

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



488 When Someone Says “Boss, I’ve Got a Problem”

If you supervise anyone at all, think twice about what to do when one of your workers says, “Boss, I’ve got a problem.” I’m Jerry Roberts and today, we’ll dig into this and give you some options. That’s next on The Extra Point.

An employee comes to you, totally flustered, and says “Boss, I have a problem.” Naturally, you want to be a great manager and a great manager steps right up, smooths their feathers and solves their problem — right?

Well, that might be your initial instinct but it’s not what you want to do if you’re looking to help people learn to think for themselves and become problem solvers. Less experienced supervisors jump in, take care of business and send people on their way. It seems like the thing to do.

More experienced managers, at least those who understand the issues clearly, avoid that temptation. They know that any inconvenience the worker has to go through is valuable as a teaching moment.

Every company hires every worker to solve problems, either big ones or small ones. A job is, at its core, a solution to a problem, or it wouldn’t be needed. A worker who can’t solve problems has to be taught how to do that, or you’ll have to always have to do the thinking and the problem solving.

The role of a problem solver is to create more problem solvers. If you don’t do this then you’re setting yourself up for a gap in the talent to solve problems.

Let’s say you’re the manager and your chief problem solver retires. That wouldn’t normally be a problem, except you didn’t bother to train their replacement to solve problems. So, guess who gets to make all the decisions when Mr. or Ms. problem solver walks out the door for the last time. Right. You.

They’ll rely upon you and you get to do all the thinking. That’s not exactly ideal. First, your personal productivity will take a hit. Second, your team will be slowed down because they have to slow their roll and come to you for everything. And if you’re busy or off-island? Then, you are then a bottleneck and impediment to the growth of your team.

So, tough as it may be at first, start teaching people how to solve their issues. You do this by asking good questions and making them come up with the answers. Here are 10 sample questions you can use when they approach you for help:

- What do you see as the root cause of the problem?
- What are the potential solutions you’re considering?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to each possible course of action?
- What have you already tried?
- What is the best possible outcome?
- What is the worst possible outcome?
- What’s the most likely outcome?
- What are you sure about?
- What don’t you know?
- What will happen if you do nothing?

The purpose of the questions is twofold. One, to get them to think. Two, to prove to them how much they do know. That establishes confidence, the confidence to try to solve problems. Just getting people to try is a step forward. Start today, create more problem solvers.

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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