everyone is a decision maker. We all rely on information, and techniques or tools, to help us in our daily lives. When we go out to eat, the restaurant menu is the tool that provides us with the information needed to decide what to purchase and how much to spend. Operating a business also requires making decisions using information and techniques - how much inventory to maintain, what price to sell it at, what credit arrangements to offer, how many people to hire.

Decision making in business is the systematic process of identifying and solving problems, of asking questions and finding answers. Decisions usually are made under conditions of uncertainty. The future is not known and sometimes even the past is suspect. This guide opens the door for business owners and managers to learn about the variety of techniques which can be used to improve decision making in a world of uncertainty, change, and uncontrollable circumstances.

### **A General Approach to Decision Making**

Whether a scientist, an executive of a major corporation, or a small business owner, the general approach to systematically solving problems is the same. The following 7 step approach to better management decision making can be used to study nearly all problems faced by a business.

#### **1. State the problem**

A problem first must exist and be recognized. What is the problem and why is it a problem. What is ideal and how do current operations vary from that ideal. Identify why the symptoms (what is going wrong) and the causes (why is it going wrong). Try to define all terms, concepts, variables, and relationships. Quantify the problem to the extent possible. If the problem, not accurately and quickly filling customer orders, try to determine how many orders were incorrectly filled and how long it took to fill them.

#### **2. Define the Objectives**

What are the objectives of the study. Which objectives are the most critical. Objectives usually are stated by an action verb like to reduce, to increase, or to improve. Returning to the customer order problem, the major objectives would be: 1) to increase the percentage of orders filled correctly, and 2) to reduce the time it takes to process and order. A subobjective could include to simplify and streamline the order filling process.

#### **3. Develop a Diagnostic Framework**

Next establish a diagnostic framework, that is, decide what methods are going to be used, what kinds of information are needed, and how and where the information is to be found. Is there going to be a customer survey, a review of company documents, time and motion tests, or something else. What are the assumptions (facts assumed to be correct) of the study. What are the criteria used to judge the study. What time, budget, or other constraints are there. What kind of quantitative or other specific techniques are going to be used to analyze the data. (Some of which will be covered shortly). In other words, the diagnostic framework establishes the scope and methods of the entire study.

#### **4. Collect and Analyze the Data**

The next step is to collect the data (by following the methods established in Step 3. Raw data is then tabulated and organized to facilitate analysis. Tables, charts, graphs, indexes and matrices are some of the standard ways to organize raw data. Analysis is the critical prerequisite of sound business decision making. What does the data reveal. What facts, patterns, and trends can be seen in the data. Many of the quantitative techniques covered below can be used during the step to determine facts, patterns, and trends in data. Of course, computers are used extensively during this step.

#### **5. Generate Alternative Solutions**

After the analysis has been finished, some specific conclusions about the nature of the problem and its resolution should have been reached. The next step is to develop alternative solutions to the problem and rank them in order of their net benefits. But how are alternatives best generated. Again, there are several well established techniques such as the Nominal Group Method, the Delphi Method and Brainstorming, among others. In all these methods a group is involved, all of whom have reviewed the data and analysis. The approach is to have an informed group suggesting a variety of possible solutions.

#### **6. Develop an Action Plan and Implement**

Select the best solution to the problem but be certain to understand clearly why it is best, that is, how it achieves the objectives established in Step 2 better than its alternatives. Then develop an effective method (Action Plan) to implement the solution. At this point an important organizational consideration arises - who is going to be responsible for seeing the implementation through and what authority does he have. The selected manager should be responsible for seeing that all tasks, deadlines, and reports are performed, met, and written. Details are important in this step: schedules, reports, tasks, and communication are the key elements of any action plan. There are several techniques available to decision makers implementing an action plan. The PERT method is a way of laying out an entire period such as an action plan. PERT will be covered shortly.

#### **7. Evaluate, obtain Feedback and Monitor**

After the Action Plan has been implemented to solve a problem, management must evaluate its effectiveness. Evaluation standards must be determined, feedback channels developed, and monitoring performed. This Step should be done after 3 to 5 weeks and again at 6 months. The goal is to answer the bottom line question. Has the problem been solved?

## **Specific Decision Making Techniques**

The following techniques are used frequently by business and government managers. Some are familiar (Benefit-Cost Analysis), others more esoteric (Linear Programming). Some are used for planning projects, others for analyzing data. Most of these techniques are mathematical or have mathematical aspects to them. They all can be used during one or more of the steps of the General Approach, as just outlined.

