

RETAILER: Developing your retail business

MANAGEMENT

Problem solving

Globalise Section 5 Topic 3

The RETAILER programme aims to provide practical resources for independent retailers in the Eastern region, backed by the support of intermediate mentors and the RETAILER website www.independent-retailer.com

The RETAILER programme is supported financially by the European Social fund (ESF). Elements of the RETAILER programme build upon the APU SESAME programme. If you are interested in joining the RETAILER programme, please complete and return the form at the back of this document.

This RETAILER topic is based on Topic 3, *Problem solving*, from Section 5, *Planning*, of the SESAME Globalise materials.

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Anglia Polytechnic University
Bishop Hall Lane
Chelmsford CM1 1SQ
01245-493131



5

Topic 3 Problem solving

Problem solving is an important part of the planning process, because, regardless of the kind of company you are running, you will have face to problems of one kind or another on a weekly, if not daily, basis. These may range from the small and quickly resolved to the complex and difficult.

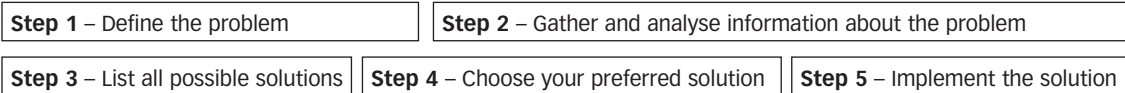
SOME DEFINITIONS OF A PROBLEM

A problem is...

- an obstacle of some kind which prevents us from achieving what we want to achieve
- a situation or difficulty which must be resolved before we can move on to other things
- an unsatisfactory situation which must be made satisfactory.

The problem-solving cycle

The best way to tackle a problem, particularly if it is large, complex and challenging, is to work through the five-step problem-solving cycle illustrated below.



Step 1 – Define the problem

Start out by writing the problem down. For example:

- As soon as we find a good US sales manager, they are poached by our competitors.
- Our main supplier's deliveries are always late ... which means that we miss our air freight schedules
- We've spent a fortune on new software and it can't operate in more than one currency.

Step 2 – Gather and analyse information about the problem

Find out as much as you can about the problem, and the kind of difficulties it is causing. Ask yourself the following questions:

- When does the problem occur?
- When did the problem first start?
- Where does the problem occur?
- How often does the problem occur?
- Who is affected by the problem?
- Who, or what, seems to be causing the problem?
- What has been done, so far, in an attempt to solve the problem?

A problem is a chance for you to do your best

**Duke Ellington,
Band leader**

Step 3 – List all possible solutions to the problem

Either on your own, or with your team, make a list of all the possible solutions that you can think of. Remember to include the solutions that, at first sight, seem to you to be unreasonable or unworkable.

Step 4 – Choose your preferred solution

Again, either on your own or with your team, select the solution that seems to be the one that suits you and your business best. This might be, for example, the cheapest solution, or the fastest solution, or the easiest solution. The key point here is that only you and your team will know which solution on your list is best for your business.

Step 5 – Implement your preferred solution

Once you have chosen the solution that in your opinion is best, the final step is to take immediate and wholehearted action to implement it.

Check Point

This check point is designed to help you work through the five-step problem-solving cycle. You may find it useful to photocopy the chart below and use it every time you are faced with a problem that does not seem to have an obvious solution.

What, precisely, is the problem?

When does the problem occur?

When did the problem first start?

Where does the problem occur?

How often does the problem occur?

Who is affected by the problem?

Who, or what, seems to be causing the problem?

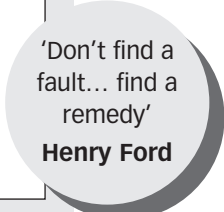
What has been done, so far, to solve the problem?

What could we do to solve the problem ?

1
2
3
4
5
6

Which, of all the solutions listed above, is our preferred solution?

What do we need to do to actually implement our chosen solution? (Organise training? Employ more staff? Make a phone call? Write a letter?)



Now that you've seen some of the RETAILER materials, would you like to benefit from the RETAILER programme?

Through the RETAILER programme, Anglia Polytechnic University offers Till Side Training for independent retailers in Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex employing less than 250 people.

The training is backed by practical materials, relevant resources, the support of experienced mentors and the RETAILER website.

Retailing is a 'people' business. Supermarkets, department stores and chains spend a significant amount of time and resources training their staff. Product knowledge, customer service, merchandising and selling are prerequisites for working in these companies, but training also:

- demonstrates commitment to their employees and their professional development (for many employees, the offer of training is the reason for deciding which company to work for)
- forms the principal rationale that supports all quality initiatives from simple Quality Control right up to Total Quality Management.

The RETAILER programme is supported financially by the European Social Fund, and is free to beneficiaries. The RETAILER programme is intended to train you, train your employees, and help you train future employees.

To find out more about the RETAILER programme please fill in your details below and send a copy of this page to:

Carole Martindell
Retailer Programme Administrator
Ashcroft International Business School
APU
Bishop Hall Lane
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1SQ

Name:

Business name:

Job title:

Address:

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Phone number:

Email address: