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Master the
Problem Solving
technique

Life is a problem solving journey

As much as we might wish for a smooth road ahead in our journey through life, the reality is often rougher than we expect.

Expectation

A ●————————————————→ B

Reality

A ●〜〜〜〜〜〜〜→ B

Along the way we face all sorts of problems that act like twists and turns to navigate, potholes to avoid, giant lakes to cross, mountains to climb, you name it. Like it or not, problems are an inevitable part of the journey.

"We are either heading away from a problem, through a problem, or towards a problem"

- Les Brown

You'll learn in the Problem Solving module that there is no such thing as a problem-free life. So it may come as a relief to know that effectively solving problems is something we can learn. The starting point is to have the right orientation.

"The way you see the problem is the problem."

The way we see problems is called our problem orientation. This can be either positive or negative. A negative orientation means a person thinks there is no way out of the problem they are facing. On the other hand, a positive orientation is all about believing you can find solutions and viewing problems as challenges that can be overcome.

The good news is that if we have a negative orientation, we don't need to slowly crawl through a long dark tunnel towards the light to change it into a positive one, we just need to change our sunglasses.

Now what does that mean?

Positive and negative orientations are like having two sets of sunglasses that we can choose between. One has lenses that show us problems in a positive light. The other shows them in a negative light. Putting on the right sunglasses means we begin to view the problems we face in a way that is more helpful for finding solutions.

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The problem solving technique

This technique is all about equipping you to effectively handle some of the challenges you face by helping you maintain a positive problem orientation.

Part 1: Problem orientation scenarios

The first part of the technique asks you to assess the problem orientation of various hypothetical scenarios. The technique requires that you find and explore at least one of the key orientation elements in the problem scenarios you read.

Feels a bit impersonal right?

It might seem strange to do a technique that only explores OTHER people's problems. But trust us - there is power in identifying the tinted sunglasses in the lives of others. As you learn to spot the negative or positive orientations of other people you will start to more easily spot the same in your own life.

Key orientation elements

Negative orientation

View problems as threats
Problems trigger a fight, flight, or freeze response in us, resulting in avoidant or impulsive/careless problem solving styles.

Regard problems as unsolvable
We believe there's no way out, around, over, or through this problem. It cannot be resolved. We feel defeated and full of despair.

Show self-doubt
We don't think we have what it takes to face or solve the problem. We are uncertain about our problem solving abilities.

Avoid negative emotions
Problems leave us feeling upset and emotionally all over the place. We try to run from negative emotions rather than using them as insightful tools.

Quit easily
We have a low tolerance for frustration and uncertainty. We give up quickly, feel overwhelmed and don't persevere when things get tough.

Positive orientation

View problems as challenges
We have an "I can do it" attitude and view problems as challenges that can be overcome. We're excited by the possibility of solving the problems we face.

Regard problems as solvable
We trust that a solution can be found - even if it isn't what we expect. We are open to multiple options and ideas.

Show agency
We believe in our ability to cope and that we can be effective when faced with problems. We're able to take action and solve problems we encounter.

Embrace negative emotions
We don't avoid negative feelings, we view them as important, helpful, and informative. We lean in when we experience something uncomfortable.

Display endurance
We don't give up when a challenge comes our way. We understand that problem solving requires time, effort, and endurance.

Part 2: Positive orientation statement

With all the negative priming in our subconscious minds, it is often quite normal to have a negative orientation towards problems. Sometimes changing your orientation starts by training your mind to think that problems can be overcome.

The positive orientation statements help you to slowly create neural pathways relating to a positive orientation. As you repeatedly say them, you will cause some of the positive orientation neurons in your brain to fire again and again each day.

Ultimately this will make your self-talk more positive and help you have a positive problem orientation. **Remember: Neuron's that fire together, wire together.**

The technique suggests that you repeat the positive orientation statements out loud to yourself. But you can do whatever works best for you.

Do whatever it takes to wire together positive orientation pathways.

Tips for using the power of repetition:

- Write the positive statement out and stick it to your steering wheel.
- Set a reminder on your phone to say the statement daily.
- Keep the statements next to your bed to read first thing in the morning.
- Stick a copy on your favourite pet with a post it note (really... whatever works!)

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How should the technique look?

Example 1:

After deciding whether the orientation of the person in the problem scenario is negative or positive, you are asked to identify up to three key orientation elements and discuss the elements you selected by answering the questions that follow.

Example 1 scenario:

Johan is at the point where driving is something he dreads. He used to enjoy getting behind the wheel, but now he finds himself just getting frustrated. Last week he actually got out the car at a traffic light and walked up to another driver's window. His wife refuses to drive with him and his daughter recently told him that she gets embarrassed by his behaviour on the road. This only makes him angrier. He says things like "It's not my fault most people are stupid!" "There's nothing I can do about it!" It seems that the "incompetence of other drivers" isn't only impacting him on the road, but is now negatively affecting his family life.

Negative orientation

A basic answer

In what way did the person regard the problem to be unsolvable?

Johan says that there's 'nothing he can do about it.'

An excellent answer

1. **What shows the person thought the problem was a threat?**

   He believes that the problem isn't contained to driving but that it is affecting other parts of his life and is a threat to his well being in general.

2. **In what way did the person regard the problem to be unsolvable?**

   Johan says that there's 'nothing he can do about it.' He clearly thinks he has no agency in the situation.

3. **What shows the person avoided negative emotions?**

   Johan's frustration and anger are the negative emotions he experiences. He doesn't use these as insightful tools though, instead he reacts explosively to them.
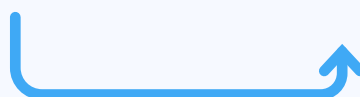
Correct orientation

- **Gives clarity**
- **Adds detail**
- **3 Key elements**

Example 2:

After deciding whether the orientation of the person in the problem scenario is negative or positive, you are asked to identify up to three key orientation elements and discuss the elements you selected by answering the questions that follow.

Example 2 scenario:

Hope's friends and family are constantly telling her to stop studying languages and to focus on something more "useful". She knew that committing to an arts degree would be difficult, but she underestimated how much resistance she would receive from many people around her. Lots of criticism, judgement and disappointment. Following her dream is difficult, but she believes it will be worth it in the end. Hope has put measures in place to ensure she is seeing the people who do believe in her, even if it isn't as often as she would like. She feels that she is doing her best, given the toxicity she is facing.

Positive orientation

A basic answer

What shows the person thought the problem was a challenge?

Hope believes it is difficult but that it will be 'worth it in the end.'

An excellent answer

1. **What shows the person thought the problem was a challenge?**

   Hope believes it is difficult but that it will be 'worth it in the end'.

2. **In what way did the person believe the problem to be solvable?**

   Hope took action and made sure she was still able to see some people who believed in her, even though so many didn't.

3. **Where did the person show agency?**

   Hope shows agency in that she remains positive, and knows she is doing her best. She believes in her own ability to cope with the situation at hand.
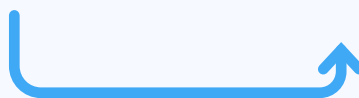
Correct orientation

- **Gives clarity**
- **Adds detail**
- **3 Key elements**

Go ahead, now it's your turn to give this technique a try!
All the best on your problem solving journey!