

BONZA NEWS

BEYOND PROBLEM SOLVING

By Gord Simmons

In our current economy many organizations will hopefully be astute enough to devote some time to thinking about their futures as well as putting out fires, reducing costs and retrenching to suit their current realities.

As those people who have been through economic downturns before know, this can be a good time to develop new approaches, change directions and take advantage of opportunities others may choose to ignore or be unable to access.

It may take a dramatic change in some people's thinking in order to get them to focus their thoughts on positive steps they can take in the future, while still having to handle the every day challenges.

In the current economic situation many organizations will be in "emergency mode." As a result of being in emergency mode they will no doubt do some amazing things to ensure success by saving time, materials, resources and eventually money. Short cuts, work-arounds and new approaches will be put into practice.

Successes are often spectacular and profitable

when we throw out traditional approaches, sacred cows and outdated methods as we are pushed to become more competitive by the new challenges of the downturn in the economy. The phrase "necessity is the mother of invention" comes to mind, and often comes to the fore when we have no choice but to think or sink.

In tough times we become innovative, we use what is at hand, and we thoughtfully cut corners and become very astute at reducing waste and increasing opportunities.

The downside to all of this, is that when things start returning to "normal" we haven't integrated the new approaches into our organizational fabric so we revert to "normal," thus losing our gained advantage of thinking in a different mode. When the good times return we tend to fall into our old habits because the pressure is off and everything is going to be ok.

Ten chances to one, we won't analyse what we did differently or what went right; just breathe a sigh of relief and get on with business.

Please give some serious thought to these next statements. Think of how many times you have heard or

perhaps said, "Good job everyone. That was a great success; we really dodged the bullet that time"; or "Good job everyone. Let's meet this afternoon and analyse why everything we did went right." In all probability you have heard the first statement but seldom the second.

Why is that? It is because we tend to focus our attention on what went wrong, rather than what went right. We love to be problem solvers, and often indulge in fixing the same problems or types of problems repeatedly.

Problem solving if done correctly and effectively is a wonderful tool, which has been with us for many years and has saved us countless dollars and time. It is a good thing. Problem solving methods can be learned, honed and fine tuned to a high skill level and this skill is seen as a highly regarded trait in individuals.

When we do problem solving we start with the premise that something has gone wrong and needs to be fixed, thereby recognizing we actually have a problem.

Continued on Page 2



QUOTE

"It's not that I am so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer." -
- **Albert Einstein**

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GOOD NEWS!

Canadian Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) companies appearing on the 2009 Branham300 Edition combined to reach a new milestone achievement this year - surpassing \$70 billion in revenue for the first time in Branham300 history! Overcoming increasing economic pressures, the Canadian ICT elite experienced 18 per cent growth - collectively generating \$75.97 billion in revenue. Impressive growth can be seen throughout the list, as innovative companies strived to surge to the top of the Canadian ICT industry.

For more information about the list, click here:

[Branham300 List](#)

Beyond Problem Solving (continued from Page 1)

Generally, when starting the problem solving process it is a good idea to determine how something should be working and how it is working now.

We then go through the process of ensuring that we are working on the real problem and not the symptoms. Once we are certain that our problem definition clearly identifies and defines the real problem and is understood by all concerned, we then work at determining the potential causes using root cause analysis.

Our next step is to determine and analyse possible solutions. After this, we select what we think is the best solution by asking ourselves if this is the best solution to solve the identified problem.

After putting together an action plan, we implement the best solution and evaluate the outcome. Unfortunately this evaluation step is often ignored or left so long that valuable time is lost if the best solution was not effective.

The downside of problem solving comes when we get so focused on finding and solving problems that this focus conditions us to constantly deal in negatives. When one constantly deals in negatives, we start to miss the positives.

As an example, look at the questions we use in root cause analysis. We are asked to use “why” at least five times to come to the real “root cause” of the problem. Basically we are asking in negative tones “why did it go wrong.” Unfortunately we spend so much time trying to decide what went wrong that we get conditioned to only dealing with problems.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with doing problem solving on a regular basis. It is very effective when done properly and expanded upon to ensure that measures are put into place, which prevent the problem from happening again.

