

Eleventh Commandment: Thou Shall Not Abandon a Problem!

We all know that problems are a normal part of life; when working in a busy medical facility, problem solving is part of daily life, and if you choose to avoid or abandon a problem, it can become an annoying, recurring issue. Here is a 6-step problem-solving model to come to the rescue.

When attempting to solve a problem, assess if the problem is something that you have some control or influence over. If control and influence are severely limited, then it is probably not worth your effort at this time.

Application of the 6- step problem-solving model:

1. Define the problem

In one sentence, state the problem:

My team suffers from poor morale

2. Causes of the problem:

Identify two or three causes of the problem

- a. Poor communication between team members
- b. Lack of effective leadership
- c. Unfair distribution of responsibilities

3. Identify potential solutions to the problem:

Identify realistic solutions for implementation

- Training: assertive communication skills, so team members can begin to communicate more openly, make requests and freely express their opinions.
- Discuss the problem and share observations with your manager; also, share any ideas re: a different method of distributing work that is more equitable.

4. Identify the best solution to the problem:

The best solution for implementation: discuss the problem with your manager, sharing ideas for a different method of distributing work more equitably.

- Choose the top priority solution; a solution that has the greatest chance for implementation, using the least amount of resources:

5. Action Steps: design a series of action steps to implement a plan of action

- Step One: generate a list of ideas from team members to improve distribution of work
- Step Two: create a plan to present your ideas to the manager; your plan should include designing an approach that will increase of your chances of being heard by your manager.
- Step Three: decide which team members will present the ideas to the manager
- Step Four: designated team member(s) present the plan to the manager
- Step Five: present the plan; be prepared to discuss a variety of ideas that will help you get closer to your goal, a more equitable distribution of work.
- Step Six: communicate outcome with the whole team and discuss implementation

6. Implementation:

- Designate a specific date to implement the plan
- Discuss roles and responsibilities for implementation
- Set up a specific date for initial implementation
- Communicate with everyone involved.
- Follow-up evaluation: perhaps 30 days after implementation: review, what is working, not working
- Make changes to the plan following the evaluation and continue with implementation process; this will help ensure not abandoning the solution when there are rough spots with the implementation

The 6-step problem-solving process is useful tool for implementing a systems change; this easy to follow model encourages analysis along with specific steps for a well thought out action plan. If you wish to make a change on your unit, this circular model, equipped with options, can give you the upper hand in creating a viable plan.

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