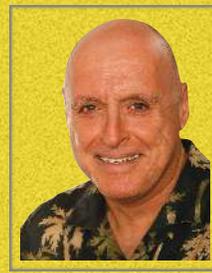


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



377 Good Questions Can Help People Solve Problems

One of your workers walks in your office and says, “Boss, we’ve got a problem.” It’s a scenario that plays out millions of times each day in organizations around the world. What are you going to do? I’m Jerry Roberts and today we talk about the role of the manager in problem solving, and how to ask the right questions. That’s up next on The Extra Point.

A local CEO once told me how he handled workers who came to him with problems. “He said: “They aren’t allowed to bring me a problem unless they also bring a possible solution at the same time.” Like the majority of leaders he found that the majority of workers were happy to let the boss do all the thinking and make all the decisions.

Unfortunately, organizations can’t grow that way and he knew it. He found more than half of each day taken up with everybody else’s issues and he wasn’t able to pursue his own agenda of building the business.

Aside from that, the key point is that he had hired these people to solve problems and he wasn’t demanding they fulfill that role. The manager, at whatever level, is supposed to equip and to prepare others to find those answers — not do it for them.

When you as a manager prevent your team from learning how to think for themselves and solve problems you are hampering overall efficiency and hurting chances for growth. You may disagree with me and say, “Oh no Jerry, you don’t understand. I come up with the solution for them and get them back to being productive, and that helps us grow.” Well, what happens when you get sick, or want to take a vacation?

When you do all the thinking and all decisions have to go through you, workers then become dependent on that and it’s a tough habit to overcome.

So the next time a worker comes in with a problem and expects you to fix things, here’s a set of questions you can run them through to get them thinking:

- What do you think is causing the problem?
- How have you tried to solve it and what happened?
- What other potential solutions are you considering?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to each?
- What’s your gut feeling for the best course of action?
- What do you feel are your chances of success — 50-50, 70-30?
- Is there any easier way to get it done?
- What’s the worst possible outcome if it doesn’t work or you don’t do anything at all?
- Is there anything you’re not sure of, can’t explain, or is bothering you?
- Do you have a contingency plan if what you try doesn’t succeed?

It’s likely the worker will be able to answer some of these questions and that’s a start. Over time they’ll grow to be able to navigate through a list like this and come up with a more solid approach to problem solving.

Get transcript #377 from guamtraining.com, print it out and have these questions ready the next time someone says, “Hey boss, we’ve got a problem.”

That’s The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I’m Jerry Roberts.

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