The main concern though, is that organizations, even those that add preventative measures, are constantly seeking out and solving problems, without really learning about those things which really work well in their organizations.

We have to ask ourselves if we are spending too much time on corrective action when we could be concentrating more of our efforts on preventive action.

Solution Seeking

Would we not be better served to do more solution seeking than problem solving? You might well ask if there is a little splitting of hairs here because the purpose of problem solving is to seek and apply solutions. You might also suggest that since they both lead to a solution, they are the same thing, so why do both? You are correct to a certain degree.

The main differences between problem solving and solution seeking are the journey, the long-term results and the enhanced organizational memory from dealing with positives.

Solution seeking leaves the organization with success charts to follow the next time a new project/activity or challenge presents itself. An added bonus to solution finding is the ability to develop procedures based on the steps identified during the analysis.

If you were asked the question, “how many times have you and your team sat down after a success and thoroughly analyzed what you had done to actually cause this success to happen?”, the answer in most cases is usually “rarely to never.”

What could be gained by going through the process of analysing your successes? How about the following?

We could identify:

- ◆ The successful positive actions taken
- ◆ Positive methods, thoughts and thinking processes that actually work
- ◆ Processes or procedures, which could be adapted to other areas
- ◆ Who did things right and at what level
- ◆ The resources required to duplicate the next success
- ◆ A roadmap or plan to follow for the next project
- ◆ The ability to apply what you learned to the next project

Remember to record your analysis and label it clearly so you can find it again and share it with others. Success stories have a way of making us feel good, wanting to duplicate our successes and allowing others to borrow our good ideas. Our current economic situation is beyond normal so try going beyond problem solving and see what you learn.

Gord Simmons has extensive management experience with the Public, Private and Educational sectors. For the past 14 years he has been a Business Owner, Management Consultant and Small Business Start Up Coach.

For more information about Problem Solving or Root Cause Analysis courses, please refer to the training schedule on our website.

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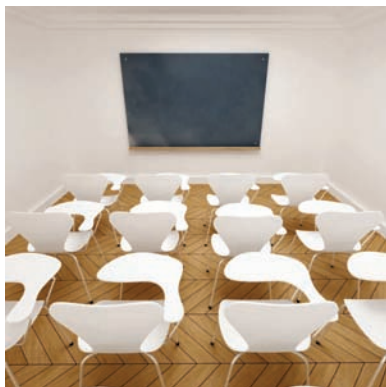
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Collecting Objective Evidence:

Participants will learn techniques for collecting evidence (observation, interviews, documents/records, product, and work environment/infrastructure), how to sort through the evidence presented for relevance, and then how to analyze the evidence to formulate audit findings and conclusions. The output will lead to more effective audit reporting and identification of the specific areas requiring attention in the Quality Management System (QMS). Techniques for effectively recording the details of evidence reviewed are outlined, and the importance of this information is stressed for management and audit teams who are tasked with ensuring that the QMS is effective in achieving the organization's goals.

Effective Questioning Techniques:

Participants will learn techniques for developing questions, asking questions during a structured interview process, and for listening to responses. They will also learn how to determine whether a change in the direction of the interview is warranted, based on the information received. This section of the course focuses on "behavioural interviewing" techniques and "active listening" techniques. Effective note-taking is integral to the interview process, and participants will learn how to collect and analyze information in order to monitor the effectiveness of their QMS, and ensure that it aligns with organizational and business success.

Who Should Attend? Anyone managing audit teams or conducting audits.

Prerequisite: ISO Internal or Lead Auditor training, or several years experience conducting audits (QMS, EMS or OHS).

Next Public Course Date: June 5, 2009 Burlington, ON

Note: This course was initially developed and presented as an on-site workshop, and is still available in this format. Please call for more information.

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Workshop Fee: \$295 +GST

Locations: May 20, 2009—London, Ontario

June 17, 2009—Cobourg, Ontario

Please call or email for the full course outline. TOLL FREE: 877-508-5525

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