

4 Ways to Become a Better Problem Solver

Solve your problems don't just sit on them.

- Investigate possible solutions with a time limit.
 - You have heard us talk about “just go do the first thing” to get started and that applies here. The first thing is starting to dig into the information you have at hand and/or researching what might be missing so that you feel informed enough to know your options.
 - The reason the time limit is important is that one of the places it is easy to get stuck is in thinking you need every single ounce of information out there before you can make a decision. This is simply not true and in many cases is not possible. In defining the time, think about the magnitude (impact) of the problem and its solution. Make sure you give yourself a timeline to make the decision so you don't keep putting it off.
- Analyze the options against the goals.
 - We often waste too much time toiling in our emotions when it comes to solving problems. This is another reason why you set a time by which you have to make the decision to hold yourself accountable. Objectivity is SUPER helpful in countering our emotions. So get crystal clear on the goal(s) associated with the problem and the potential solution. If you know what you are trying to deliver on, it should make it easier to run through the list of options and their ramifications against your goals.
 - When we get super focused through the lens of the goals it often helps the answer to show themselves vs. having to make a decision. This is where you know you are getting REALLY good at using this process and tools to solve your problems.
- Enlist the help of the RIGHT others.
 - Another place we tend to get stuck is in 1. whether to enlist other people and then 2. deciding WHO we want to enlist. ‘Decision by committee’ becomes another hold up in solving problems. Sometimes this comes from a good place in that we want to make sure everyone feels heard. Other times, we do it because we aren't confident in making the decisions ourselves. Again, take into account the magnitude of the problem to decide whether anyone else needs to be involved.
 - If you do decide others are needed, choose people that have experience that will help round out your thinking/have differing POVs/need to be involved because the decision directly impacts them. In other words, give an objective reason for them to be part of the decision. Define their role in it and be clear on whether you are asking for their input OR you are asking them to help you decide. These are different things. You might solicit input from someone that has info you are missing, but you aren't necessarily asking them to help you solve it. You might present possible solutions and then ask for their thoughts on the options, again, without asking them to be part of the decision. Or you might be asking them to help you choose. No matter what it is, be clear in the ASK.
- Test-and-learn to optimize the solution.
 - Once we make and implement a decision, it is important to analyze the outcomes. At the very least, we should be learning from all of the decisions that we make. Many times, there is potential for optimizations, builds, or other solutions if the first one didn't work. It can be hard to pull the trigger for fear of being wrong. But if you take the test-and-learn philosophy, it allows for grace.
 - One of the fundamental ways to get better at solving problems is to always be analyzing your previous solutions and subsequent results. This adds experience and tools to your toolkit and allows you to start to identify patterns, blind spots, tendencies, and pitfalls. People often ask us how we get so many things done at FRp. We make fast decisions based on the size of the problem and are okay if we fail because we are always making informed decisions that we can learn from.

