

8 Tips to Help Your Team Strengthen Problem-Solving Skills

1. Jump-start group problem-solving by creating small victories. For teams unfamiliar with working together, select smaller initiatives that merit group consideration and ultimate consensus. Resist your temptation to offer the solution and instead, serve as a facilitator for group consideration of the issue. As the group gains experience collaborating, serve up some of the stickier and larger workplace challenges. Success breeds success.
2. Give the team autonomy for implementing their ideas. Nothing creates accountability like owning both the solution and the implementation of the solution. Your willingness to let a group carry a problem from identification to resolution reinforces your confidence and trust in their work. People and [teams respond positively to trust from the boss](#).
3. Teach your team [how to frame issues](#). Framing is a powerful technique for looking at a situation from multiple perspectives. For example, a product team might look at a competitor's announcement of a new offering as a threat in the marketplace. Another view might suggest that the competitor will now be singularly focused on bringing that product to market, leaving them vulnerable to a new offering from your firm with a different customer group. Teach your teams to frame issues from multiple perspectives: positive, negative or neutral, and then encourage them to develop unique solutions for each frame.
4. Encourage the team to draw upon your help in removing obstacles or securing needed resources. Part of your success in strengthening your team's problem-solving skills is to remove yourself as a critical part of the solution development process. Instead of holding court in [team meetings](#) and potentially biasing the group with your views, make certain everyone understands your willingness to support the team by working across functions and up the organizational ladder to secure budgets, talent, and other essential resources.
5. Never respond to failures or misfires with anger. While a group misfire on a big issue is frustrating and even anger-inducing, this is a destructive behavior and must be avoided. The proper response is to challenge the team to step back from the situation and analyze what worked and what did not work. Challenge them to describe how they will improve in the future and then move forward. Lingering on a failure is toxic for the team environment.
6. Set high expectations. While the above steps suggest a reduced or removed role for you as the manager, you get the final say on the recommendations of your team. If the team has failed to think through a complex issue or to consider all options as part of their solution development, it is reasonable for you to push back and challenge them to dig deeper. A technique for teaching teams to think critically about a topic is through the use of proper questioning. Instead of criticizing an idea, ask questions that lead the group to understand that it is more complex or requires a different view than the one presented. Questions teach!
7. Encourage teams to draw on outside expertise. One of the classic traps of teams is groupthink—a process where the group focuses exclusively on their ideas and suppresses or rejects outside and differing views. This dangerous trap is easily avoided by ensuring the team draws in individuals who can objectively evaluate assumptions and approaches and provide candid feedback.

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An excerpt from the article How to Strengthen Your Team's Problem Solving Skills by Art Petty

8. Celebrate often! The stress and pressures of the work are made bearable by the feelings of accomplishment and contribution. The opportunity to revel in accomplishments for a few moments in time offers a powerful reinforcement for the benefits of working together to solve problems.

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