### **Systems Analysis**

Can be used by the business manager to study the inputs, processes, and outputs of the entire company, a division, or an office, depending on the nature of the problem. Inputs are the resources (manpower, materials, facilities) used by the business to produce the output (goods or services). Processes are the methods and organization which manage the conversion of inputs to outputs. By using Systems Analysis decision makers can evaluate the system's various components separately on the basis of established objectives (like cost or error rate). If a problem can be identified as belonging to a specific component of the system, it can be corrected.

### **Benefit-Cost Analysis**

Is used to compare the pros and cons of various alternative solutions to a problem. To perform this type of analysis the manager must define the problem, determine objectives, develop alternatives, put a dollar value on all benefits and costs of each alternative, calculate the Benefit Cost Ratio (B divided by C) and/or the Net Benefit (B-C), and make the decision. This type of analysis established a clear relationship between expenditure (cost) and purchase (benefit). It can be used to study problems in which the costs and benefits of alternative ways to achieve an objective can be assigned dollar values.

### **Input-Output Analysis**

Charts the flow of a product from one industrial sector, company, department, or facility to another. It shows what inputs produce what outputs. I/O Analysis uses Transaction Tables, showing the purchasing and selling activities of buyers and sellers, and I/O Coefficients, the product sold by A to B divided by the output of B. It is used most often by larger companies to help with longer term planning but smaller manufacturing firms also may find this useful.

### **Regression and Correlation Analysis**

Is used to study the relationship between or among variables, for example, the relationship of household income to product sales. It can be used to determine how increases in household income affect sales volume. If management wants to study the relationship between sales, and income, interest rates, and education, they would use Multiple Regression Analysis. Correlation Analysis refers to the study of how strong or accurate a relationship is, as well as such technical factors as measurement fit, deviation, and error. It often is used by companies to study demand, pricing, supply and cost curves.

### **Modeling**

Is used by management to simplify the complex world. A model is a (simplified) representation of a system, situation, or process. A model may be physical, symbolic, verbal, graphic, or mathematical. A good model strips away excess detail but leaves essential behavior. For example, a model could be a representation of a distribution system illustrated graphically with a flow chart. Models show relationships among the parts of a whole and assist with forecasting. Model building is used in the physical and social sciences, as well as in business management.

### **Linear Programming**

Is a widely used mathematical method of determining an optimum, single solution to a problem such as finding the minimum staff cost or the most nutritional mixture of ingredients. This technique can be done by hand but today's computer software business management packages often contain Linear Programming instructions. The technique can only be used with problems that can be translated entirely into numbers and have with a single, optimum objective or solution. For example, in an office situation (say processing invoices) where there is a given total workload, an established workload per worker by skill (pay) level, and given staffing requirements, linear programming could be used to determine the least expensive mixture of worker skill levels to handle the given workload.

### **Econometric Analysis**

Is used by companies (and the Government) for planning, forecasting, and model building. Through this type of analysis businesses can estimate demand cycles, cost and supply functions, income distribution changes, and so forth. Econometrics uses regression and correlation analysis. It is an attempt to quantify as many variables affecting a business as is possible. Larger companies often develop econometric models to get a picture of the future economy.

### **Forecasting**

Is making decisions based on predictions of future trends and events such as inflation and interest rates, employment levels, or supply costs - all of which can affect sales of small businesses. There are three types of forecasting techniques: 1) Subjective or qualitative where you rely on expert judgments, 2) Time-Series Projections where you use quantifiable observations over time, and 3) Casual Models where you emphasize causal/correlational relationships. The principal emphasis in forecasting is looking for patterns and fluctuations over time.

### **The Decision Tree**

Technique plots the sequence of alternative decisions needed to solve a larger problem. The actual decision tree looks like a flow chart. Each alternative decision has consequences that lead to other decisions. These are all drawn as branches of the tree. One can also add probability and payoff calculations for each decision. The major feature of the Decision Tree technique is that solutions to a complex problem can be sketched out on a single sheet of paper.

### **PERT - Program Evaluation and Review Technique**

Sequentially charts the individual tasks and activities needed to complete a project. The result is a flow chart of the entire job. A time schedule and probabilities of meeting that schedule can be plugged in. The Critical Path also can be determined (the longest time it will take to complete all the important tasks, which gives the completion date). PERT helps managers make decisions about scheduling and resource allocation and reduces uncertainty. PERT is often used on construction projects and was pioneered by Admiral Rickover when he ran the Nation's nuclear submarine production program. However, PERT is a very flexible tool and also can be used, for example, to do market research.

[Go to Top](#)

\* \* \* \*