

# BOTOX

## FOR PROBLEM SOLVING



by Francie Dalton

When problem solving gets to be as easy as swimming through molasses, it's not likely due to the intricacies of the problem itself, but to the emotions of the parties involved. This article describes five tools to help subordinate emotions to a process that eases and accelerates problem solving.

### Identifying Components

Having articulated the problem to be solved, ask all relevant parties to identify what they see as major pieces of the problem. Avoid including causes or results of the problem; instead, list major pieces of the problem. Don't edit the inputs; just capture everything on flip chart paper. Suspend this process after about 15 minutes. No matter how many items are on the list, it's likely that they'll all tuck up under 3 to 5 "umbrella components", so restructure the list, keeping it visible to everyone, highlighting these umbrella components. Now decide which of these umbrella components you want to tackle first, and take it to the next step. (Ultimately, each umbrella component should be taken through the following steps, so you might consider breaking down into teams, with each team being assigned a different umbrella component.)

### Causal Analysis

For each umbrella component, the next step is to identify causal factors. You'll need to identify both major causes (factors which directly cause the umbrella component); and minor causes (factors which cause a major cause). A common mistake here is the confusion of

causes with examples. Ensure that the major causes you've identified are actually causes rather than examples of the umbrella component; then ensure the minor causes you've identified are actually causes, and not examples of, the major cause.

Now decide which major cause you want to tackle first, and take it to the next step. If you're using the team approach, each team can take a major causal factor to the next step.

### Make it Worse

Looking at a single major cause with its attendant minor causes, choose only one minor cause. Write down as many reasonable ways in which this one minor cause could be inflamed or worsened. This produces solutions in disguise. Simply invert each negative statement into its positively stated opposite, and you have a group of solution statements.

Chances are you'll only have to do this with one or two minor causes to eliminate the entire major cause.

### Pros and Cons

Select only one solution statement. Assume it's your responsibility to implement this solution, and list all currently existing resources that could facilitate implementation. Be careful not to include projected results of implementation; focus on pre-implementation - not post-implementation - and identify only that which exists right now to help you implement. Next, list all currently existing impediments that could thwart your implementation of this solution. Once again, be careful to stay focused on pre-

implementation. This step reveals what can be utilized and what must be neutralized to enable the successful implementation of your solution. You'll want to do this for each solution statement derived from step 3 above.

### Implementation Plan

Having completed steps 1-4, writing an implementation plan is easy. A sound implementation plan has 5 sections:

- What is to be done and by whom.
- When, such that, helpful resources identified above are utilized and potential impediments identified above have been neutralized.

Do this for each solution statement derived from step 3 above.

Appropriate for really tough business problems, or for badly snarled relationship problems, the structured process suggested here helps keep emotion out of the problem solving initiative. Using these tools will hasten and heighten clarity of analysis, reveal opportunities for growth, and expedite the identification and implementation of sustainable solutions. ■

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