

Women's Business by Francie Dalton

Emotions in motion throw off judgment

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.

If you want to solve the problem, you'll need to sort out the emotions (lucky you). Here are some tips to help you do that without getting stuck in an emotional morass.

1. **Go to pieces.** 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 they'll all tuck up under three to five umbrella components, so restructure the list, keeping it visible to everyone, highlighting these umbrella components. Now decide which of the umbrella components you want to tackle first and take it to the next step.

2. **Do it 'cause I said so.** For each umbrella component, identify causal factors. You'll need to identify major causes (factors that directly cause the umbrella com-

ponent) and minor causes (factors that cause a major cause).

Do not confuse causes with examples. Ensure that the major causes you've identified are actually causes rather than examples of the umbrella component; the same for minor causes.

Now decide which major cause you want to tackle first.

3. **Make it worse.** Look at a single major cause with its attendant minor causes and choose only one minor cause.

Write down 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.

4. **Be a pro, con artist.** 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 the

things that exist right now to help you implement. Next, list all existing impediments that could thwart implementation of this solution.

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.

Get to work. A sound implementation plan outlines what is to be done, by whom and when. It incorporates helpful resources identified above and makes a point to neutralize or remove potential impediments.

The structured process suggested here — appropriate for really tough business problems or for badly snarled relationship problems — 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.

■ FRANCIE DALTON IS FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF DALTON ALLIANCES, A BUSINESS CONSULTANCY SPECIALIZING IN THE COMMUNICATION, MANAGEMENT AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES. PHONE: 410-715-0484 WEB SITE: WWW.DALTONALLIANCES.COM